

# Fishing for Contacts: How to Call CQ

Making random contacts with other hams on the amateur radio bands has much in common with fishing. A successful angler will tell you that catching a fish is about much more than simply tossing a line into the water. You need to use the right bait, pick the right spot, fish at the optimum depth, etc. By the same token, a veteran ham will say that you need to put out a call for contacts in the right way, at the right times, and at the right frequencies.

## When to Call on HF

If you are operating SSB, CW, or most digital modes on the HF frequency bands, timing is everything. At certain times of the day, some bands will not be open for long-distance contacts, so you'll find there are few, if any, stations available to answer your calls.

The following is very generalized, but largely true...

Frequency Band	Best Times to Call
160 Meters	Nighttime only
80 Meters	Nighttime only
40 Meters	Day or Night
30 Meters	Daytime only
20 Meters	Daytime only
17 Meters	Daytime only
15 Meters	Daytime only
12 Meters	Daytime only
10 Meters	Daytime only

As the sun becomes more active, conditions will change. Under ideal conditions you may find that 30 and 20 meters are open during nighttime as well.

## How to Make a Call

Study the amateur radio band chart in this issue and you'll see the parts of the HF bands where you can operate, according to your license class. Turn on your transceiver, select a frequency, and listen. Make sure there are no other signals on the frequency before you begin transmitting. It's considered good practice to ask "Is this frequency in use?" followed by a few seconds of listening for a response.

If the frequency seems to be clear, start sending your "CQ." CQ is ham vernacular for "Is anyone out there? I want to make contact." The origins of "CQ" are obscure and rooted in the early days of telegraphy. Some believe it was intended to mean "seek you," but that is debatable.

Regardless of how it may have originated, "CQ" is understood by hams throughout the world. When sending with Morse code, "CQ" has a rhythm that is instantly recognizable.

If you're trying to start a Morse code chat, the best practice is to make short but frequent calls, sending CQ several times followed by your call sign twice, like this:

**CQ CQ CQ DE W1BXY W1BXY K**

*DE* means "from" and *K* means "over," or "your turn."



Listen for about 5 seconds. If you hear nothing, send the sequence again. You may have to send CQ several times before someone hears you and responds. If after several tries you don't snag a contact, try calling again on a different frequency.

Calling CQ using SSB is much the same. Several short calls are better; long-winded calls might even discourage contacts. For example:

**(Short and sweet)** "CQ CQ CQ from W1BXY W1BXY in Newington, Connecticut, calling CQ and standing by."

**(Long and annoying)** "CQ CQ CQ CQ from W1BXY W1BXY. Hello CQ CQ CQ CQ from W1BXY W1BXY calling CQ 20 meters. CQ CQ CQ CQ hello CQ. Anyone around?"

Someone listening to the verbose caller might decide that they don't want to wait to respond, and will go to another frequency instead.

## Calling at VHF and Above

Fishing for contacts on the VHF and higher frequencies can be quite different. Calling CQ on an FM or digital repeater is considered poor practice. Instead, check to make sure the repeater is not in use, and then make a brief transmission, saying...

"W4ISZ listening" or  
"W4ISZ monitoring"

If no one responds, wait a few minutes and try again.

You can call a traditional CQ when operating FM on *simplex*, which is a direct station-to-station contact that doesn't require a repeater. However, this is not common. It is best to simply say that you are listening and standing by for a call.

If you are operating SSB or CW, calling CQ as you would on the HF bands is standard practice. Again, keep the CQ calls short, but frequent.

## Using the Calling Frequency

Contacts on VHF and above can be difficult to find because there is less activity. So, hams have established *calling frequencies* to serve as gathering spots. The practice is to call for contacts on these frequencies, but then move to a different frequency after the conversation begins.

Band	Calling Frequency	Operating Mode
6 m	50.125	SSB
	52.525	FM
2 m	144.200	CW/SSB
	146.520	FM
1.25 m	222.100	CW/SSB
	223.500	FM
70 cm	432.100	CW/SSB
	446.000	FM
33 cm	902.100	CW/SSB
	906.500	FM
23 cm	1294.500	FM
	1296.100	CW/SSB

## Customized Calling

Sometimes you want to call CQ for a specific reason other than to just have a conversation. This is especially true during on-the-air contests where the objective is to make as many contacts as possible during the contest period. On CW or digital modes, it is common to see a CQ call like this:

### CQ TEST DE WB8IMY

TEST is short for "contest." Or, the name of the contest may be sent in abbreviated form, like this:

### CQ RR DE WB8IMY

This translates to "CQ RTTY Roundup," a popular ARRL contest for HF digital modes.

On SSB, you may hear something like, "CQ contest WB8IMY."

Perhaps you are trying to qualify for the ARRL Worked All States award and you need to contact someone in Wyoming. You might send a Morse code CQ like this:

### CQ WY CQ WY DE W9IL

Making these types of specific CQ calls is very common, and could be exactly what you need to clinch that award!

