

Contest Tips 2017

A YCCC Compilation by Fred Hopengarten, K1VR

BEFORE THE CONTEST

- **Literature Check.** Don't be afraid to read the competition's newsletter: <http://gofrc.org> Check out their October newsletter [<http://www.gofrc.org/frctest/node/133> Start at page 3 and keep reading.] to see what flavor "Kool-Aid" they are serving their members for CQWW. [Details: Read the article entitled "Recommendations for a Single Operator Effort in CQWW DX SSB 2017," and the article entitled "Cluster Filters for CQWW DX SSB, both by Bud, AA3B.] (W1CTN)
- **DX'peditions.** NG3K has an "Announced DX Operations" page here: <http://www.ng3k.com/misc/adxo.html> Scroll down the page and find the entry for the contest you're operating in. I review it prior to the contest, and sometimes even print it out. In it, you can find the call signs that are irregular (LZ1970KG, DK0WRTC) that you might question during the contest. You will find countries that are easy to work (CY0, HR), and you'll know what bands they are limited to, or if they are a multi-op. If you need HR on another band, there is no use asking an HR to move to 40 if he is doing a single band 20. Use of the NG3K list does not mean that you don't have to copy the call sign and signal report. It's not that accurate. But it does give you call sign knowledge you wouldn't have otherwise. (W1UE)
- **Batteries.** You may use batteries to power a wireless keyboard, wireless mouse, DVK, keyer, headphones, or other accessory. In regards to replacing batteries, my rule of thumb is if I can't remember when I last replaced the battery, I replace it before the contest.

What's going to happen if you don't replace the battery, and the thing stops working during the contest?

1. It will stop working at 8AM Saturday morning, in the midst of your biggest run of the weekend.
2. That will be the time that you discover that your wife used the last AAA batteries for the TV Remote control yesterday, and forgot to tell you about it. Now you're not only off the air, you're off to the store to get more batteries!

If in doubt about the batteries, replace them before the contest. (W1UE)

- **Batteries.** If you use Bose noise-canceling headphones, be sure you have a spare AAA battery readily at hand. (K2KQ)
- **Batteries.** I use a wireless keyboard, wireless mouse, battery powered Logikeyer, and Yamaha mic which uses batteries for the condenser mic. I'd hate to have any of these things act up because of low batteries in the middle of a contest.

As I was starting to set up for the phone contest, I realized my audio in the monitor didn't sound normal. OT4A told me it sounded pretty bad. I checked the two AAA batteries and one measured .5 volts, while the other actually went negative! I might get around to wiring a resistor into the mic connector to eliminate the batteries before the weekend.

I'll listen on a second radio to see what the on the air audio sounds like.

The keyboard and keyer batteries seem to last forever, especially the husky 6V lithium on the keyer. I have had the mouse act up before, so I'll probably just replace the single AA with a fresh one. (W1WEF)

- **Rotators.** Take a look outside the cockpit (operating position) and confirm your beam is pointing where the rotor display tells you it is. A few degrees, no big deal; 20 degrees + and you might be in the other station's noise. (W1CTN)
- **Walk the Land.** Are your *wire* antennas still up? (Check those Beverages, wire verticals & slopers) (K1VR)
- **Computer.** Update your date and time using NTP. On older Windows systems, that's called "internet time," I think. Apple calls it "set date and time automatically," and gives a server address that's something like time.apple.com. That's way more accurate than anything you can do setting clocks with WWV by hand. (W1JQ)
- **Logging Program.** Check that your logging program is logging in UTC. (W6PH)
- **Telnet.** I thought I'd talk about the devil-Telnet. It has changed contesting in the past 10 years more than just about any other single item. While the major impact is on CW, SSB has suffered from it also, but in a different way.

First tip-On SSB, it seems that ops are spotting LESS than they were 10 years ago. So, my first tip is to spot stations that you find. Whether QSOs or mults, spot them. You're helping them out, and you're helping other stations out.

Second Tip-Use a local telnet connection. Everyone has their favorite, but I suggest we try to keep it local. Here are some YCCC ARcluster nodes:

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KG4V,KG4V.MIKETHEACTUARY.COM:4242
KG4V-1,KG4V.MIKETHEACTUARY.COM:7374
KG4V-2,KG4V.MIKETHEACTUARY.COM:7373
W1VE,DXC.W1VE.COM:23
WC2L,DXC.WC2L.COM:23
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Third Tip- Use a ARcluster Filter. Set DX Filter {CQWW-SSB} AND NOT SKIMMER AND UNIQUE>1 This restricts spots to CQWW HF Contest bands, doesn't pass W stations, doesn't pass Skimmer spots (which are not SSB), and suppresses most busted calls (a call must be spotted incorrectly more than once in 10 minutes to pass this filter).

Fourth Tip- Don't restrict yourself spots from only NA or zone 5. Even with a small station, there are too many workable stations that you will miss if you limit the spotted area. Where the spot originates can be important, but don't automatically restrict all those spots. IMHO, in the long run you miss workable stations if you do. (W1UE)

- **Microphone audio!** For SSB, adjusting your audio chain is important. One thing we probably don't do enough is read the manual. There is a generic way to set up the Mike gain, compression, and drive, then there is the manufacturer's way to do it. The K3, for example, is different than many rigs- its metering is different. So, read your manual and follow the instructions. That's the only way you'll get it right. When you think you have it

right, listen to the processed audio in your headphones (not all rigs have that available-again, read the manual!). You can then actually hear the changes as you make them.

I often will ask a fellow ham for an audio check, usually before the contest. He may tell me that my audio is "thin", or is too bassy- but its up to me to know what knob to adjust to correct the audio. This is a less scientific way to do it, but it still works!

Tip for the day is "Read your manual". It's something that even I am guilty of not doing often enough. (W1UE)

DURING THE CONTEST

Running. The main reason why MULTI OP stations are running at the band edge is to minimize interference with other (1, 2 or sometimes 3) operators doing S&P on the same band. For a single op station it's much better to run on a clear frequency than on a vanity frequency (like 14150+), where no one can copy your not-so-strong S9+20 signal, covered by S9+40 signal of your "slightly" more power-efficient neighbor with a 6-stack of 7 element Yagis (with optimized phasing for this very propagation, beaming right to EU). (W3UA)

Running. Stu, KC1F (SK) won WW Phone with many more Qs than most anyone. Everyone asked where he found them all. He was running on 28.8 and higher...in a year when 10 was at its peak. Don't try it this year, but it just shows you don't always have to be at the low end. (W1WEF)

Running. Don't feel the need to fight for the bottom 5 or 10 kHz with the multis (especially on SSB). The points can't hear you or won't even bother digging you out between K3LR and KC1XX. Your rate and accuracy will be better higher up. See: W9RE. (N1TA)

Running. On SSB, if you wind up 500 cycles from KC1XX, you may not hear him - but I can guarantee that not many Europeans will hear you! (W1UE)

Max Points. Here in NE, the winning strategy is to run Europe as much as you can. You'll get lots of QSOs and most of the EU mults that way. Depending on propagation, antennas and power, at certain times of day you'll may get mults calling in from other directions, like JA, AF, VK/ZL, the Caribbean, SA, etc.

That said, there are 40 zones and hundreds of countries spread all over the world, and those mults will boost your score (plus, they're fun to work!) But it's rarely if ever the case that you can run any part of the world from NE with higher rate than EU, with the possible exception of JA in the late afternoon (amateur radio population/activity is highest in EU and JA). So it's best to keep running EU and don't try to run SA, AF, AS, etc. Further, there are lots of mults that are busy running or don't need another W1 QSO and won't call in -- you have to find them. So it's best to run EU and S&P for mults from other regions. That's what makes it a worldwide contest for us.

SO2R is the most efficient way to work mults, but it's not easy and requires a second radio or a second VFO that can listen while transmitting on the main VFO. If SO2R isn't feasible for you, S&P when the rate slows down and do a quick sweep when you change bands.

And if you don't feel confident about running, then S&P with your beam on Europe. You'll get more QSOs and mults that way, and you'll run across non-EU mults as well.

And remember: For any given station, time in the chair is the single most important contributor to your score. (WC1M)

Work Europe. Someone once told me that, for CQWW success from the Northeast, there are 5 rules:

1. Work Europe
2. Work Europe
3. Work Europe
4. Work Europe
5. If you can't work Europe, work someone else.

That's it. Very simple. If there is propagation to Europe, work Europe. If there's not, work someone else. Makes band planning pretty simple! (W1UE)

Score as a Function of Time. Score is basically bulk * variety (QSOs * multipliers). It takes a lot of time to get 1000 or 2000 QSOs. The mults actually take less time, because (for SOLP unassisted) you're only looking for 500 or so, and most of them will come out of your European "bulk." So--to achieve that: EU when EU is available. Mults when you find them. But the mults will come; the bulk takes serious time. (W1JQ)

Multipliers

- **U.S. and Canada.** Working your own country at least once per band for the multiplier. It may feel weird, but it is really needed. (W3TB)
- **U.S. and Canada.** Don't miss easy multipliers! For CQWW, Canada counts as a country multiplier and as many as 5 different zones. One should be able to work Canada on 160/80/40/20/15, even with low power and poor antennas. The US is also a country multiplier, and as many as 3 different zones. Even with low power and poor antennas, an op should be able to work W/K on all 6 bands, and at least zone 5. So that's 11 countries and at least 3 zones for 16 mults- and the contest hasn't even begun!
- **U.S.** And don't forget to log those zero pointers. (W6PH)
- **Canada.** Do not pass up working a VE. It is a two point contact. And there are lots of them. By the same token, don't get in a pile up to work a second Zone 8 station if you already have that multiplier. It is only two points more and the VE's are a lot easier to work. (W6PH)
- **Antenna Height.** If you have phased antennas, or have antennas at different heights, it could be you picked the wrong choice...try another option. I remember K1EA (used to be upstream from me) calling a KP2 station over and over using a low angle antenna. (I

worked the KP2 with one call using my little sloper.) When the EA op picked the lower antenna on the tower, one call did the trick. (Will Ewing)

If you hear a W/K local on the air and you need him on 10M, ask him to QSY there. The worst he can do is say no, and he may just take care of a double mult for you on 10m! (W1UE)

- **CQ'ing in Your Face.** You finally found a DX station that's S9. You call and call and call, and he CQs in your face. You finally give up. You tune up the band a little, and you find a station from the same country that's S7, and you work him in one call. Huh?

There are several things that could be going on here:

1. The S9+ station is attracting a lot more attention, and isn't hearing you.
2. The S9+ station is using a receive directional antenna and you are in his null.
3. The S9+ station is in a big city, and has an S8 noise level.
4. The S7 station is out in the country, can hear a pin drop in New York, and is using 50 watts.

Just because the S9+ station can't hear you, don't assume that the S7 station won't hear you. Even if you're Low Power, call him anyway! He could be a new multiplier! If he can't hear you now, make a note of his frequency (either on pad of paper or put him in the bandmap) and come back to him later. (W1UE)

- **Multipliers: First Day vs. Second Day.** Don't waste time in pileups early in the contest. Europeans on 40M will be loud when the contest starts, but they are very busy working each other. Even though those QSOs are only worth 1 point each, there are still 70+ multipliers in Europe they need to work!

Pileups are usually much easier to break on the 2nd day. At times, you will even find DX stations that Call CQ with NO takers. The second night, you will also find stations on the low bands will be much easier to work, as they have already worked most of the other Europeans and many of those same Europeans will be sleeping instead of causing you QRM. Multi-op stations in the Caribbean will also be begging the 2nd day. So, if you're a small station, the second day can be very productive for mults! (W1UE)

Search & Pounce

- Try the "Speed Search and Pounce" technique to improve your S&P!
 1. Tune in a station on either VFO
 2. Set VFO A = VFO B
 3. Tune in another station and switch VFOs
 4. Assess, Call, Switch...Repeat
 5. When one is worked, switch and equalize VFOs
 6. In this manner, leap frog your way up the band!

Look again at Step 4 ("Assess") - if you determine that the time spent in trying to work a station exceeds the payback, at this point you could put him in the Band Map and move

on to the next station. Then come back to him at a later time, when he may be easier to work. (W1UE)

- Leapfrogging VFOs works REALLY well for unassisted ops! Especially on a clean band. (W1JQ)
- I set one VFO to the low end of the band, and the other VFO mid-way up the band. *E.g.*, VFO A = 14.150, VFO B = 14.250 toggling back and forth while moving both up the band. By doing this, you don't have to equalize the VFO's after each QSO. (N2GC)

The Bands

40: "There ain't no meters like 40 meters." Many of us tend to not like 40 on phone. Even if you are a big gun, it's still a slugfest.

Be prepared -- 40 may die just after the start of the contest. However, it will come back to life after midnight, and stay good for quite a long time, 'till well after European sunrise.

An excellent time to be on 40 is Saturday afternoon, as early as possible as you can reliably work stations. Why? There are TONS of stations that are really weak. This really only works with high power, as you have to be heard. However, you can maintain huge rate with stations that are just above the noise. Once the band is wide open, turn off your AGC and turn the RF and AF gain down. Your receiver will thank you for it, and you will make more QSOs.

40 should be busy most of the night, even if we lose EU for a bit. (W1VE)