

The Amateur's Code

The Amateur's Code was originally written by Paul M. Segal, W9EEA in 1928. Since then it has become, for many amateur radio operators, their goal for conduct both on and off the air. The code, reproduced below, appears immediately prior to Chapter 1 of each issue of the [ARRL Handbook](#) published annually by the [American Radio Relay League](#), the National Association for Amateur Radio.

Following each point of the Amateur's Code is my own commentary, in the tradition of The Old Man.
N0NB

ONE "The Amateur is Considerate...

He never knowingly uses the air in such a way as to lessen the pleasure of others." Tuning up on nets for long periods, excessive mic gain or running power when not needed all tend to aggravate our neighbors on the air. Breaking into a net to "check in for the count" without listening long enough to the net to be able to utilize procedures specific to that net make the Net Control Station's job more difficult and leaves an unfavorable impression of your operating prowess in the minds of net participants. Not bothering to determine if that rare DX station is "working split" or listening "up 5" before transmitting on the DX's transmit frequency is an egregious violation of this principle. Obscenity or vulgar language, although perhaps protected speech, are inappropriate in a polite society (whether society is currently polite is debatable, for our sake we'll consider ham radio to be polite).

The best action is to take a few moments to listen and note your surroundings before pressing the switch. Also, make sure the brain is engaged before the mouth is set in gear (that's a toughie for a lot of us!). You'll save yourself from needless embarrassment.

TWO "The Amateur is Loyal...

He offers his loyalty, encouragement and support to his fellow radio amateurs, his local club and the American Radio Relay League, through which Amateur Radio is represented."

Getting on the local repeater and complaining about how lousy its performance has been lately or denigrating those who volunteer to work on the machine is certainly not behavior consistent with Point Two. Griping that the repeater was in use for a parade, walk-a-thon, or other public service event for a few hours on a Saturday morning doesn't cut it either (I don't care how much yearly dues you pay!). Of course, not attending club meetings because the club officers are morons licensed within the past 10 years who didn't have to build their equipment doesn't qualify either. If you won't attend the local hamfests large or small, you're not promoting amateur radio on a local basis, as you should be. Finally, refusing to join the ARRL because of Incentive Licensing, Novice Enhancement, the codeless Technician, or Restructuring is pointless and doesn't allow your dissenting voice to be heard nor does it help to protect the valuable spectrum we all share.

Join the local radio club. Sure, they may all be jerks until you get to know them and realize how much you have in common. Then you may find they could really use your expertise aligning that duplexer or getting the repeat audio just right. Don't be pushy, but volunteer where you can and before you know it you'll be qualified to write Web pages like this. ;->

Finally, join the ARRL. Is everything the ARRL does to my liking? Certainly not, but quitting the League will not give you the leverage you need to make your voice heard to your Section Manager, Vice-director, or Division Director. Where do you meet these folks? At your section and division hamfests and conventions and perhaps even your local hamfest if it gets enough support to warrant their attention. In short, a hamfest gives you the opportunity to bend the ear of these folks in person. They will listen to your concerns and passions regarding amateur radio.

THREE "The Amateur is Progressive...

He keeps his station abreast of science. It is well built and efficient. His operating practice is above reproach."

No, this doesn't mean that you own all of the latest gear to the exclusion of food and clothing. Rather, is your equipment in good repair? Is your transmitted audio clear and comfortable to listen to? Is your transmitted CW free of chirps and key-clicks? Also, is your power supply clean so that your transmitted signal is free of AC hum? If you have one or more radios in a vehicle, your connections are made to the battery to minimize the chance of alternator whine, right?

On the receiving side, are you familiar with your receiver's features such as variable bandwidth tuning and IF shift? Have you installed after-market filters? Do you know how best to use the noise blanker, RF attenuator, AGC, and RF gain controls to maximize signal to noise ratio? Are you familiar with the control that cuts out the RF pre-amp on later radios and do you know why this might be an important feature?

Station layout is also important here. No one really likes a rat's nest of wires to be the focal point of your shack (although QST had a messy shack photo contest some years back and there were some dandies!). Your operating position should be laid out in such a way so that common equipment is close to each other to minimize cable length and contribute to a good grounding scheme. Grounds should be short and made of heavy wire or braid. The best way is to tie each piece of equipment to a ground bus bar and then have a single heavy wire running outside to your ground system. Coax and other cables from the tower should have lightning protection and be dressed neatly and labeled to aid in reassembly of your station should a component be removed. Don't forget good lighting overhead of your operating position as well.

Not only should the equipment be kept abreast of science, but also the radio amateur needs to remain on the cutting edge of operating techniques and rules changes. Part 97 continues to evolve with changes in the technology used by amateurs and with changes in society at large.

Finally, one's conduct on the air should be above reproach. Essentially I think that means that we should conduct ourselves with courtesy and respect. In other words conduct yourself as a lady or a gentleman on the air and you'll have plenty of enjoyable contacts. Be a grouch and you'll probably wind up on 75m talking to the same old bunch of grouches and trying to run off the durn QRMers who make the cardinal sin of getting within plus or minus 5 kHz of these types, but I digress.

FOUR "The Amateur is Friendly..."

Slow and patient sending when requested, friendly advice and counsel to the beginner, kindly assistance, cooperation and consideration for the interests of others; these are the marks of the amateur spirit."

Be an Elmer! It certainly is difficult to seemingly answer the same questions over and over again through the years, but it's something we must do to maintain a healthy and vibrant Amateur Radio Service. All of us were beginners at some point in ham radio. Sometimes we just need to step back and reflect on the patience of those that helped us. Remember, we only pay back our Elmers by being a good Elmer to others.

FIVE "The Amateur is Balanced..."

Radio is his hobby. He never allows it to interfere with any of the duties he owes to his home, his job, his school, or his community."

I've known people who have gotten into ham radio, wrapped themselves up completely into it and within a few years have sold all their equipment and were into something else. Like everything else amateur radio should be enjoyed in moderation. Enjoy it for a bit and then attend to your other responsibilities. Ham radio will be waiting when you return. Please don't turn your wife into a "ham radio widow" or your kids into "ham radio orphans." It's great to have passion for the hobby, but know your limits.

SIX "The Amateur is Patriotic..."

His knowledge and his station are always ready for the service of his country and his community."

The history of amateur radio is rich with the accounts of amateurs who have performed admirably in times of disaster for their communities or when their country called in time of crisis. Even today amateur radio operators train themselves and are ready to track storms, assist in damage assessment, assist public safety personnel when their communications are disrupted, and provide a vital link for families trying to reach loved ones in the first hours after disaster has struck. From Kuwait to Oklahoma City to Kosovo to East Timor and other hotspots around the world, hams have risked their lives, and even lost them, to get word out to the world of events as they happen. It is not unusual after a coup or uprising that the first words are from a ham telling of news or requesting assistance for various reasons. In fact, in late 1982 it was ham radio that proved to be a lifeline for a group of U.S. medical students on the island of Grenada during a Marxist coup and the ensuing rescue operation.

Of all the points in the Amateur's Code, Number Six is the most important. In fact it is for this reason alone that the Amateur Radio Service remains chartered and has access to spectrum that is likely worth well into the billions of dollars. Enjoy it, have fun, but above all, remember that we are a service and if we should ever prove to no longer perform our function as a service to the public, amateur radio will cease to exist. Rather sobering, not?