



The Amateur in You, Part 1

What have you been pondering?



Benefits of upgrading to the Extra license

As you ponder upgrading your license, you might have glanced at the [ARRL graphical band chart](#) or a similar representation of the license privileges among the bands. You might also have noticed that an Amateur Extra Class licensee possesses only a *little more* frequency privilege over that of a General Class licensee, and have wondered whether studying for the Extra license is worth that small addition of the spectrum.

Indeed, while the General exam is a little tougher than the Technician exam, the Extra exam is much more difficult than the General exam. The General exam question pool contains just over 400 questions while the Extra pool contains just under 700 questions. Likewise, the General exam presents the candidate with 35 questions while the Extra exam presents 50 questions. So, for a large amount of study and examination, upgrading to Extra seems to provide very little benefit. If that's the case, then what other benefits does upgrading to Extra provide?

Frequency convenience

The Extra-only frequencies can be useful in several ways. For example, the General portions of some bands can get very crowded during contests, so moving to the Extra-only segment can sometimes offer a little breathing room to make contest contacts or to carry on a normal conversation.

The Extra-only segments are designed technically to reside in the lowest segments of the 80-, 40-, 20-, and 15-meter bands to allow farther reach of signals to the more trusted Extra licensees when conditions for a given band are marginal. Additionally, some of those lower-frequency segments contain what's known as ***DX windows***, or designated frequency ranges where operators agree to focus on international (DX) communication.

Service

On one hand, as an Extra licensee, you no longer need to be chaperoned during Field Day or any other activity in which your club needs to potentially use all amateur frequencies for contacting. On the other hand, you could be the licensee who holds the privileges necessary to allow others to make contacts on any amateur frequency, whether or not they hold a license at all.

There always seems to be a need for more VEs (volunteer examiners) to help out at exam sessions, so General Class licensees are needed to test unlicensed candidates for the Technician license. But once the candidate passes the Technician exam, the VE team must rely on the Advanced or Extra VE to test them further. Holding an Extra Class license removes that restriction and allows you to administer exams of all classes.

One great benefit of upgrading to Extra is the additional knowledge you might have sought about the mysteries of radio science. It turns out that while studying for the Extra Class license exam, you couldn't help but learn many of the concepts you'll be tested on, even though you find yourself memorizing much of the exam pool.

The prestige of the Extra Class license tends to attract people to you, allowing others a degree of confidence in your level of knowledge and experience, and providing you with the opportunity to serve as a mentor, or ***elmer***. With the greater privilege, however, comes greater expectations of knowledge and understanding, and possibly greater skill at teaching the same. The path to an Extra upgrade can help you live up to that expectation.

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