

The Amateur in You, Part 1

What have you been pondering?



How to get into ham radio

You know about amateur radio, otherwise known as “ham” radio, and now you’d like to find out just what it’s going to take to get into the craft. Let’s cut to the chase. You need three things: a license, radio equipment, and knowledge, and *it doesn’t matter in what order you get them*.

License

To get a ham radio license, you need to pass the license exam, which is not as scary as it might sound. You can enroll in a ham radio course, which can prepare you, but attending one is not necessary. You’re free to study the material on your own. Here’s how:

- Use the [Recommended Study Method](#), which is free and has helped thousands.
- When you’re getting around 90% Aptitude on the Practice Tests, locate a [testing center](#). You can also [take an exam remotely](#) if you’re willing to do it from an isolated room, like your bathroom.



- Once you pass the exam, the FCC will email you a link to pay the \$35 exam fee.
- Once you pay the fee, your license and call sign should show up in [the ULS](#) (use your FRN to search) in a couple of days.

Radio equipment

You don’t need much in the way of radio equipment to get started, but you do need

something. Here’s a minimal list:

- Purchase a [Baofeng UV-5R Mini](#) (\$19).
- Purchase a [Signal Stick antenna](#) (\$22).
- Register for a free login at [RepeaterBook](#) and look up the repeaters in your area.

- Purchase a [programming cable](#) (\$15).

- Download and install the free [CHIRP software](#) onto your PC.

- Download a [CHIRP template](#) (the [IMG file](#)) for your radio frequencies, replace already-populated repeater frequencies in the template with those you found on RepeaterBook, and program them into your radio. If don’t see a template designed for your area, no problem; just pick any and start replacing the frequency entries.

- Programming a radio can be tricky, so if you run into any issues, reach out to a mentor, either somebody you already know, or [one of ours](#).



Knowledge

Take a class, even if you’re already licensed; it’s good to know a little more about what it was you memorized. Train yourself on best practices; learn what to say and how to say it when you’re talking on the radio. Even when asking questions online, it’s good to know how to ask them, to draw out the most meaningful responses from others.



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Although at this point you've learned a lot, don't assume that you know as much as you feel you do, because amateur radio has a lot more to it than meets the eye, from basic to technical. You don't need to know much, but you should know the basics. Here's how to get those basics under your belt:

- Browse the questions on the [New Ham page](#), especially those that address [Best Practices](#).
- [Self-train](#) on all basic aspects of ham radio. Learn the [Phonetic Alphabet](#).
- Get [more in-depth training](#) on ham radio knowledge, if you're so inclined. *This link is for those who want more than a high school education in ham radio.*
- Join [ARES](#) and become trained in their certification levels.



- Seriously, [enroll in a course](#). The fun, hands-on instruction will likely last you a lifetime.
- Many hams enter the craft with the belief that one radio has a better *range* than another. Your radio knowledge will be enhanced once you realize that the difference in radio range is experienced by your location, your obstructions, and your antenna.

Finally

Once you've gotten the three basic ingredients (license, radio, knowledge) behind you, the thing you'll need more than anything is **experience**. Get on the radio, throw your call sign out on the local repeater, [check into a net](#), but among the most important things



you can do is [join a ham radio club](#). Associating with a club might seem a little old-school, but can bring you together with other hams locally, who either understand your struggles or can answer questions you might not know you had about your new-found craft.

Once you've done all of that, volunteer to help or train somebody else. If you haven't ever approached it this way, you might be surprised just how much you can learn, and quickly, by teaching others. No matter how you address training, always make **kindness** your guiding principle. It'll also help you improve in important areas of teaching, such as eye-contact, presentation, and patience.

