

Review of simple HF operating procedures

HF Bands and frequencies are a shared resource. Think of a large conference or meeting room with many tables and people – all of them wanting to talk with others in the room, especially to those on a table across the room. It's easy to see that cooperation and courtesy are needed to make HF communication work. Here are some basic operational procedures that the International ruling organizations and Hams have generally agreed on so everyone can make the most of sharing the Ham bands. (Note: Always operate the radio within the frequencies and modes allowed for your license class.)

- Listen first to see if a frequency is in use so you don't interrupt a conversation in progress. Also, become familiar with the Band Plan for that band so you operate on a frequency appropriate for the mode. I.e. – if you are operating “barefoot” at 100 watts SSB seeking stateside contacts, then you would not want to transmit in the CW portion of the band, or the parts of the phone band that are designated for Beacons, Data, QRP or the DX window. Also, if operating SSB on a band below 10Mhz then you would operate LSB. Use USB when operating above 10Mhz. Some radios will take care of LSB vs.USB automatically. (Exception – Special rules apply for the channeled frequencies of the 60 Meter band).
- If after listening you are not sure the frequency is in use, you can always key the mike and say

“Is the frequency in use (say your call sign here)”

Always give your call sign!

- If the frequency is in use you may hear someone say “QSY QSY”, or just give their call sign, so just tune to another spot on the band. If the frequency is not in use you can send a 3x2 CQ. For example:
“CQ CQ CQ This is K6OU K6OU calling CQ”
and then listen awhile. Repeat this cycle, CQ followed by listening, for two or three minutes (or until your patience runs out) before moving on. This is a good time to check your radio and tuner settings to make sure all is OK.
- If someone comes back to you they will probably say “(your call sign) followed by (their call sign)”. Try to remember their call sign so you can reply. If you didn't happen to catch their full call sign, try to remember a few letters so you can at least reply with “(the W6 calling me – please repeat your call, this is (your call sign))”.
- Normally reply by saying “(Their call sign)” followed by “(your call sign)”. It is important to learn to use phonetics, i.e.- Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, etc to clear up and cut through miscommunication caused by fading signals (QSB), static (QRN), or interference (QRM). Phonetics will also clarify letters that sound the same, such as c and z, b, d, e. For example, the call sign K6CZ would be made unambiguous by saying “Kilo 6 Charlie Zulu”.

Note: When replying to someone, or calling someone, or turning the conversation over to someone or a group, your call sign is always given *last*.

- Keep a logbook of your HF contacts or QSOs as they are called. Keep the logbook dates and times in UTC. (Also called GMT, ZULU, or Z time.) In order for a 2-way contact to be considered a valid QSO, the stations must share at least their call signs and a signal report using the RST system.

“WA6BTK this is K6OU your signal is 59”.
- Normal contacts that are not contest or DX pileups would also include your QTH and name.

“KI6GJH this is KD6ZDF, kilo delta 6 zulu delta foxtrot, your signal is 57 here in northern California, the QTH is Lincoln, California - name is Jim, juliett india mike, over”.
- Rare stations or DX stations will frequently operate “Split”, i.e. transmit on one frequency and listen on another, usually up 2 to 5Khz or more. They do this to better manage the crowd of Hams that are calling them simultaneously with just call signs whenever the DX station finishes a contact or simply says “QRZed?”. Operating split means you must be sure you are transmitting on the frequency the DX station is listening too, and not the one you are hearing them on. Suppose the DX station acknowledges you from the crowd in the pileup by simply saying your call sign and a signal report, e.g- “K6OU 59”. Your response should be brief to be courteous to the other Hams in the pileup:

“QSL, you're 57 from kilo six oscar uniform”

That’s it, you’ve just got a rare one, so be sure to log the zulu time and date accurately before going on to another contact.
- During normal conversations or “ragchews”, it is not necessary or recommended to give your call sign at the end of every short transmission during a QSO. The rules do require you to give your call at least every 10 minutes. This can be done simply by saying “(give your call sign) for ID”. The rules also require you to give your call sign at the end of a conversation.
- At the end of a contact, Hams usually end the QSO with considerable courtesy by thanking the other station for the QSO and wishing them the best by at least saying “73”, and closing with their call sign followed by your call sign.

HF operating incorporates some new skills that build on what you may have learned operating VHF/UHF, IRLP, or ECHO-LINK. These new skills (paraphrased from a recent article in *World Radio*), include:

- Increased attention to properly sharing call sign information.
- Increased use of the standard phonetic alphabet
- Learning how to call and respond to CQ
- Increased use of the art of listening before calling CQ

- Learning what information is shared in a typical HF contact and how to efficiently exchange that information including the knowledge and use of “Q” signals (See www.wparc.org/q-codes.shtml for a list of the commonly used Q-codes.)
- Preparing and using personal operating aids such as frequency charts and other “cheat sheets”
- Keeping a log book of QSOs
- Increased knowledge and skills related to operating your radio and antenna system, its controls and settings
- The ability to exercise patience, learn new skills, and take small steps, such as being willing to enjoy operating domestic first before jumping to DX
- Accepting the mindset that it is OK to seek help when encountering a showstopper or a difficult problem

73 and good DX from K6OU