

# *What is Amateur [Ham] Radio?*

The Federal Communications Commission defines the Amateur Radio Service as being **"for qualified persons of any age who are interested in radio technique solely with a personal aim and without pecuniary interest"** and which **"presents an opportunity for self-training, intercommunications, and technical investigations"**.

So what does all of this governmental gobbledygook mean? Well, let's cut to the chase with a rough translation.

Whether you are age 9 or 90, Amateur Radio [also referred to as Ham Radio] is a communications service in which anyone interested in learning about radio, and passes an FCC license examination, can participate. Ham Radio includes a wide variety of radio related activities - not for monetary gain or profit - but aimed solely toward achieving personal enjoyment and satisfaction. Whether communicating with other Hams halfway around the world in one on one conversations [known as "rag chewing"], or learning the basics about radio communications by tinkering, building or repairing equipment, or by experimenting with antennas, participating in radio contests, or being involved in public service activities such as Skywarn - these are just a few of the many diverse aspects of Amateur Radio.

Now, let's break the definition down even further.

## **Ham Radio is just like Citizens Band Radio, right?**

**WRONG!** Unlike CB, which is limited to a portion of the 11 meter band, with only AM, Lower or Upper Sideband modes to work with, Amateur Radio operators communicate with each other on a wide range of frequencies in various band segments across the communications spectrum using operating modes as varied as today's communications. CW [Morse Code], Voice Modes such as Sideband [Upper & Lower], FM, AM, Digital Modes such as Packet, Radio Teletype, and even television - all are part of Amateur modes of communication. Hams also use "out of this world" techniques, such as working through satellites, and even EME [Earth/Moon/Earth] signal bouncing to communicate with other Hams. And that's just for openers!

Some Hams are "engineers" who like to build transmitting and receiving equipment, accessories, antennas, and so on. The fact is, much of today's communications technology evolved from Ham Radio "experimenters" who have indulged in these activities over the years, and continue to do so today.

Some Hams are "contesters" and they participate in them to earn awards or achieve goals. These range from Working All States, to DXCC [100 Countries], to County Hunting, to working Special Event stations. Contests are also useful to hone Amateur operating skills, or see how their skills and station equipment stacks up with other contesters.

Some Hams are just "rag chewers" who enjoy a relaxing chat with fellow amateurs - be it locally or around the world. Lifetime friendships are often forged this way. Hams participate in "round table" nets that cover topics that are of a mutual interest, such as particular faith groups.

Finally, and perhaps most important, Amateur Radio plays an important role in public service, such as providing emergency communications during disasters, participating in message [traffic] nets by originating, handling, or delivering messages, acting as net controls, or as relay stations. Among the most recent events in which Ham Radio communications played a crucial role during and in the aftermath was Hurricane Katrina, and the 911 Terrorist Attacks. Right here in the Upper Midwest, Amateur Radio provided the only means of communications into Northeastern Minnesota for 12 hours during the June 2012 floods. Hams provide critical weather information to National Weather Service offices during severe weather events through their local Skywarn groups.

Amateur Radio can be as simple or diverse as you want it to be. Whether it is being a casual "rag chewer" or participating in public service activities, pounding brass or working EME, experimenting or contesting, Ham Radio has much to offer the aspiring and curious electronics hobbyists.

## **How Do I Get Started?**

It's easier than you might think to get started in Amateur Radio. All it takes is a little study and you can be on the air in no time. Morse Code is no longer a requirement as it was in the old days. Just take a 35 question exam [26 correct answers] and you pass!

Ham Radio exams are available with several clubs in our region. For an exam site near you, go to [www.arrl.org/exam\\_sessions/search](http://www.arrl.org/exam_sessions/search)

MORA is happy to assist anyone interested in becoming a licensed radio amateur. For help, please email us at [info@morahamradio.com](mailto:info@morahamradio.com)

## **Local or World Wide**

Whether you would rather connect with Hams in our area, or with Hams on the other side of the world, Amateur Radio offers the ways and means for you to do so.

Our local repeater at Ogilvie is open and friendly, and several Hams monitor it periodically during the day. The Tuesday Evening Net is perhaps the easiest way to establish contact, learn Amateur Radio protocol, and forge friendships with local Hams.

If your desire is to reach out beyond our local area, there are several nets on the 75 and 40 meter bands that provide coverage from across our region to across the nation. Finally, there are the 20, 15, 17, 12, and 10 meter bands which, when open, provide access to Hams around the world.