



The Amateur in You, Part 2

What have you been pondering?



Short guide to contesting

Contesting is the organized on-air activity of making as many contacts as possible by ham radio within a predetermined time period. It's not every ham's cup of tea, but for those who enjoy the thrill of the fast-paced operating, it can be a lot of fun.

Many contests are performed using SSB (single sideband), but many are also done using CW, digital, or other modes. To keep this simple, I'm going to confine my remarks to an SSB contest, although they might easily apply to others.

Getting started

First, pick out a contest you might like to participate in. Next, find out the time(s) it's running, remembering that they are typically listed in **UTC time**. Then, read through the rules, and become acquainted with the **exchange**, which you'll use with every contact.

Download and install a logging program you like. I recommend [N3FJP](#), which has a one-time cost, is feature-rich, and is very easy to use.

Answering

Spin the dial, looking for stations who are calling out for testers. Stop at one whose frequency falls within your transmit privileges. For example, if you hold a General license, do not reply to a call on 7.176 MHz or 3.802 MHz.

Then, when you hear the call **CQ contest!** answer with your call sign phonetically:

K-N-Ø-J-I

The calling station will acknowledge you and give you the exchange:

K-N-Ø-J-I, please copy 5-9, Kentucky

You then respond with your side of the ex-

change:

Please copy 5-9, Utah

Calling

Find a frequency that falls within your transmit privileges, and sounds *somewhat* quiet, then ask whether the frequency is in use:

This is K-N-Ø-J-I. Is this frequency in use?

You might discover that *every* frequency is in use, and you'll just have to pick the quietest one you can find. Then, with your left hand on the mic and right hand on your keyboard, assuming you're right-handed, start calling:

CQ contest, CQ contest, this is K-N-Ø-J-I, contest!

Be sure to use the word **contest**, to help listeners know to answer you only if they're also participating in the contest. Enter their call sign as soon as you hear it, then say,

K-I-7-A-B-C, please copy 5-9, Utah

assuming KI7ABC called you, or simply

K-I-7-A-B-C, 5-9, U-T

assuming the exchange is *call sign, RST, and state*. When the other station replies with their report, enter it right away, and say,

Thanks for Kentucky (assuming their state is KY). Good luck in the contest. Q-R-Z

Join the fun

Yes, contests can be a lot of fun, but it's not without a purpose. Contesting helps keep your skills alive, compels you to keep your equipment (especially your antenna) in working order, and promotes good amateur practice. If you'd like to see a fairly complete list of contests and contest-like on-air activities, visit [ContestCalendar.com](#) by Bruce WA7BNM.

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