

Improving Contest Operating Skills

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There's lots of advice around about contest operating (some great, some not so good). The best advice that I've ever found is contained in the International Amateur Radio Union (IARU) document titled "Ethics and Operating Procedures for the Radio Amateur", edition 3, June 2010, pages 16 to 18 for phone and pages 29 to 31 for CW (search for the document on the Internet, it's a free download). The referenced phone and CW sections emphasize techniques that accomplish Speed, Efficiency and Accuracy. I strongly encourage you to take the time to read at least one of these two sections, depending upon the modes you plan to operate during Field Day.

Below are some examples for how to implement these recommendations in order to make fast, effective and accurate Field Day phone exchanges. In each, two stations are shown. One is the "Run" or "Camp & Call" station that is sitting on one frequency calling for Field Day contacts. The other is the "Search & Pounce" (S&P) station that is searching the band for Field Day stations and has found the "Run" station.

Example 1: A typical exchange might go like this:

"Run": N6P, November Six Papa, Field Day.

"S&P": W6XYZ

"Run": W6XYZ 4A LAX

"S&P": 1A LAX (or "one alpha LAX")

"Run": Thanks, N6P, November Six Papa, Field Day

Example 2: Where a call is only partially copied:

"Run": N6P, November Six Papa, Field Day.

"S&P": W6XYZ (but N6P only copied the W6 part of the call...)

"Run": The W6 4A LAX

"S&P": W6XYZ, X-ray Yankee Zulu, 1A LAX

"Run": W6XYZ thanks, N6P November Six Papa, Field Day

Example 3: Where the calling station didn't copy your exchange:

"Run": N6P, November Six Papa, Field Day.

"S&P": W6XYZ

"Run": W6XYZ 4A LAX

"S&P": again, again

"Run": W6XYZ 4A LAX

"S&P": 1A LAX

"Run": Thanks, N6P, November Six Papa, Field Day

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Example 4: Where the Run station didn't copy the calling station's exchange:

“Run”: N6P, November Six Papa, Field Day.

“S&P”: W6XYZ

“Run”: W6XYZ 4A LAX

“S&P”: 1A LAX

“Run”: again, again

“S&P”: 1A LAX

“Run”: Thanks, N6P, November Six Papa, Field Day.

There are other possible variations to the above example Field Day exchanges, depending upon how the exchange goes, but there are few common points:

1. CQ” is not included in any of them since you are looking only for Field Day contacts, not just anybody to have a QSO with.
2. They do NOT use phrases such as: “Please copy”, “You are...”, “QSL”, “Good luck in the Contest”, etc. These slow down the exchange and don't add any new information for either operator, so are poor operating practice.
3. Never use “QRZ” since that doesn't tell the station that might have just stumbled upon you what your call sign is and they need to know that so that they can check to see whether you are a duplicate (“dup”) contact for them.
4. It's faster for both operators to simply say “again, again” if they missed part of the exchange than to ask for a specific part of the exchange, such as asking specifically for a repeat of the other operator's Call, Class or Section.
5. As shown in Example 2 above, when you only copy part of the other station's call, don't try to get the call right before completing the exchange. Instead, use the part of the call that you have (as shown in Example 2) and give your part of the exchange. If the call turns out to be a “dup” for you, just log it anyway and move on, the “dup” will be sorted out by our Field Day data-wrangler.

These same principles apply to other contests and to emergency communications.

Please take the time to read the IARU Operating Ethics document that I mentioned in the first paragraph above. It is just chock full of excellent advice for every Radio Amateur and is very well written.

See you at Field Day!