



The Amateur in You, Part 1

What have you been pondering?



How to elmer

The meaning of the word *elmer* is known to many hams as a *mentor or tutor who offers personal guidance, technical knowledge, assistance, and encouragement to ham radio operators*. While not exhaustive, this brief guide can explain how you can be an elmer to others, or in other words, *how to elmer*. The term “elmer” was coined almost by accident, in a [March 1971 QST article by Rod Newkirk W9BRD](#).

Kindness

Above all other attributes, make *kindness* your guiding principle in every conversation. If a new ham asks you a rudimentary question, or one that you’re simply tired of repeatedly answering, either answer the question politely, or tell him you’d rather answer at another time. It’s not kind to remind the person that he or she should have already known the answer from the exam or study materials, because many of us have probably forgotten more than we remember, and few of us passed the exam with a perfect score. Refrain from simply telling people that they should have Googled it or read the manual, because they likely have already done that. Criticism has no place in the conversation of an elmer.

Patience

You might not be aware that the person you’re helping has a learning impairment, is highly self-conscious, or is otherwise disabled in some way. Working with some can test your patience, so try never to speak sharply or harshly to them; speak in a kind voice. Avoid correcting the person’s mistakes, if at all possible; instead, present another point of view. If the new ham states that a dipole is made of two half-wave length elements, simply state that you tend to find better results when you cut them to quarter-wave lengths.

Be reachable

Every so often, turn on your radio and announce that you’re *monitoring*, indicating that you’re willing to converse with whomever is listening. We live busy lives, and don’t have time for every person who wants our attention, but make time for, and befriend those you don’t know, as well as your close clique of ham buddies. Your generosity will pay off.

Set the example

Whether you’re helpful or otherwise, people hear you and see you in action, and they look to you for an example of what an experienced ham should say and do. As impossible as it might be at times, try never to be negative on the radio; be positive. Never berate anybody or resort to personal attacks or name-calling; instead, build them up. Be agreeable, even when you don’t agree. When you sense a pointless argument brewing, be the first to stand down.

Humility

You can tell by now that you don’t need to know a lot, to elmer others; even the newest licensee has something to teach and share with the rest of us. Still, none of us knows everything, and there is no shame in saying that we weren’t aware of a technical detail or a particular situation. People tend to have greater respect for those who can admit that they’re wrong. Refer the ham to another who is better qualified to answer a question.

Finally

Does this describe you? Of course it does, and down deep you know that’s true. You have a lot that the rest of us can benefit from. Don’t be afraid to take a person under your proverbial wing, and kindly show him or her how to elmer.