STARTER GUIDE

WHAT TO SAY ON HAM RADIO: YOUR FIRST CONTACT

Passing the exam doesn't teach you what to say. Here are the exact words for the first things you'll do on the air, each matched to a contact you can rehearse in Key Up before you transmit. N0CALL and W1DEMO are made-up call signs, in a format the FCC never issues; say your own.

Printed from www.cqdeck.com/learn/first-contact. The page always has the latest version.

THE SHORT VERSION

- On a repeater, say your call sign and "listening": "N0CALL listening." People don't usually call CQ on FM repeaters.
- To answer someone, say their call sign, then yours: "W1DEMO, this is N0CALL."
- Keep each turn short, wait for the courtesy beep before you answer, and end the contact with your call sign.
- Talk in plain English: no CB phrases like "10-4," and no "over and out."

Calling on a repeater

Listen for a minute first, in case people are pausing mid-conversation. Then press the button, wait a beat and say your call sign and "listening." That's the whole call.

YOU	N0CALL listening.
NO ANSWER	Wait a minute or two, then call again.
YOU	N0CALL listening. Anyone around for a radio check?
W1DEMO	N0CALL, this is W1DEMO. I heard you the first time, I was just getting settled in the car. You're full quieting into the repeater. Name here is Marcus. What's yours?
YOU	Thanks for the report, Marcus. I'm Sam, on a handheld at home. I just got my license, and that was my first call.

- Silence is normal. People often listen while driving or working and don't answer the first call.
- Wait a minute or two before calling again. Calling over and over sounds like a stuck microphone.
- Asking for a radio check gives people an easy reason to answer.
- Still nothing after a few tries? Check your tone and offset, then try a weekday evening, or check into a net.

> "Full quieting" means your signal is strong enough that there's no background hiss. It's the best signal report you can get on FM.

TRY IT **Rehearse it in Key Up** cqdeck.com/practice?scenario=quiet-repeater

Am I reaching the repeater? cqdeck.com/start/getting-out

Answering someone

On a repeater, answer a listening call with their call sign, then yours: "W1DEMO, this is N0CALL." Then trade names, as in the call above. When a station calls CQ, like a

Parks on the Air activator on 10 meters, keep it even shorter: say your call sign once in phonetics and nothing else.

W1DEMO	CQ Parks on the Air, CQ POTA, this is W1DEMO, activating Cedar Ridge State Park. W1DEMO, listening.
YOU	November Zero Charlie Alpha Lima Lima.
W1DEMO	The station ending Lima Lima, again please?
YOU	November Zero Charlie Alpha Lima Lima.
W1DEMO	N0CALL, thanks. You're five-seven into the park. What state?
YOU	Thanks. You're five-nine here in Ohio. N0CALL.
W1DEMO	Roger, thanks for the call. 73. QRZ POTA, W1DEMO.

- Leave out "this is" and greetings. An activator often has a line of hunters waiting.
- If they catch only part of your call, say your whole call sign again, not just the missing part.
- On SSB, signal reports are numbers like "five-nine." Give an honest one, then your state.
- Technicians can use voice on 10 meters from `28.300` to `28.500` MHz.

> "QRZ" means "who's calling me?" The activator is ready for the next hunter.

TRY IT **Rehearse it in Key Up** cqdeck.com/practice?scenario=park-hunt

A simplex call on 146.520

Simplex means radio to radio, with no repeater in between, so turn the offset and tone off. `146.520` MHz is the national 2 meter calling frequency: make contact there, then move to

another frequency to talk.

YOU	This is N0CALL, monitoring 146.520. Anyone around?
W1DEMO	Station calling on five-twenty, you're very weak. Please say again your call sign, phonetically.
YOU	November Zero Charlie Alpha Lima Lima.
W1DEMO	N0CALL, this is W1DEMO. Got you now. You're readable but a little scratchy. Name here is Rosa. How am I coming in?
YOU	You're full quieting here, Rosa. I'm Sam, on a handheld in my back yard.
W1DEMO	Thanks. Want to move off the calling frequency? Let's try 146.550.
YOU	Sounds good. Meet you on 146.550. N0CALL.
W1DEMO	See you on five-fifty, Sam. W1DEMO.

- Simplex can be quiet. If nobody answers, wait a minute or so and call again.
- When a signal is weak, slow down and spell your call sign phonetically.
- On FM, reports sound like "full quieting" or "readable but scratchy."
- On the new frequency, call the other station to confirm you both made it: "W1DEMO, N0CALL on 146.550."

TRY IT **Rehearse it in Key Up** cqdeck.com/practice?scenario=simplex-call

146.520 on the tuning dial cqdeck.com/?tune=146.520#dial

Checking into a net

A net is an on-air meeting at a set time. Net control tells everyone when to talk, which makes a net the easiest place to get on the air. Wait for the call for check-ins, then give your call

sign phonetically.

NET CONTROL	Good evening, this is W1DEMO, net control for the Tuesday Night Net. Stations wishing to check in, please call now with your call sign, phonetically.
YOU	November Zero Charlie Alpha Lima Lima.
NET CONTROL	November Zero Charlie Alpha Lima Lima, thank you. Go ahead with your name and location.
YOU	This is Sam, in Riverton. N0CALL.
NET CONTROL	Welcome to the net, Sam. Is this your first time with us, and do you have anything for the net tonight?
YOU	First time, and no traffic. N0CALL.
NET CONTROL	Glad to have you, Sam. Please stand by while I take other check-ins.

- Say your call sign once, then let go. Net control will come back to you.
- “No traffic” means you have nothing for the net. “With traffic” or “with a comment” means you do.
- End each answer with your call sign.
- When net control says “stand by,” you’re done for now. Keep listening: they may come back to you, and they’ll close the net at the end.

TRY IT **Rehearse it in Key Up** cqdeck.com/practice?scenario=net-checkin

Find a net (NetFinder) https://netfinder.radio/

Ending a contact

Wrap up with thanks, 73 and your call sign. The FCC requires your call sign at the end of every contact. Adding “clear” says you’re done; some hams say “clear and monitoring” when they’ll

keep listening.

W1DEMO	Nice to meet you, Sam. Plenty of folks listen without answering, so don't take the quiet personally. The club net here on Thursday nights is an easy way to find people.
YOU	I'll listen for it. Thanks for answering, Marcus. 73, N0CALL.
W1DEMO	Good to meet you, Sam. 73. W1DEMO, clear.

- Say 73 once. It already means "best regards," so there's no "73s."
- Dropping out of a conversation with several people? Say so with your call sign: "I'm going to drop out. 73, N0CALL."
- In a long chat, give your call sign at least every 10 minutes too, not just at the end.

TRY IT **Rehearse it in Key Up** cqdeck.com/practice?scenario=quiet-repeater

Coming back? Rehearse your first call back cqdeck.com/practice?scenario=back-on-air

Mistakes new hams make

- CB lingo. "10-4," "breaker" and "what's your 20" come from CB radio. On ham radio, just say "roger" or ask "where are you?" Use your name, not a handle, and save "break" for something urgent.
- "Over and out." "Over" means "your turn" and "out" means "we're done, no reply needed," so the two contradict each other. On a repeater you don't need either: end with your call sign.
- Talking before the courtesy beep. When the other station lets go, wait for the repeater's beep, or a second or two, before you answer. The gap lets others break in and resets the repeater's timer.
- Talking the instant you press the button. Press, wait a beat, then speak, or your first word gets cut off.
- Forgetting your call sign. Give it at the end of each contact and at least every 10 minutes during one. That's an FCC rule (47 CFR 97.119), not just manners.

- Kerchunking. Keying up without a word, just to hear the repeater, sends a signal with no call sign. To test, say “N0CALL testing.”
- Long turns. Keep each transmission to a few sentences and leave a pause, so others can join and the repeater doesn’t time out.

> Nobody expects a new ham to sound perfect. Most people on a repeater are glad to hear a new call sign, and a fumbled call is forgotten by the next one.

Sources

FCC rule 47 CFR 97.119: station identification https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-47/chapter-I/subchapter-D/part-97/subpart-B/section-97.119

ARRL band plan (146.520 MHz calling frequency) https://www.arrl.org/band-plan

Parks on the Air hunter guide https://docs.pota.app/docs/hunter_guide-english.html

FCC rule 97.301: frequency privileges https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-47/chapter-I/subchapter-D/part-97/subpart-D/section-97.301