

# Lee Co ARES – May 9, 2022 Training Net

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## Contesting

There are many facets of ham radio. Emergency communications; supporting special events such as Fun Runs; rag-chewing; chasing DX stations; communicating thru satellites; embracing new technology; experimenting with antennas; building your own equipment. The list is almost endless.

Contesting is one facet of ham radio that helps develop operating skills. Training your ear and mind to recognize and pick out call signs and info from weak signals or with multiple stations responding simultaneously to your call, is good experience. I'm not a big contester by any means, but I do enjoy the excitement once in awhile. Almost any day of the week, there are multiple contests of some sort going on.

Every contest has contest rules which vary from one contest to the next, but the premise is basically the same: contact as many stations as possible during the contest period and exchange a specific bit of information.

Some of the rules may include:

- Only certain bands may be used (it may be a 6 meter only contest).
- The contest only takes place between certain times and on certain dates. Some contests also require “off times” when you are required to take a break from operating.
- An exchange of information is necessary during each contact and varies widely from one contest to the next. You may be required to send and receive a reception report, sequential serial number, grid square, county, state, your name, age, year first licensed, or ARRL section.
- Only certain operating configurations can be used. You may have to choose a “category” of operation such as a single operator using low power.

Some competitions, such as the ARRL Sweepstakes, draw large numbers of hams onto the airwaves.

Other contests are smaller with only limited participation.

There are contests for both the HF and VHF/UHF/microwave bands. On HF, contests are limited to the 160, 80, 40, 20, 15, and 10-meters. Contest sponsors have agreed to keep the 60, 30, 17 and 12-meter bands off limits from competitive events.

The best way to keep track of contest activity is through QST magazine each month. In every issue you'll find “Contest Corral,” a comprehensive list of upcoming contests. The ARRL also offers an e-mail newsletter called the “Contest Update” and a bimonthly digital magazine, “National Contest Journal” that are both free to ARRL members.

## Contest Logging

Although the Federal Communications Commission does not require hams to keep station logs with records of every contact, contest sponsors *do*. Your log is your contest entry; without it, your score won't be considered. (Even if you weren't serious about competing, please do send in your log since that helps the sponsors check all of the contest QSOs and they like to know you were active in their event!)

Most contests require electronic submittal of logs. Computer logging programs keep track of the time, frequency, score and will also help you avoid duplicate contacts. Depending on the rules of the contest, you may only be allowed to contact a particular station once on a given band.

Contest software will alert you to possible duplicate contacts before you waste time making the contact. If you hear someone calling "CQ Contest" and you type their call sign into the call entry window, the software will instantly check for any other previous or "dupe" contacts. If that station is a duplicate, you'll know right away.

Contest software also makes it easy to submit your log after the contest is over. The contest sponsors supply a website for uploading your log or e-mail addresses to which you send your log. If you log on paper, you'll also need to send in a summary sheet that includes your information, some information about your station, and your entry category.

## Running vs. Searching and Pouncing

"Running" means finding a clear frequency and calling "CQ contest" for long periods of time, logging everyone who answers. Running is an effective contest strategy, especially if your station has a big signal that many can hear. Smaller stations should try running whenever conditions are good and a frequency without too much QRM can be found.

On the other hand, you might want to consider *searching and pouncing*. Just like the term implies, this involves tuning through the band, looking for running stations and contacting any you can find. If you practice this technique, you can work stations quickly. Even if your signal is weak, CQing stations will make special efforts to pick you out of the noise because they need the points your contacts will give them.

A typical SSB contest contact between a running station (W1AW) and an operator responding (search and pouncing or S&P) to the CQ (W9JJ) sounds like this:

"CQ contest, CQ contest from W1AW, Whiskey One Alfa Whiskey. Contest."

"Whiskey Nine Japan Japan" (W9JJ answers, using phonetics)

"W9JJ 59 Connecticut" (W1AW responds with the caller's call sign and gives the required exchange one time. In this contest, the exchange is the signal report and state.)

"W1AW 59 Wisconsin." (W9JJ responds with the signal report and state. If W9JJ needs anything repeated, see the following example. There is no need for W9JJ to say "QSL" if the exchange was copied OK. W9JJ only needs to say W1AW if it might be unclear who's being responded to - otherwise just "59 Wisconsin" is enough.)

"Thanks. W1AW QRZ" (Having copied W9JJ's exchange, W1AW thanks W9JJ to complete the QSO, gives the call sign, and says QRZ to indicate that other S&P stations should call. If there is more than one calling station, the QRZ is not needed.)

If W9JJ needs W1AW to repeat part of the exchange, the response to W1AW's information should be:

"W1AW what is your state?" (W9JJ asks W1AW to repeat the information that wasn't copied the first time.)

"Connecticut, Charlie Tango" (W1AW may give the state abbreviation both as a word and phonetically since W9JJ had trouble copying it the first time.)

"W1AW 59 Wisconsin"

One trick to prevent losing your voice, is to record those standard exchanges in voice memory on your radio (if so equipped).

CW and digital contacts follow the same general flow of information. CW contesters tend to send and receive at high speeds, but they will usually slow down for slower operators - send your call sign at a speed you feel comfortable with.

If you use logging software that supports contest operation, it can be configured to send most of the contest exchange automatically by pressing single keyboard keys.

## Tips from the Winners

The hams who do consistently well in contests have a number of things common: They all follow certain habits that work to enhance their performance and their score. Here are the top tips:

1. Read the **Contest Rules** and make sure you understand them.
2. Check all your equipment (including software) a few days before the contest begins. Make sure everything is operating perfectly.
3. Understand the basics of propagation and plan your contest strategy accordingly. Try to obtain a propagation forecast for the contest weekend.
4. Make plans for rest and nourishment. Have food and drink on hand. Take breaks every couple of hours to stretch your legs and clear your mind.

Even though contest competition can be intense, it isn't always about winning. You may never win the top slot in a contest, but you'll definitely enjoy the competition and the camaraderie. And your operating skills will definitely improve.

## **Parks on the Air**

One of the popular ongoing activities, is Parks on the Air. You can participate as an activator or as a hunter. If you plan to operate from a park, you are an activator. If you are trying to contact parks from home, you are a hunter. There are milestones and awards that you can earn with either category.

1. To get started with Parks on the Air (POTA), you'll need to create a username and password on their website, POTA.APP.
2. If you are going to operate from a park as an activator, there are a few details to tend to prior to going to the park. First of all, make sure the park is open and you have a park reservation, even for a day pass. Due to high popularity, parks can reach maximum capacity; you need to make a reservation, even for a day pass. Don't just show up and expect to get in; it would be a shame to drive a couple of hours just to be turned away at the entrance gate. Next, you need to activate the park that you will be visiting on the Parks on the Air website. Look for the park designation on their website, either by park name, state, or zipcode. For example, Goliad State Park is K-3015. To activate the park, enter the park code, the dates and times you plan to be operating there, and any other notes, i.e., bands you plan to operate on.
3. Once you get to the park, obey all park rules. Make sure your operating location is within park boundaries and in an area you are allowed to be in, i.e., at your reserved campsite, or at a picnic table. Make sure your antenna and coax do not present any hazards to any park patrons.
4. When you start operating, you can self spot your activation on the POTA website, so folks can know which frequency you are operating on.
5. Once you start, it may take a few minutes to start getting responses to your CQ. Call using something like, "CQ CQ CQ, this is Whiskey Bravo Five Yankee Yankee Quebec, calling CQ Parks on the Air, WB5YYQ calling CQ and standing by for a call". It shouldn't take very long before calls will be coming in as fast as you can log them.
6. A valid park activation requires a minimum of 10 contacts. To validate your contacts, POTA requires electronic logs submitted in AIF format via email. Make sure your electronic logging program can handle this. Validation of your log happens pretty quick, usually in a day or two.

Parks on the Air is a great way to test your equipment, experiment with different antenna configurations, enjoy the outdoors, see other parts of the country, and participate in an extremely popular ham activity. It's also a great way to introduce ham radio to the public.

Information compiled from ARRL website, and Parks on the Air website....

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