

Microvolt

Monthly newsletter of the Utah Amateur Radio Club

July 2025



Contact!



Is it true what they say, that *ham radio is a contact sport*? Well, if you ask a net participant, a Field Day attendee, or an avid contester, you might hear a thundering YES! So, what exactly is a *contact*? Basically, an amateur radio contact is any established communication between two parties by ham radio. Still, contact types and methods vary, and it might be fun to explore them. Furthermore, if a contact never got recorded, did it really take place, or does that even matter? Let's take a look into the world of contacting from several points of view and *you* be the judge!

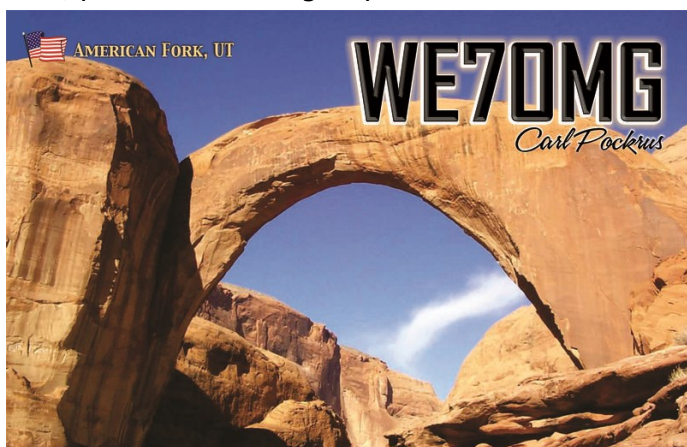
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Cover – Making contact

Amateur radio contains so many facets, programs, and activities that some find enjoyment in doing things that don't involve talking with another human being over the air, such as the technology behind radio, installing radio equipment, and volunteer examination administration. Yet, to most people looking broadly at ham radio, it would still seem that the entire point of radio is to communicate with another.

It's difficult to replace the exhilaration of hearing your own call sign repeated by a total stranger across the country or the other side of the ocean. Even starting out as a newly licensed operator, hearing an acknowledgement of your name or call sign by another ham is a thrill, knowing that your equipment is working and that you somehow got it to work well enough to get somebody's attention and a reply.

Making that first contact can be nerve-racking to some who suffer from "mic fright" and don't know what to say, stumble over their words, or are in fear that they'll say something wrong, now that they have an officially issued government license. On one hand, getting used to talking on ham radio takes time and practice. On the other hand, it takes patience and understanding of the newer folks for those of us who have done it a few times. For some, talking on the radio might come naturally, but for most it does not. And after you make that first contact, your contact can give you a [First Contact Award](#).



If you're one of those who have a difficult time communicating verbally with others, because maybe you have a speech impediment, or other disability, you can still enjoy ham radio by contacting using FT8, PSK31, Winlink, or other digital methods for example. These operating modes do not require your



voice, but do require a connection between your computer and your radio, often through a sound card. Some modern transceivers have built-in sound cards that connect to your computer by a USB cable, where older radios can be adapted for digital work by inexpensive external devices.

No matter how you make the contact, another thrill is to receive a *QSL card* in the mail from the operator whom you've contacted. While not required by either party, a QSL ("acknowledgement" or "confirmation") card is a postcard that demonstrates the contact in writing. Some hams ask for the cards, to build their card collection, and a few have collected hundreds, even [thousands of them for display](#).

Prior to the advent of digital communication, QSL cards were the primary method of confirming a contact, so operators tracked them carefully. Special "post offices" called bureaus were established to expedite the sending and receiving of the large volume of QSL cards. Some volunteers (card "checkers") were once installed to help acknowledge award confirmations by verifying contact authenticity, that today are confirmed largely by software.

So, just whom are you permitted to contact? You can make a contact with another ham radio operator through a mountaintop repeater, or a repeater that's installed on a satellite. You can make a contact with an astronaut on the ISS (International Space Station). You can contact a ham by bouncing your signal off the ionosphere or even the Moon. You can contact any other amateur in the world within the frequency and power privileges of your license. But using ham radio, be sure **not** to contact an unlicensed person, unless you're letting the person know how to get licensed.

Microvolt editorial staff