

Intro To Contesting

What is Contesting

Contesting (also known as *radiosport*) is a competitive activity pursued by amateur radio operators. In a contest, an amateur radio station, seeks to contact as many other amateur radio stations as possible in a given period of time and exchange information. Rules for each competition define the amateur radio bands, the mode of communication that may be used, and the kind of information that must be exchanged. The contacts made during the contest contribute to a score by which stations are ranked.

Contests were formed to provide opportunities for amateur radio operators to practice their message handling skills, used for routine or emergency communications across long distances. Over time, the number and variety of radio contests has increased, and many amateur radio operators today pursue the sport as their primary amateur radio activity.

During a radio contest, each station attempts to establish two-way contact with other licensed amateur radio stations and exchange information specific to that contest. The information exchanged could include a signal report, a name, the location of the operator, and any other information defined in the contest rules. For each contact, the radio operator must correctly receive the call sign of the other station, as well as the information in the "exchange", and record this data, along with the time of the contact and the band or frequency that was used to make the contact, in a log.

How is it done

An operator can set up on a frequency and call other stations (called running) and wait for other stations to answer their query to exchange information. Or you can tune around the designated frequencies called Searching and Pouncing looking for those who are running. Both methods work and offer different advantages and challenges. Many contesters use both methods during a contest to maximize their score.

Running means using a dedicated frequency and calling for other stations for long periods of time, logging everyone who answers. If you are running you will only make contact with those who respond to your query.

Searching and Pouncing (S&P) is also an effective way to make contacts. Just like the term implies, this involves tuning through the frequencies, looking for the running stations and contacting any you can find. S&P allows you to seek out those stations that you might not otherwise have access to while running.

Sprint Format is where an operator is running, but after three contacts they must vacate the frequency and do S&P. The last contact they had then gets to use the frequency for running until they have three contacts and they then move on to S&P.

The ability to capture the necessary information exchanged, log it and move on to another contact are many of the same skills used in message passing. Those who do contesting are often some of the best operators because of the skills they acquire in a contest.

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Typical Contest Exchange

Contacts between stations in a contest are often brief. A typical exchange between two stations on voice — in this case between our friends Herman Muster W6XRL4 (who is running) and Wolfman W6WOOF (who is S&P) — might proceed as follows:

Herman: Any Station contest, Whiskey Six Xray Romeo Lima Four, contest.

(Station W6XRL4 is soliciting a contact in the contest. He would keep making the announcement until someone responds.)

Wolfman: Whiskey Six Whisky Oscar Oscar Foxtrot

(W6WOOF hears the contest solicitation and responds with only his call sign and nothing more.)

Herman: W6WOOF XND W6XRL4 (said phonetically).

(W6XRL4 confirms the W6WOOF call sign, sends his city code of XND, and ends with his call sign.)

Wolfman: W6XRL4, BLD, W6WOOF (said phonetically).

(W6WOOF confirms reception of W6XRL4s exchange, sends his city code of BLD, and ends with his call sign.)

Herman: Copy, W6XRL4 contest

(W6XRL4 confirms W6WOOF's exchange and is now listening for new stations.)
(W6WOOF starts looking for another station on a different frequency.)

Herman: Any Station contest, Whiskey Six Xray Romeo Lima Four, contest.

(Station W6XRL4 continues soliciting a contact in the contest.)

If any station did not copy the exchange, they would ask for a fill.

In normal message passing we would use "Amateur Call" as a procedural word to precede the FCC Call Sign. But in a contest, we know what the exchange format is and use of the procedural word is generally not needed, this speeds up the exchange.

Experienced testers use "Q" codes during their exchange. Because we practice for Emergency Communications, we will only use plain English, no codes.