

How To Start A Run

Summary by Kevan Nason, N4XL

In August 2016 there was a thread started on the CQ-Contest reflector found on Contesting.Com about this topic. Good advice came from several operators. More postings may yet come, but what follows are excerpts as of the time of this writing. I have trimmed the responses removing duplicate comments (and what I consider extraneous information that others may find useful) leaving behind these nuggets of wisdom.

Mike, VE9AA

There are no secrets. 100w contesting on SSB is tougher than CW but still doable.

For SSB you need G-O-O-D audio. I am not the only one who won't call a station who sounds like cr at p. (not that you are - - just sayin)

The secret? There is no secret. Sound good and interested. You run a 706, but you didn't say what your antenna was. If it's a dipole in the basement, ummm, yeah, you won't be able to run.

If it's 4pm local, don't choose 80m to try and run (hi!). If it's 11pm local, don't choose 10m. (although there is always a small chance of summer Es, so won't hurt to spin the VFO here once in a while)

Try to scan all the bands quickly and determine what band(s) the guys are loudest on at that given moment. (you'll learn this from experience as times goes on) *(NOTE: The bands with loud people are your best chance of getting rate. The way I personally learned to run was pick an atmospherically quiet band that was open and fairly active, but not the one that everyone was on. That gave me room to find a frequency and a slightly lower rate with which to develop my skills. Kevan, N4XL)*

If conditions are bad (as they sometimes are) and everyone is S1 and you have very minimal antennas, perhaps you won't be able to run, that's quite true. If condx are in the tank,(or you have that basement dple) you are better off S&P and calling the louder guys. If there are folks on the bands that are 55-59+, you should try to find a clear spot and CQ.

No Answers after a couple minutes? Move a couple kHz and try again. There could be QRM in your target area that you cannot hear.

Call CQ more! CQ-pause 3 seconds-CQ... don't have any way to pipe your hand mics audio through a computer for an electronic CQ? No problems. I won RAC(carf) Winter in 1991 using

a hand mic and tape recorder with a cassette tape loop...time to CQ, put mic near speaker, call a station or respond, put mic next to your mouth.

Very very short crisp CQ's. Sound eager/happy, enunciate. don't slur your words or whisper, don't use mic gain and compression both set to 10

..did I say short CQ's? Nobody wants to hear "CQ CQ CQ, CQ contest, this is W8TAH, W8TAH, W8TAH, what say someone please, over over." (not that you'd do that..I am just illustrating).

Better: "CQ CONTEST, Whiskey 8 Tango Alpha Hotel!"

or

"CQ Whiskey 8 Tango Alpha Hotel, Contest!"

(notice I did not use the word OVER in my 2 'good' examples).standard phonetics only. Willy 8 Tecumseh avacodao harpsicord is not going to cut it. Short is key

From Al, K0AD

- 1) "Sound Loud" when running. Sometimes the tone and confidence in your voice can make a difference when running. Call CQ with confidence like you expect to get a call. It can sometimes make a difference.
- 2) Minimize extra words in your exchange and really try to get the information from the guy calling the first time if possible. If there are guys waiting, some will lose patience if your exchange sounds like a rag chew.
- 3) Realize that one or two minutes without an answer to your CQ can feel like an eternity when running. But when you are S&Ping, the rate may be the same but it may "feel" like you are making progress. Don't run forever without getting a response but realize that there will be slow times and fast times during your run.
- 4) If your radio had a panadpater (and waterfall), use it to find good holes in the band.
- 5) If you feel your signal may not be that great, you may have better success running higher in the band.
- 6) If you hear guys near your frequency calling someone you cannot hear (perhaps due to skip), realize that you may be getting clobbered by a guy you don't hear.
- 7) Always check a couple times to see if a frequency is in use before starting to call CQ. It is surprising the number of guys who do not do this.

8) Finally, and this may not be for everyone, use SO2R. When runs slow down, it helps my morale when I am able to look for and work stations on the second radio while still running on the first. Realize that there is a risk of losing your run frequency if you take too much time on the 2nd radio

From Jeff, AC0C

(NOTE: Jeff's first comment might sound snarky to some. However, there is a "truth" to it. Most of us start contesting as S&P operators and should have a good idea of how a good operator sounds and acts while they are running. If you answer a CQ and can't tell the difference between a "good" experienced runner and someone who is struggling then how will you be able to recognize your own deficiencies and improve your skills? Kevan, N4XL)

I've been a micro signal, a moderate signal and a decent signal - from the Midwest - over the last 10 years. Here are my thoughts:

1. If you have to ask how to run on the reflector, I hope I am not being presumptuous in saying that perhaps you have not spent enough time running S&P and working contests. There is no magic bullet.
 2. You have to be loud enough that the other guy does not think you are too weak to ignore. There is no substitute for power and antennas. If you are QRP or 100W - and you have a dipole - then you are going to be crushed by everyone else who has something more.
 3. If you cannot compete on signal strength, then you have to leverage skill (which comes from working contests to learn the basic skill) - and to consider how you can tilt the field in your favor. All things being equal, it's easier to run in CW and RTTY than in SSB. It's easier to run higher up in the band than lower. It's easier to run on the off band (which now is 40 or 15) than to try to elbow into 20m in the prime daytime slots.
 4. Pick the right contest - for example NAQP and FD are easy to run - WPX SSB or the ARRL DX is a lot harder.
 5. A good way to get some run time is to go to a more potent station in your area and beg some chair time.
 6. Consider why you want to run. The contest sage of "if you are not running you are losing" only applies if you are able to run rate consistently over time. It's easier to work on S&P with tough band condx or with a marginal signal than trying to run and getting pushed off your QRG after only a couple of minutes
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Dave, WN4AFP

1. Be confident in you and your station. Before you start a 'run' use the band that is best suited for your station AND choose your best operating mode. Every op has their 'money' band. Find yours.

2. "Run" at the right time. "Run" when you start hearing your 'target' stations (those you want to work) running. Run when the propagation is best to work your 'target' stations. Work a few 'target' stations and ask for a real signal report, to give you an idea of the real band conditions. If others are working stations, you will too.

3. Be committed to the 'run'. Be committed to 'run' for a specific period of time. Say...30 mins. Stick with your script and 'run'. Don't give up...regardless of your hourly rate... Frankly, don't worry about hourly rate until you've been running for a while and you have a benchmark to improve upon. Just 'run', run and run....

4. Review your 'run' activity and seek ways to improve.

Enthusiasm is the other key. People want to talk with people having fun in the contest.