

## **Newcomers and Elmers Net: Participating In Nets Robert AK3Q 1-12-14**

### **What is a net?**

- a net is a meeting place on the air, just as we are doing now
- "Net" is short for Network, and like the modern business-speak, networking is connecting with others in your particular area or areas of interest
- as you might have guessed, there are many kinds of nets for almost every interest imaginable
- nets do not have to revolve around radio; in fact, many do not
- there are nets for age groups, geographical nets, health and welfare nets, antique car nets, astronomy nets, boating nets, missionary nets, boy and girl scout nets; weather nets
- as well as numerous nets around radio such as QRP nets, antique radio nets, AM nets, vintage Swan or Collins nets, satellite nets, maritime mobile nets, traffic/road condition nets, HF nets, RV nets, Swap meet nets; radio/TV broadcasters net, emergency training nets, club nets, early morning/late night nets; some nets start at 3 am while others are just closing down at 2 AM
- if you want to find a net there are likely at least a half-dozen going on at any given moment during the day into which you can tune, not to mention specific band nets and mode nets

Nets run the spectrum between formal and informal

- this is a semi-formal net in the we have a net control each week, as well as a topic for discussion, but we also encourage discussion about the hobby in general
- most nets have some form of structure, but a truly informal net usually just involves someone opening up the net and closing it when folks are talked out; discussion is usually round-robin, meaning one person speaks and the passes it along to the next person in the list
- even informal nets usually have at least a list or order of succession for who gets to talk next-otherwise there is a lot of doubling and frustration for everyone
- however, when there are only a few people, informal nets will not follow a real list; they just rely on the participants to keep track of who is on the net so that everyone gets a chance to talk

### **Why Participate in a Net?**

One of the cool things about a net as a newcomer is that it gives you a place to practice getting on the air, without the pressure of keeping up an entire conversation

- some folks naturally have the gift of gab—in fact sometimes they are hard to shut up! I sometimes listen to folks talking on HF frequencies and regularly find people who talk for 5, 10 ,even 15 minutes without turning the mike over to the other person
- think about a person who talks for that long in what is supposed to be a conversation! It's like getting on the phone with someone who never lets you get a word in edgewise!
- nets are by nature designed to allow multiple people to meet and talk about things of interest, without any one person dominating the conversation (except this net, ha ha!)
- this means you can check into a net, talk a little bit here and there, and spend most of the time listening
- this is an easy way to gain experience and to learn some of the flow of talking on the radio
- it is also a great way to learn things, and often a place to ask questions
- most nets are very friendly places, and newcomers are welcome; not only do folks who run nets like to have bigger numbers, but also we all like to find folks with similar interests
- for some safety/public service type nets, the broader the reach of the net the better things might be handled in case of an actual emergency

There are occasionally some nets that are only for members of a particular group, but these are few and far between on the amateur bands – exclusivity is discouraged in most respects

- however, when it comes to repeaters, you may run across private repeaters where you need permission or belong to a particular group to participate, but I have never run across one of these in the years I have been a ham
- even if the repeater operator wants to limit who uses their repeater, it is usually just so that they can control behavior on a repeater—unfortunately some folks live to cause others trouble

### **How to Participate**

Usually the easiest way to jump into a net for the first time is to listen for a while and figure out what the net is about

- if it is a theme net and you want to participate, wait for a call for check-ins and then check-in just like you do here
- a net may have a specific form to their check-in which will become clear by listening to others check-in first
- some nets are member based, meaning they may assign a number to each group member, but they will also accept new check-ins; merely identify yourself as a newcomer to the net by saying something like “this is my first time checking into the net . . . .”

- it is usually a good idea to spell your call sign phonetically for clarity; if no one else is doing this, then follow their conventions and wait for the net control operator to ask you to repeat your call if needed
- most nets have folks use phonetics—it just makes things go more smoothly in the end
- if you are getting in right at the beginning of a net you will follow along until the net controller calls on you for your comments, information, etc.
- if you are checking into a net which is already in progress, the net controller may tell you whom you follow on the check-in list, to give you an idea of when your time will be coming up
- at other times the net controller may ask you for comments as soon as you check in, this is why listening first is usually a good idea so you know what the net is about!

One of the common features of most nets with a net control station (NCS) is that they are responsible for directing the flow of the net

- they call on people to talk, they look for and acknowledge check-ins, and they may have other folks in different locations put out calls for check-ins with the assumption that an HF net, for example, may have folks who can hear the net but the net controller cannot hear them
- also something known as relays are used, and this is where other folks on the net may supply check-in or other information to the net controller (and the group) for someone who is not being heard well by the net control operator
- the middle person acts as a relay, sometimes for both sides, so that information is correctly received

### **Going Direct**

- when one person wants to speak directly to another person, the proper procedure is to ask the net control operator for permission to “go direct” with another station; the net control operator will then either give permission, or they could ask that person to wait until a later point depending on the flow of the net
- the important thing to remember is that the net controller is responsible for the clarity and flow of the net, and this is why many nets have in their opening a statement such as “this is a directed net which means net control will control all net activity”
- while it is not as important to have a net control for a non-emergency net, this standard practice for a directed net is good practice for when there might actually be an emergency and information must flow smoothly and in an orderly fashion. Lives can depend on it!
- so always follow the direction of the net control operator, even if you think there is a better way to do something

- never call someone direct without the permission of the net control operator, either directly or because the net has been placed in "free" status
- a "free" net means folks can call each other without going through net control, but good manners and consideration for others still apply!
- at some point the net control operator will end a "free" net and resume directed net control duties, usually when a net is about to end
- many nets however, are directed start to finish

### **Good operating practices on Nets**

Keep comments short and on-topic; don't be afraid to talk, but be aware there are others who want to participate as well

- never, ever criticize a net control operator or net participant on the air during the net
- if the net control station gets something wrong and you can help correct a problem, fine, but only do so if you are sure you can help and if someone more experienced is not available to help
- the emphasis here is on help, not criticize, nor make someone look foolish, or be anxious to point out someone's mistake
- a little humility goes a long way! Everyone makes mistakes, including you, and your time will come when someone could really embarrass you, so don't embarrass someone else! What goes around has a way of coming back around!
- have the attitude of being helpful, positive, and encouraging; never arrogant, know-it-all, or impatient
- if you participate in very many nets you will come across people who are calling a net for the first time, or very inexperienced; be supportive!
- and even when being helpful, make sure your help is actually needed, and not just an excuse for "coming to the rescue" of someone; make sure they really need to be rescued first!
- I am reminded of an old cartoon where a boy scout was so determined to help an old lady across the street that he never stopped to ask if she wanted to cross the street—he just started taking her and she didn't want to go!

### **Become a Net Control Operator!**

After you become comfortable participating in some nets, offer to try your hand at being a net control operator

- while many specialty nets may require some training, a lot of less formal nets can be directed by a new person with the help of more experienced folks
- just from our group here Ryan, W1RYN, whom many of you will recognize as a regular check-in to this net, has called several nets for the Wednesday night Tech Talk Net.
- he has done a great job, gained valuable experience, and is living proof that being a net control operator will not kill you!

There are a lot of hams who have been hams for years and years who have never called a net – don't be like that! Every ham should have that experience a few times in life, at least, just in case a situation would arise where there was a need for a net control during an emergency

Nets give you an opportunity to expand your circle of friends, find out more about areas of interest, and give you on-air experience with a low-fear factor -- find some nets and get involved!!!

#### Resources

<http://ac6v.com/nets.htm>

[http://www.dxzone.com/catalog/DX\\_Resources/Nets/](http://www.dxzone.com/catalog/DX_Resources/Nets/)

<http://ve5brc.amateur-radio.ca/net.htm>

[http://www.n1yz.com/HFNET\\_LIST.HTM](http://www.n1yz.com/HFNET_LIST.HTM)

<http://www.docksideradio.com/Cruising%20Nets.htm>