Introduction To Contesting

●●●

Let's Make Contesting Fun!

What is contesting?

It's an event where an operator or a team of operators compete by establishing contact with many operators in a given period of time while exchanging a piece of information.

Most contests are sponsored by an organization, club, group or individual. They are responsible for creating and defining the rules, entry categories, multipliers, and log checking and issuing the awards.

That piece of information exchanged is used by to sponsor to confirm that a contact did indeed take place and the information was exchanged correctly.

Why Contesting?

- Competitive
- Keeps your station updated/working
- Makes you a better operator
- Obtain awards faster (DXCC, WAS)
- Makes it easier dealing with QRM, QRN (ear filters)
- Great camaraderie with other contesters
- More wallpaper
- Useful in other areas (EmComm, Nets)
- It's Fun!

Some Facts About Contesting

- There are over 550 contests per year.
- Even with similarities, almost each one is unique (Mode, Band, Time, Category)
- Some are more popular than others (CQ WW, ARRL DX, WAE, All Asian)
- State QSO Parties is a great way to start in contesting
- World Radiosport Team Championship is considered to be the "Olympics" of amateur radio. Takes place every 4 years. Invite only*
- Contests can last from just a couple hours to over 48 hours

Contesting Myths

- You need acres of aluminum
- You need to pre-register
- You need to pay to play
- You have to have the best, most expensive transceivers
- You must have at least two radios (SO2R)
- You have to be a member of a contesting group or club.
- If you operate as a member of a club, you can't also compete as an individual
- You have to be on the air for the entire event

Different Types of Contests

- Sprint
- Mode specific (SSB only, CW only, RTTY only)
- Band specific (ARRL 10m)
- Part time (NEQP)
- Full time (48hr, CQWW)
- QSO Parties
- Country/Area Specific
- Field Day (US)
- Mixture of the above

Some of Terms and Lingo Used In Contesting

- S&P - Search and Pounce
- Running - Calling CQ
- Q - Contact (QSO)
- Rate (Q Rate) - Contacts Per Hour
- NIL - Not in log
- Multiplier - Contact with station will multiply your score
- Dupe - Duplicate contact
- Cluster / Skimmer (Assisted) - Using the internet or software to find stations
- Big Gun - Big station optimized for contesting (K1TTT, K3LR, K9CT)
- Little Pistol - Single operator stations
- Cut numbers - In CW, numbers are replaced with letter to shorten the contact
- Busted Call - Callsign you incorrectly copied

What equipment do I need for contesting?

Minimal setup consists of

- Transceiver
- Antenna
- Logging (paper or computer logging)

Preferred setup consists of

- Transceiver with filtering
- Directional antenna, multiple antennas, receive antennas
- Hands free microphone, Automated keyer and Digital Voice Keyer
- Computer with serial in/out (and/or USB) for radio control
- Contest grade logging software (N1MM, Wintest, N3FJP)

Make due with what you have! It doesn't have to cost more money to contest.

How do I start contesting?

Start by looking at what's coming up.

- What's that on the air?
- <u>WA7BNM's Contest Calendar</u>
- SM3CER Contest Service
- QST's contest corral (www.arrl.org/contest-calendar)
- Sponsors website directly (NEQP.org, ARRL.org, CQWW.org)
- Last resort… Google.com

We will be using WA7BNM's Contest Calendar in this course
http://www.hornucopia.com/contestcal/

Picking the contest

Using WA7BNM's online calendar sorted by Perpetual month.

Look at what appears to be interesting to you. Use a search engine to see how popular that contest is

Press the blue + symbol for more information

It will give you all the information you need to participate.

October 2016	
+ TARA PSK Rumble Contest	0000Z-2400Z, Oct 1
+ Oceania DX Contest, Phone	0800Z, Oct 1 to 0800Z, Oct 2
+ California QSO Party	1600Z, Oct 1 to 2159Z, Oct 2
+ German Telegraphy Contest	0700Z-0959Z, Oct 3
+ SARL 80m QSO Party	1700Z-2000Z, Oct 6
+ Makrothen RTTY Contest	0000Z, Oct 8 to 1559Z, Oct 9
+ Oceania DX Contest, CW	0800Z, Oct 8 to 0800Z, Oct 9
+ SKCC Weekend Sprintathon	1200Z, Oct 8 to 2359Z, Oct 9
+ Scandinavian Activity Contest, SSB	1200Z, Oct 8 to 1200Z, Oct 9
+ Pennsylvania QSO Party	1600Z, Oct 8 to 2200Z, Oct 9
+ Arizona QSO Party	1600Z, Oct 8 to 2359Z, Oct 9
+ FISTS Fall Unlimited Sprint	1700Z-2100Z, Oct 8
+ 10-10 Int. 10-10 Day Sprint	0001Z-2359Z, Oct 10
+ 10-10 Int. Fall Contest, CW	0001Z, Oct 15 to 2359Z, Oct 16
+ New York QSO Party	1400Z, Oct 15 to 0200Z, Oct 16
+ Worked All Germany Contest	1500Z, Oct 15 to 1459Z, Oct 16
+ Asia-Pacific Fall Sprint, CW	0000Z-0200Z, Oct 16
+ Illinois QSO Party	1700Z, Oct 16 to 0100Z, Oct 17
+ Run for the Bacon QRP Contest	0100Z-0300Z, Oct 17
+ SKCC Sprint	0000Z-0200Z, Oct 26
+ CQ Worldwide DX Contest, SSB	0000Z, Oct 29 to 2400Z, Oct 30
November 2016	

Major Contests

CQWW DX SSB
CQWW DX CW
CQWW WPX SSB
CQWW WPX CW
IARU HF Championship - Multimode
ARRL Intl DX SSB
ARRL Intl DX CW
WAE DX SSB
WAE DX CW
All Asian DX SSB
All Asian DX CW

Contest Logging Software

- Suggest to use software dedicated for contesting
- General logging software (HRD, DXlabs) lacks options even though they may have a "contest mode" built into the software
- Most popular contesting software are N1MM Logger+, Wintest, N3FJP (US), Writelog, Skookum (OSX) among others.
- There are linux logging software. Most use N1MM+ using WINE
- Computer doesn't have to be "the latest and greatest" but a decent processor/ram will help out with DB entry and some automation (keyer)

Contest Preparation

Make sure everything's working days or weeks (not hours) before the contest

- Loved ones know you won't be available?
- Antennas are working?
- Software/hardware working?
- Radio working? (Audio, power, rig interface)
- Propagation working?
- Everything you need during the contest ready to go?