

Ham 163 - Whats a ham

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There are nearly 1,000,000 hams in an US population of 342 million. Do you suppose these all have the same ideas? Ridiculous, you say. Yet hams have a huge influence on communications.

What is an amateur? A ham is someone who can communicate at a distance without any public infrastructure support.

Do you have to be technically oriented? No, you only have to pass a written exam on rules of operation, so you do not negatively impact public or other ham communications. It is only 35 questions and similar to the Driver's License.

What do you have to know mechanically or technically about a car to be a licensed driver? Very little. Our 17-year-old grandson has converted an old vehicle to new frame and drive, rebuilt, overhauled, restored, and sold multiple vehicles already. What is different about his driver's license? Nothing.

How do you get a ham license? There is a published pool of questions complete with correct and distractor answers. The process is incredibly simple. a) Read the questions. b) Read ONLY the correct answer. c) Note the hint. Repeat about five to seven times. That is it. Congratulations, you are a new ham.

I got my license, but do not know anything. Look on your license. It says Federal. You know everything that the government requires you to know. Anything else is personal for your pleasure, enjoyment, and edification.

What do I do next? Fair question. There are no 'you got tos.' Amateur is about what you want to accomplish whether local, regional, or long distance. Each requires different equipment and skill sets. Evergreen emphasis is local support.

I saw it on the web ... You can believe everything on the web because it is true, right? Ham is not different. Most postings are based on an experience or opinion, but has little to do with true physics. I have a simple approach from the Pareto principle. If most people are doing it, I avoid. Pareto predicts only 20% is successful.

If I avoid web advice, how do I find out? Ask a knowledgeable Elmer. Ham is personal sharing. Elmers are relatable. The best way is to visit the Show 'n Tell on the second Saturday of each month. Still ask. All topics are picked because someone asked. If one person has a question, we know others do, but are too shy.

Why are there nets? Nets let everyone know who is out there. It allows both sides to test equipment, evaluate propagation, and practice how to. Most are formal and structured; some are less formal with a specific purpose. Evergreen has three formal nets and two nets that are about emergency communications, simplex, and experimenting.

Why can I talk to a station sometime and other times not? Think of a 50-Watt radio signal and a 50-W light bulb. They are virtually identical in frequency and propagation. What impacts whether you can detect a glimmer of the light bulb? Same things on radio - trees, weather, clouds, sunspots, time of day, elevation, hills, distance, and the list goes on.

If hams do not use public infrastructure, how do they talk? Each buys her/his own equipment for their station. So, each can stand alone. That is powerful.

But I have a cellphone and TV stations, I do not need ham. OK, most hams have those too. Amateur is only for those that want the privilege, security, and personal control over their communications. Ham, when nothing else works.

I got a license so I can have emergency communications. Congratulations. Who are you going to talk to? When? On what frequency? Now what emergency? Each type emergency demands different equipment and practices. See #9.

What if I make a mistake? Well, that is difficult. Will you define mistake? Can you show me that in the question pool? Did FCC say it's an error? If not, it is not! Ignore the naysayers. Perfect practice makes perfect.

Can girls, boys, ladies...do this? We do not ask background. Do you really want to be a ham? We will help you be there in four-weeks, promise. Our mission is reliable, lowest technical common denominator communications, locally first.

Is ham just a hobby? Some people seem so involved. Vocation is a paid position. Ham is an unpaid, professional, licensed radio operator. Avocation is a more apt term. The culture of amateur radio is helping other people, whether pass their exam, get a suitable station, aid in disasters, and the list goes on. Although it may take a different form, I know of no religious order that is more oriented to helping others than the ham community.

If you are not where you want to be, need help, or are curious? Ask someone. A ham that helps is called an Elmer.

We have a very active ladies' group. At a picnic, the comments were in awe that the guys are willing to help the ladies. This is not sexist, but it is wired into the male anatomy to help ladies. Second, see above.

They do it different. Great. There are four general personality types. The D, determined, are about getting the task done and move on (innovators). The I, influencer, are about talking and having fun (relations). The S, supportive, drag their heels till it works (maintainers). The C, constrained, are about the rules. All together makes a team.

Life is good. Enjoy!

