STARTER GUIDE

UPGRADING TO A GENERAL LICENSE

A General license opens most of HF, the bands that reach across the country and around the world. It's one more 35-question test, and there's no FCC fee to upgrade. Here's what changes and how to get there.

Printed from www.cqdeck.com/learn/upgrade-to-general. The page always has the latest version.

What General opens

HF privileges, Technician and General

BAND	TECHNICIAN	GENERAL
160 m	None	All modes, 1.800–2.000 MHz.
80 m	CW only, 3.525–3.600 MHz.	CW and data 3.525–3.600 MHz. Voice 3.800–4.000 MHz.
60 m	None	Available, with power and mode rules unique to 60 m.
40 m	CW only, 7.025–7.125 MHz.	CW and data 7.025–7.125 MHz. Voice 7.175–7.300 MHz.
30 m	None	CW and data, 10.100–10.150 MHz. No voice on 30 m for anyone.
20 m	None	CW and data 14.025–14.150 MHz. Voice 14.225–14.350 MHz.
17 m	None	All modes, 18.068–18.168 MHz.
15 m	CW only, 21.025–21.200 MHz.	CW and data 21.025–21.200 MHz. Voice 21.275–21.450 MHz.
12 m	None	All modes, 24.890–24.990 MHz.
10 m	CW and data 28.000–28.300 MHz. Voice (SSB) and CW 28.300–28.500 MHz.	All modes, 28.000–29.700 MHz.

- Voice on part of every HF voice band from 160 to 10 meters, so you can talk across the country and overseas, not just around town.

- 20 meters is the classic daytime band for long-distance contacts. 40 and 80 meters carry regional contacts in the evening and at night.
- Data modes like FT8 on every HF band, which reach far even with a simple antenna.
- Many more park activators to answer, plus HF nets that cover whole regions.
- Up to 1,500 watts, though most hams run 100 watts or less.

TRY IT **Explore the bands on the tuning dial** cqdeck.com/#dial

The General exam

- 35 multiple-choice questions from the public General question pool. Get 26 right and you pass, the same as Technician.
- The current General pool is used through June 30, 2027. A new pool replaces it on July 1, 2027, so check which one covers your test date.
- Expect more about HF operating, propagation, antennas and electronics than on the Technician test.
- It's given at the same exam sessions, in person or online. There's a session fee, but no FCC fee for an upgrade.
- You can take it at the same session as Technician. With ARRL exam teams, one fee covers one try at each exam.

TRY IT **Find an exam session** cqdeck.com/learn/get-your-license#session

How to study

- Use practice tests and flashcards built on the current General pool, and read the explanations when you miss one.
- Learn the band plan with a picture in front of you. The tuning dial shows where General voice and data segments start and stop.
- Propagation questions make more sense once you've watched real numbers for a while.
- Get on HF before you pass by listening. An online receiver lets you hear 20 and 40 meters from your browser.

- As with Technician, keep taking full practice tests until you pass them comfortably every time.

TRY IT **Free study tools** cqdeck.com/toolbox#study

Reading solar numbers cqdeck.com/learn/reading-solar-numbers

Listen to HF online cqdeck.com/toolbox#listen

The day you pass

You don't have to wait for the FCC. Your CSCE lets you use General privileges right away, as long as you add "AG" after your call sign.

- On the air, say it with a word for the slash: "N0CALL stroke AG" or "N0CALL slash AG." In Morse or digital modes, send N0CALL/AG.
- Keep using it until the upgrade shows up in the FCC's license database, then drop it. Your call sign stays the same unless you ask for a new one.
- The CSCE covers you for up to 365 days while the FCC processes the upgrade.

TRY IT **Get an email when your upgrade is issued** cqdeck.com/callsign-watch

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A simple first HF station

- A 100 watt HF radio. Used radios from well-known makers are common and a good way to start.
- A 12 volt power supply big enough for the radio, around 25 amps for most 100 watt radios.
- The antenna matters most. A wire dipole or end-fed wire hung as high as you can get it works well, and an antenna tuner helps it match more bands.
- Low power works too. Many hams start with a small radio and a wire in a park, which is how most Parks on the Air activators operate.
- Before you transmit, do an RF exposure evaluation for your station, as FCC rules require. The ARRL's free calculator walks you through it.

TRY IT **ARRL RF exposure calculator** https://www.arrl.org/rf-exposure

First things to try

1. Set your license to General on Today, so the bands and parks match your new privileges.
2. Listen on 20 meter voice, 14.225 to 14.350 MHz, around midday. Hear how a contact goes before you call.
3. Answer a park activator. They want contacts, keep exchanges short and are happy to work new Generals.
4. Try FT8 on 20 or 40 meters with a computer and free software. It shows you how far your station reaches.
5. After dark, tune 40 and 80 meters for regional nets and conversations.

TRY IT **Today** cqdeck.com/dashboard **Rehearse a park contact** cqdeck.com/practice?scenario=park-hunt **Am I getting out?** cqdeck.com/start/getting-out

Sources

FCC rule 97.301: frequencies by license class https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-47/chapter-I/subchapter-D/part-97/subpart-D/section-97.301

FCC rule 97.305: modes by frequency https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-47/chapter-I/subchapter-D/part-97/subpart-D/section-97.305

FCC rule 97.313: power limits https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-47/chapter-I/subchapter-D/part-97/subpart-D/section-97.313

FCC rule 97.503: exam elements and passing scores https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-47/chapter-I/subchapter-D/part-97/subpart-F/section-97.503

FCC rule 97.9: operating with a CSCE https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-47/chapter-I/subchapter-D/part-97/subpart-A/section-97.9

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

FCC rule 97.13: RF exposure evaluation https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-47/chapter-I/subchapter-D/part-97/subpart-A/section-97.13

ARRL: the 2023 to 2027 General question pool https://www.arrl.org/news/new-general-question-pool-released-for-ham-radio-licensing-effective-july-1-2023

ARRL: no FCC fee for upgrades https://www.arrl.org/fcc-application-fee

ARRL: RF exposure https://www.arrl.org/rf-exposure