

Help for new Licensed Operators

Six of the most Commonly asked questions.

- What kind of radio should I buy?
- I have a license and I have a radio. What do I do now?
- I never get a reply when I get on the air. What should I do?
- The "old guys" won't talk to me. Where do I find other "new guys" like me?
- I have all kinds of questions. Who can I ask?
- I was thinking about joining the Local Branch but have heard some negative things. Should I join or not?

What kind of radio should I buy?

The standard answer you will receive is, "It depends on what you want to do." This is not as facetious an answer as it might seem. Amateur radio has so many aspects to it that it really is impossible to give a simple, all-encompassing answer. If, however, you have *absolutely no idea* where to begin, I'd suggest 2-meters, or if you can stretch the wallet - go for a dualbander. Why? First, because it is simple and requires a minimum of equipment. Second, because that's where you are most likely to find other hams, especially local ones, who can help you.

The radio:

Since you do not yet know what bands and which modes will appeal to you, start cheap. Get a simple hand-held radio (a "walkie talkie"). Don't worry about fancy features. Not that you get a choice these days they're included ready or not, just don't use them until you're more familiar with your new radio. Try to stick with new equipment initially. The only special features you might need are CTCSS tones and the ability to send and receive on different frequencies. (Almost every new hand-held radio will have these features). CTCSS has very little use here in New Zealand, but some repeaters are having this feature installed to eliminate cross-mode etc. Extended Receive coverage is usually included. Extended TX Coverage is sometimes available on request. You will need extended TX and RX if you intend being involved in Civil Defence Activities etc. Once you've operated for a while, your future requirements will become clear.

I have a license and I have a radio. What do I do now?

1. Listen. Get a feel for the procedures, the nets, the general usage, and the other hams.
2. Talk. Everyone goes immediately to the repeaters, but I really recommend working on simplex until you are comfortable, confident, and competent. Even when you move to repeaters, use simplex when you can. I know far too many hams that use repeaters exclusively, even when communicating the distance of about a block.
3. Check the NZART Web Site, and the World Wide Web for activities. There is *something* out there that will appeal to you.
4. If you are still in the dark, study the Morse Code and upgrade your license. Studying for the General license level gives you additional knowledge about the hobby and leads you down paths you may not have considered. Basically HF (Shortwave) World Wide Communications. Yep, sorry, but at the time of printing, CW is still a requirement for HF Comms, albeit only 6WPM.

I never get a reply when I put out my call sign. What should I do?

(This question and the following question are related, so read the answers to both of them.) The short answer is "persist". Eventually someone will answer. You might also keep your ears open and listen for someone else calling, then answer. They will be as grateful as you would be.

Other considerations:

Try the "Calling frequency", both when calling and listening. Call "CQ"

Are their repeaters nearby? Try them. This is the most likely place to make a contact. You can believe it or not, Call "CQ" on a repeater as well.

Can anyone hear you? You may be in a bad location or have an inefficient antenna. If you are indoors or in a car, you really need an outside antenna. If you are using a hand-held radio, the "rubber duck" antenna supplied by the manufacturer is probably not very efficient. If you are calling through a repeater, you should hear a tail from the repeater after you release the PTT. Remember that persistence pays.

The "old guys" won't talk to me. Where do I find other "new guys" like me?

This is a sad and self-perpetuating problem. You want to do exactly what the "old guys" did. Some hams do, indeed, talk only to their "friends". Many of them started in the same boat as you, unable to find other people willing to talk to them. They eventually found other kindred, "new guys" and formed a small insular group. Now *they* are the "old guys". I strongly urge you not to follow the same pattern. *Learning to communicate* is an important part of this hobby, and that means with strangers, even reluctant ones, not just with your buddies. Many of us are naturally shy, so it can be tough, but hey, so was passing the exam!

Suggestions:

Find an open "net" and join in. That's a good icebreaker. You will need to do this often.

Eventually people will become familiar with your call sign and you'll be "one of the guys".

Find a local club and attend the meetings. Don't sit in a corner - go introduce yourself.

Basically, it's up to you. You will have to be the one who seeks (and seeks and seeks) contact (CQ) until you succeed and become "accepted". Some of the "old guys" are shy, too! Once you are part of the group, don't ignore the next poor "new guy" that comes along.

I have all kinds of questions. Who can I ask?

Easy question. Virtually every ham is willing to share his/her "wisdom" with you. Beyond that, talk to your local radio dealer. The Internet is a goldmine of information.

You can write to "The Communicator" That what this publication is for. And trust when I say, "You're not Alone". Others will learn from your questions and answers.

I was thinking about joining the NZART but have heard some negative comments. Should I join or not?

Some people may have what they perceive as legitimate grievances against the NZART and/or local branches of NZART, and some people just gripe about anything. I don't propose to get into a debate about that here. The key things you should know about the NZART are -

1. The NZART is the largest, strongest amateur radio lobby group in the New Zealand.
2. The NZART has a member-driven policy.

So my answer is: Yes. Join the NZART. The hobby needs a strong, politically- savvy organisation to protect it. If you don't like what the leadership is doing, vote them out. It is a democratic organization. Take your chance, stand for office and see if you can do any better? Most members' experiences with the NZART have been positive and the majority has benefited either directly or indirectly from the organisation's programs.

Was this information useful to you? Is their additional information you think we should include? We'd be happy to hear from you. Please write in..... Wayne ZL3TCV.