



The Amateur in You, Part 1

What have you been pondering?



Which radio to get you started

Let's cut to the chase, and then we'll start talking about options and possibilities. You should purchase a [Baofeng UV-17R](#) radio, a [Signal Stick](#) antenna, and a [spare battery](#), then program it with the [frequencies you'll use most](#) in your area.

A handheld transceiver (HT)

When selecting a portable radio that you can quickly take with you when you need it, here are some things to consider:

- Able to receive and transmit on **2 meters**, which is where most local ham communication takes place on repeaters and nets. Ideally, it should also be a **dual-band** radio, supporting **70 cm**, the second-most used frequency band.
- One for which you can purchase an **alkaline sled** or an easy rechargeable option, like USB-C from a [solar trickle charger](#)
- One that many of **your friends have**; it's very convenient to have a radio, for which you can ask for help, or compare notes, or bring to club meetings and discuss
- Should be **supported by CHIRP**, the free, online radio programming software, to get it programmed quickly, should you need to add a new repeater or net frequency. (You'll need the [programming cable](#) that goes to your particular radio model too.)
- Able to receive **FM broadcast**, allowing you to hear news and information from commercial radio stations during an incident
- Should be not only a dual-band radio, but also a **dual-watch** radio, which can allow you to hear incoming communications on two different frequencies at the same time
- Should be **light-weight** and small enough to slip onto your pocket or re-sealable sandwich bag
- Should be **inexpensive**, to allow you to feel

free enough to experiment with it and wear it out, without the worry of replacement or repair cost. Some folks will purchase an expensive HT that's loaded with cool features, as their first radio, only to be too afraid to take it hiking with them or do field experiments with it or involve it in events.

Will your choice of radio still be a good one if all the above criteria aren't met? Probably, but there are some minor inconveniences you might have to live with.

A mobile radio

If you're looking to get something a little heftier, whether you install it in your vehicle or set it on your desk, a mobile unit might be what you're looking for. Some of the above suggested criteria still apply, such as dual-band, dual-watch, same model used by friends, CHIRP-supported, and low-cost. Obviously, there are other things to consider when you get a mobile unit, such as:

- A separate 12-volt or 13.8-volt **power supply**, such as an [MFJ MFJ-4230MVP](#) or [Powerwerx SS-30DV](#)
- A good, portable antenna, such as a [Tram 1185](#) mag-mount, or a [Pockrus J-pole](#) mast-mount antenna
- Some **50-ohm coaxial cable** that's long enough to reach from your radio to the antenna, but of a model that minimizes the signal loss, such as RG-8X
- Should deliver (transmit) 25 watts on FM to make it worth your investment

There are other types of radios, such as portable and base units, but the focus here is on getting started, and recommendations for a reasonable deployment.