

From John, K3TN

The Contesting Aaargh! FAQ

The Internet has a tradition of creating FAQs - Frequently Asked Questions lists - to deal with commonly recurring questions. FAQ's started on the Internet because on the second day of the USENET newsgroups being available, many people asked the exact same questions that had been answered on the first day. That was back in 1980 and here 30 years later the same thing still happens constantly on the Internet – you see it all the time on the CQ-Contest email reflector.

There are some good contesting FAQ lists:

- [ZS1NA Contesting FAQ](#)
- [CQ-Contest FAQ](#)

However, the traditional FAQs never solve a common problem known as FARQTTNE– Frequently Asked Religious Questions Causing Threads That Never End. These exhausting, repetitive, threads often degenerate to exhaustive, repetitive sniping and lead to a syndrome I call AARGH – they fill up your inbox, make you scream Aaargh! and scramble to hit CTRL-ALT-DEL or whatever the iPhone equivalent is.

To deal with this, I created a section in the now defunct Contesting Wiki called the Aarrgh FAQ. If you think of others, or disagree with what is there, in the grand tradition of Wikis, you can add/edit delete what is there. Also, to prevent an outbreak of FARQTTNE, much of what is there is TFIC – Tongue Firmly in Cheek.

The Aargh FAQ as of 2/24/2016

- **Where can I find information on {something that is easily found online}?** - Simply point them to <http://www.lmgty.com/?q=something+easy+to+find> where you have substituted their trivial topic for the 'something+easy+to+find' in the "Let Me Google That For You" URL
- **Do I have to use the actual last two digits of my first year licensed as the Check in Sweepstakes?** - You should, because the rules say that the Check consists of "The last 2 digits of the year of first license for either the operator or the station." But nobody really cares if you don't.
- **Why does everyone send 599 or 59 in contests that require RST?** Because it is easier. If you would like to send something else, feel free but no one really cares if you do.
- **Isn't {insert latest new technology here} the death of contesting?** No, generally new technology is always incorporated in all forms of competition. If you choose not to use any particular new technology, feel free - it is your choice.
- **Doesn't {insert such and such rule from such and such contest} mean that someone could interpret this as {insert apocalyptic interpretation here} and cause the death of contesting?** Yes, but since no rational person would ever interpret it that way, no one really cares.
- **Wait a minute: I actually do interpret {such and such rule from such and such contest} to mean {apocalyptic interpretation}.** Please look here for a good definition of "[rational](#)."
- **Aren't the rules of {such and such contest} unfair to me?** Yes, probably - if it bothers you, perhaps you shouldn't operate in that one.
- **Contesters are all 80 years old and no new blood is coming in - isn't this going to be the death of contesting?** Probably not, but if you feel that way do some Contest Elmering to bring some

younger hams into the contesting fold. Wringing your hands here probably just scares potential contesters away, much the way cranky bocce ball players have caused all the teenagers to want to play Farmville on Facebook instead of getting out on the lawn and throwing those bocce balls.

- **Isn't winning a contest all about who has the biggest antennas, the most powerful amplifiers and the fastest computers?** Usually not. In fact, to paraphrase Bum Phillip's quote about long time Alabama football coach Bear Bryant: "Most of the perennial contest winners can take his'n and beat your'n, and then he can turn around and take your'n and beat his'n."
- **Do QRP stations have to use mediocre antennas? Or can they use towers, beams and stacks?** QRP refers to power, not antennas. You can use 5 watts with the Russian Woodpecker's antennas and it would be within the rules of almost every contest in existence.
- **What will put me into the assisted category of a contest?** Generally, using outside assistance such as packet or internet cluster spots, chat rooms, email, social networks or similar to get QSO spots will place you in the assisted categories. Most times using wideband decoders like skimmer will put you there too. Contest rules vary slightly, so when in doubt, read the rules of the contest.
- **Is it OK to just start calling CQ on a frequency if I listen and don't hear anyone using it?** Well, if you listen long enough that is probably OK. Most feel it is better to send QRL? or ask "Is this frequency in use?" once or twice. Think about it this way: if you were going to take the last scoop of mashed potatoes from the bowl at dinner, wouldn't you at least ask "Are these potatoes in use?" However, this is one of those religious debates where some sneer at QRL? and others are aghast at anyone who would **not** QRL? There are rules against intentional interference in Amateur Radio, but there is **no definition** of what you have to do to *avoid causing* intentional interference.
- **I have a follow-up question on frequency use.** Yes, go ahead.
- **There seem to be certain frequencies that you are not allowed to use in contests. What's up with that?** Well, on some of the low bands like 160 and 80, there are recognized DX "windows" from back in the day when working DX on those bands was rare and exotic. So, today generally only non-US stations are supposed to call CQ in those windows. There are also other frequencies that are used by groups like SSTVers or pig farmers or bean bag collector nets that tend to get upset if anyone else uses "their" frequency. While the reality is that no one owns any particular frequency, life is short - there are other frequencies to run on and rather than give the haters a reason to hate both the players and the game, courtesy is to just QSY. Also, when there are any emergency operations going on, it is more than courtesy to avoid interfering - it is core to our hobby. AC6V has a pretty good guide [here](#).
- **The WARC bands are pretty quiet - shouldn't we start contesting on them?** Short answer: no. If that is not enough for you, read on. This is essentially the "why are we not allowed to use certain frequencies in contests" question answered above. However, there are two reasons why it is good for the WARC bands to stay contest free: (1) Non-contesters need a place to hide when we contesters take over the bands on most weekends; and (2) as Tevye sang so stirringly in "Fiddler on the Roof": Tradition! Supposedly, back at WARC-1979 it was agreed to keep the WARC bands contest-free. No one can find an actual citation for this, but you are free to browse.

- **Isn't it annoying when a DX station is running and doesn't identify every time?** Not to those who have been listening longer than you, and not to the DX station who has a huge pileup that already seems to know his call. If you find the wait too long, move on or be a crow on SSB (shout "Call call") or send cl? on CW. But accepted contest etiquette is to identify every 3rd or 4th QSO which keeps the rate up and the wait for ID reasonable.
- **If a station in a contest has key clicks, bad audio, doesn't identify frequently enough, gets too close to my run frequency, or in general just does something to really annoy me, is it OK for me to work him but not log the QSO, thus costing him a 2 QSO NIL penalty?** That would be pretty childish. You always have a choice whether to work someone or not, but what you work should go in your log. Doug KR2Q has the best quote on this topic: *"This is supposed to be a fun hobby and contesting is supposed to be fun. We all can get frustrated when doing anything in life; but getting vindictive? Life is too short for "getting even" and "punishment." Nothing in our life is 100% to our liking. Never dwell on it. Just move on. This stuff JUST DOES NOT MATTER THAT MUCH."*
- **What is the best contesting transceiver?** Invariably, the **next** one you buy will be the best rig - that is why you chose it. But, once you have been contesting about 20 years you will begin to believe that the **first** radio you used was actually the best. However, if someone tried to make you operate a contest today with a TS 830 or the Drake twins you would go run screaming out of the room.
- **Why is Contest X scheduled for the same weekend as Contest Y? Shouldn't Contest Y move to another weekend?** Well, there are only 52 weekends in a year and there are approximately, oh say way, way more than 52 contests each year. This pretty much dictates multi-contest weekends, and if Contest Y is moved it will land on Contest V and Z. Though if all contesters really are 80 years old, every day is a weekend for them - maybe we can just change the definition of "Contest Weekend" to include all weekdays.
- **When I reply to a thread on a mailing reflector, isn't it a good idea for me to include a copy of the entire previous thread, with > inserted as line breaks indicating the old lines, with my thoughts added somewhere in there without > in front of it?** > When I reply to a thread on a mailing reflector,
> isn't it a good idea for me to include a copy of the entire previous thread, with > inserted as line breaks
> indicating the old lines, with my thoughts added somewhere in there without > in front of it?
>
>
No, please don't do that.