The Amateur in You, Part 1

What have you been pondering?

Nets

When a person obtains an amateur radio license in this century, chances are pretty good that the very first contact the new amateur makes will be either on a local 2-meter repeater or on a voice ***net***. Doing so by an established net is an easy way to get started, because of the reduced pressure to perform or to say much at all. During a net, a participant has time to collect thoughts, recall the rules that govern the operations, and work up the courage to actually announce a call sign.



An amateur radio net (short for "network") is an organized on-air vocal meeting of ham radio operators. On such a gathering, one person is designated ***Net Control*** (short for Net Control Station or Net Control Operator) and opens the net, asking for participants to ***check in*** to the net by announcing their call signs. Nets are *not a necessary activity* in the amateur radio community, but can be interesting, fun, engaging, and educational.

Typically, each ham radio net possesses these four organization levels:

Host : Organization that sponsors the net, provides the frequency and/or repeater for the net, and assigns a Net Manager for one or more of their nets.

Net Manager : Person who defines the theme or purpose and format of each net. ensures each net is staffed by a Net Control Operator, and decides the days and times of the nets.

Net Control Operator : Licensed amateur who opens (starts) the net, optionally announces the net format (in a possible ***preamble***), and either asks for participant check-ins ("check-in net") or announces the names of past net participants from a roll ("roll-call net").

Participant : You, the licensed amateur who participates in a net by checking in or acknowledging your name and call sign during the roll call.

During a net, Net Control is in charge, and determines whether the net format is formal or casual. A formal net is typically a ***directed net***, in which participants are asked to follow guided rules regarding when and what to transmit, and to remain on the net until it's closed. Net Control often explains those during the preamble, which is the short introduction and theme (such as for new hams, ladies only, youth only, etc.) explanation paragraph at the net start.

During an incident or disaster, any person can start a *health and welfare net* and ask for people to check in, to coordinate assistance, shelter, medical, and other needs. Once in a while one operator is asked to communicate ***traffic***, which is a formalized message that follows the format of the NTS (National Traffic System), as dictated by **ARRL**. In a non-emergency net, the term traffic otherwise refers to a regular message, such as an event announcement.

So, who can participate in a net? You can, if you fit the theme. Who can start a net? You can, if one isn't already designated for the frequency or repeater on which you intend to hold it. Can you listen in on a net to which you have no intention of checking in? Yes, and in fact you might find that any given net tends to attract more listeners than participants. And in spite of established net themes, no amateur holds any obligation to ever check into any net.