

Field Day Operating Tips



Or, How to score bigtime and still have fun.

Overview

- Station setup
- Antennas
- Preparing for operation
- Using the computer wisely
- 2 ways to operate the contest
- How to get control of the frequency
- Establish your patter
- When confusion arises
- What do I do if nobody responds to my call?
- New resources

Equipment

- It is advantageous to have a built in antenna tuner that you can use to touch up the match to the antenna quickly.
- Use the club's band pass filters to reduce interference
- Know how to use the features of your rig e.g. filters, slope tune, notch and DSP if you have it
- Use headphones. Field noise (i.e. the generators) can make operating a very frustrating, to say nothing of stressful, experience.
- Forget the pen and paper routine. Use a laptop and don't forget to back up the computer data whenever the generators need to be filled. Practice with the field day program if you are not familiar with it.
- Learn to operate the microphone with one hand and type the required information into the computer with the other.

Point and shoot

- If possible, use a rotatable antenna.
- If using wire antennas, consider an inverted “V” antenna and one sloper so that you can effectively change the firing direction. The inverted “V” will be almost omnidirectional and the sloper will give a little better signal in the sloper’s direction. Use an antenna switch to flip back and forth between antennas while listening and switch to the one that gives the best results.
- Follow the Gray Line if possible
- Later on in the contest, use the contact map to determine where most of your contacts are coming from and then point in that direction.

Know your limits

- Know the band limits for the contest
- If you do not know the limits listen to the bottom and top ends of the band to determine the limits used by others.
- Do not waste time listening or calling above or below the contest limits.
- If, during operation, you find reserved frequencies (for emergencies, satellites etc,) respect them and do not operate on top of, or right beside, them.

Use the computer wisely

- The radio operator should use a computer. Having a “logger” means that both of you have to hear the call and, as a result, both may forget or misinterpret the call. Lost time in discussion often loses a possible contact. Better for the operator to call back with the wrong call and then be corrected than to lose the contact completely.
- If you are the operator, type in the call as it comes in. This works best when the other station is trying to contact you, because you can say their call phonetically, slowly, as you type in the data. Let them correct you if you make a mistake.
- When you type in their contact information it will be flagged as a duplicate if that is so. Tell them “Sorry OM we have you as a dupe. Do you QSL?” Then move on to the next contact.



Two ways to operate field day

- There are two ways to work the contest:
- 1) Slowly tune up or down the band looking for someone calling CQ then call them and hope that they hear you. You will probably have to stay in queue until the pile-up is exhausted as antennas in the US are usually set East-West and therefore they do not have good reception to the north.
- 2) establish control of a frequency and get others to call you.
- Experience has shown that method 1 will get you between 1 and 10 contacts per hour while method 2 will get you between 60 and 150 contacts per hour. I have averaged >100 contacts per hour for up to 4 hours straight on several occasions and I am not that great an operator.



Establish your "pattern"

Establish your patter

- We were taught that good operating practice starts by asking if the frequency is in use. If nobody answers, then use the 3x3 calling approach – e.g.
- Is this frequency in use? (Wait) |: CQ Field day, CQ Field day, CQ Field day, this is VE3NAR, VE3NAR, VE3NAR. :|
- This does not work on field day!!
- First, if someone hears you ask if the frequency is in use, of course, if they are looking for a clear spot, they will say “yes it is. Thank you for asking. CQ Field Day from UR1LSR”. This works well in taking a frequency. I have done it and it is effective!!
- Second, anyone hearing you make such a long call on field day will give up after the second repetition because, he does not want to waste time listening to a “real amateur” who will likely take a long time to exchange information as well. This is not conducive to a high contact rate either for you or for him.

Establish your patten cont'd.

- When you find your space simply say:
- “CQ Field Day, this is VE3NAR, Victor Echo 3 November Alpha Romeo.” Then listen. If nobody comes back within 3 seconds, repeat it until someone does call.
- If you are not getting a response, you can say something like “Thanks for the contact, good luck in the contest, QRZ field day from Victor Echo 3 November Alpha Romeo.” Then listen. People will stop and listen to you when they think that others are already in contact with you. This trick works quite well.

How do you get control?

- Getting control of a frequency is really fairly simple. Slowly scan from the low to high end of the band (or vice versa) and when you come across any gap in the cacophony listen for no more that about 5 to 10 seconds. If there is no strong signal right on the frequency, then start your patter.

If you have to call someone

- In a pile-up, it is difficult to hear someone clearly even if they are using a KW of power.
- We operate lower power, are coming in a null for most American antennas, so we are not strong signals.
- There are two ways to make yourself known. First is to call slightly off frequency. An experienced contester will be looking above and below the pile-up for a readable signal.
- The second technique is to wait until the pile-up cacophony dies a bit then say “November Alpha Romeo”. The other station will then say “the November Alpha Romeo station only please.” At which time, you give him your full ID.

Be sure your contact is valid

- How often have you heard “... thanks for the contact. QRZ? (pile up is heard) W7NFG we are 2a South Florida. You are 59, QSL? (exchange from contact then) QSL. Thanks for the contact, QRZ?”
- I have heard many “power operators” do this and at no time in the present or even in the next 5 or 6 contacts do they even state their call sign. I have heard 5 or more contacts like this in sequence and, when I finally get through, my first question is what is your call? This confuses them because they think that I should know who they are. Unfortunately, they usually turn out to be a dupe so I have wasted my time listening to his contacts. Of course, he does not care about that. I just hope that the ARRL spotters catch these guys for making improper contacts.
- In other words **Make sure all of your contacts are valid.**

When Confusion Arises

- If someone hears your call incorrectly, correct him with the proper ICAO phonetics, otherwise confusion may become exacerbated.
- If you have a cute set of phonetics try them but if confusion arises, go back to the traditional ICAO phonetics. For example, in past years there was a Texas station Whiskey 5 Fuzzy Wuzzy Gorilla. Now you only had to hear that once and you would remember it and know what was intended.

Confusion cont'd.

- I remember a Nortown member using the phonetics North American Radio for NAR. His pronunciation was such that he was frequently thought to be saying Golf American Radio. I guess that his pronunciation of “Norf” sounded like Golf. Nothing would get him to change to November with the inevitable result that many of his contacts had to be dumped because the contact could not get the call correctly. Another bad set of phonetics turned out to be Nuts, Apples, and Raisins. These phonetics were frequently mistaken for a variety of words and some even thought that we had an unusual 4-letter call.

Crazy Phonetics

- Crazy or unusual phonetics only work if they have a good visual impact.
- Cf. Fuzzy Wuzzy Gorilla. You could easily imagine a fuzzy wuzzy gorilla jumping around the field day site!!
- I have used Nasty Angry Rhinoceros for NAR but I cannot attest to the success of those phonetics.
- Any suggestions?

When you cannot hear the full call

- This can occur when there is a pile up trying to contact you – and yes, when you control the frequency you may have several dozen people trying to get you at one time. Remember, they have heard your call, checked to see if you are a dupe and then called you. This saves you a lot of work. But, of course, if you do type in the call, the computer will tell you if it is a dupe.
- When you cannot get any call completely, pick out the strongest voice or the one slightly high or low in frequency, and get part of his call. Then say “the WA0 station please go first”, or “the station ending in Xray Oscar only please”. Seldom do you find more than one station matching these criteria.

What do I do when nobody responds?

- If you have held a frequency for some time and then contacts dwindle to zero. Consider moving the antenna a bit. Follow the Gray line or use the contact map, change your patten or change frequency and establish ownership of a new frequency.



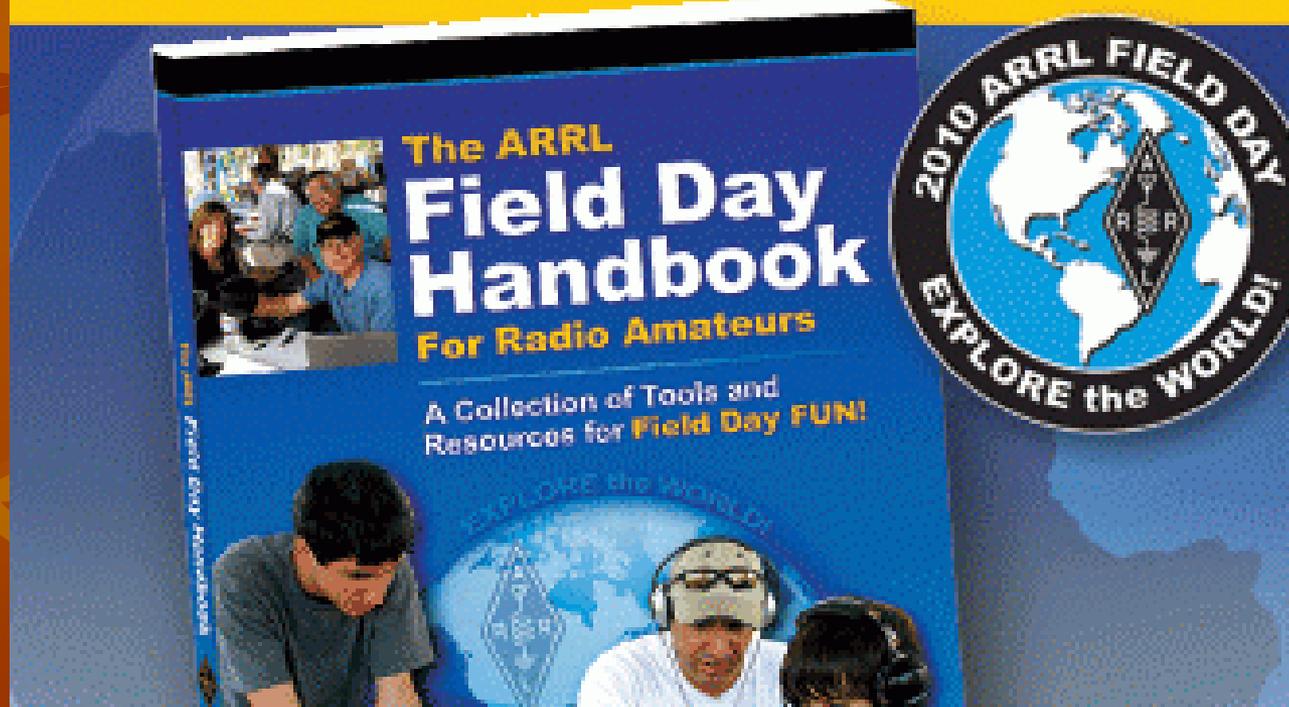
Keep the operator sharp

- Change operators every hour or so, so that each operator is fresh and ready to go.
- Or if the band is dead,



Resources

NEW BOOK!



New from ARRL