STARTER GUIDE

HOW HAM RADIO NETS WORK AND HOW TO CHECK IN

A net is an on-air meeting at a set time and frequency. Net control runs it and tells everyone when to talk, which makes a net the easiest place for a new ham to get on the air.

Printed from www.cqdeck.com/learn/how-nets-work. The page always has the latest version.

What a net is

- Nets meet on a schedule, like every Tuesday at 8 p.m. on a club's repeater. Many meet weekly; some meet every night.
- Most nets are directed: nobody transmits unless net control calls on them. Some are informal, and people take turns more freely.
- There are club nets, social nets for chatting, emergency practice nets (ARES), weather nets (SKYWARN) that meet during storms, and traffic nets that pass written messages.
- Newcomers are always welcome. Many nets ask new hams to check in by name.

How a net runs

Most nets follow the same pattern, so after one or two you'll know what's coming.

1. Net control opens with a preamble: the net's name, what it's for and how it runs.
2. Net control asks for emergency or priority traffic first. Unless you have an emergency, stay quiet.
3. Net control calls for check-ins. Some nets take everyone at once; others go by area, or by the last letters of call signs ("suffixes Alpha through Mike").
4. Net control reads back the call signs it heard, then goes down the list, giving each station a turn.
5. Late check-ins are taken near the end.
6. Net control closes the net and returns the repeater to regular use.

How to check in

1. Listen to the preamble. It tells you what to give: your call sign alone, or your call sign, name and location.
2. When check-ins are called, wait for a pause, then press the button and give your call sign in phonetics: “November Zero Charlie Alpha Lima Lima.” Say it once, then let go.
3. Wait for net control to acknowledge you. If you weren’t heard, try again at the next call for check-ins.
4. When net control comes back to you, answer what they ask, then end with your call sign.

Phrases you’ll hear

- “No traffic”: you have nothing for the net. “With traffic” or “with a comment” means you do, and net control will come back to you.
- “Short time”: you can’t stay long, so net control will take you early.
- “For the log”: you’re checking in to be counted, with nothing to add.
- “Doubled”: two stations talked at once and neither got through. Net control may ask for “the station ending in Charlie” to go again.
- “Relay”: a station that can hear someone net control can’t passes the message along.
- “Checking out”: you need to leave before the net ends. Tell net control with your call sign, and they’ll release you.

An example check-in

A first check-in on a directed net.

NET CONTROL	This is W1DEMO, net control for the Tuesday Night Net. Is there any emergency or priority traffic? … Hearing none, we'll take check-ins now. Please give your call sign phonetically.
YOU	November Zero Charlie Alpha Lima Lima.
NET CONTROL	I have N0CALL. N0CALL, go ahead with your name and location.
YOU	This is Sam in Riverton. First time on the net, no traffic. N0CALL.
NET CONTROL	Welcome to the net, Sam, and congratulations. You're coming through fine. Stand by for the next round.

Don't worry about getting it perfect. Net control handles first-timers every week, and a missed turn is no problem.

Find a net

- Local club websites list their nets, and many clubs run one on their repeater every week.
- NetFinder lists nets by time and frequency.
- Listen to a whole session before your first check-in, so you know the routine.

Sources

ARRL Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) https://www.arrl.org/ares

National Weather Service SKYWARN https://www.weather.gov/skywarn/

NetFinder https://netfinder.radio/