FORTUNE FAVORS THE PREPARED · COMMS ONE-PAGER

Get Your Ham Radio License

No Morse code. 35 questions. A few weeks of study and one exam session.

1. Why bother with a ham license?
2. Which license, and what does it unlock?
3. How do I study, and for how long?
4. Where do I test, and what does it cost?
5. I have a callsign. Now what?

1 Why a ham license · when the power and phones go out, you still have eyes and ears

- **Range.** A 5-watt handheld through a repeater can cover a county. FRS radios cover a neighborhood.
- **People.** Hams run the nets, repeaters and ARES groups that back up emergency managers when normal systems fail.
- **Long distance.** With a General license and HF, reach the next state or across the country with no towers or internet.

What ham is not. Not private (anyone can listen, and coding messages to hide their meaning is banned), not for business, and you give your callsign every 10 minutes and at the end.

Ham or GMRS? GMRS: $35 for 10 years, no test, covers the family. Ham: a test, but far more reach. Many have both.

2 The three license classes · each exam is multiple choice, drawn from a public question pool

License	Exam	Pool in use (valid to)	What it unlocks
Technician	35 Qs, pass 26	2026–30, 409 Qs (6/30/2030)	**Where most start.** All bands above 50 MHz (6 m, 2 m, 70 cm): repeaters, simplex. HF slices: 10 m voice (28.300–28.500 MHz), Morse on parts of 80/40/15/10 m.
General	35 Qs, pass 26	2023–27, 429 Qs (6/30/2027)	**The preparedness upgrade.** Most of every HF band: state-to-state and worldwide voice and data, NVIS, HF nets. Technician first (same day is fine).
Amateur Extra	50 Qs, pass 37	2024–28, ~600 Qs (6/30/2028)	**Everything.** All privileges, incl. Extra-only slices of 80, 40, 20 and 15 m. Heavy on theory.

A new General pool starts July 1, 2027: check which pool your exam uses. Pools are free at **NCVEC.org**. Upgrades carry no FCC fee.

3 The path, step by step · most people go from zero to callsign in 3 to 6 weeks

1 Get an FRN Free at apps.fcc.gov/cores, *before* the exam.

2 Study One book or course, plus practice tests.

3 Practice Full practice exams until you hit 85%+ every time.

4 Book an exam In person or online. Pre-register if asked.

5 Test day $0–15. Photo ID, FRN, calculator (memory cleared).

6 Pay the FCC $35 in CORES within 10 days of filing.

7 Callsign By email, often within days. Save the license PDF.

4 How to study · pick a style that suits you

Type	Good options
Free online	**HamStudy.org** flash cards and practice exams. KB6NU's *No-Nonsense* Technician guide (free PDF).
Free video	David Casler's lessons for every exam. Gordon West Technician videos.
Books	*ARRL Ham Radio License Manual* (deep), Gordon West (question by question), HamRadioSchool.com. Paid online: HamTestOnline.
Classes	Local clubs, many online. Ask an "Elmer" (experienced ham).

Use books for the current pool. Full list: Amateur Radio Learning Resources.

5 Find an exam · volunteer examiners (VEs) run every session

In person
Three VEs, paper or tablet. Some take walk-ins. Find one at **hamstudy.org/sessions**, **laurelvec.com** or ARRL's *Find an Exam*.

Online (remote)
From home with a webcam and a quiet room; some teams want a second camera. Listed at **hamstudy.org/sessions/online**.

Cost	Amount
Exam fee (to the VE team)	$0–15 **(Laurel VEC free)**
FCC fee (new license, 10 yrs)	$35, paid to the FCC in CORES
Upgrade / renewal	No FCC fee / $35

Need an accommodation? Tell the team ahead of time. More: Finding a Ham Exam.

6 After you pass

- ☐ Keep your **CSCE** (exam certificate). It proves you passed.
- ☐ The team files with the FCC; you get a **pay link** email. Pay $35 in CORES within 10 days or it's dismissed.
- ☐ A second email links your **official license**. The link lasts 30 days: download and print it.
- ☐ Transmit once your callsign is in the FCC **ULS**. Upgrades: use new privileges now, adding /AG or /AE until it shows.

Callsign _____ **FRN** _____ **Expires** _____

7 The week you get your callsign

- ☐ **First radio.** A dual-band handheld and a better antenna. See What Radio to Buy?
- ☐ **Local repeater.** Program it in, then call: "[callsign], listening."
- ☐ **Check in to a net.** Listen to a weekly club or ARES net, then check in.
- ☐ **Join a club** and find an Elmer to help.
- ☐ **Look at ARES.** Call your county Emergency Coordinator. See ARES, RACES, ACS and AUXCOMM.
- ☐ **Add it to your PACE plan** and family contact card.

8 A four-week study plan · about 30 minutes a day

- ☐ **Week 1:** Get your FRN. Pick a book or course.
- ☐ **Week 2:** Read or watch it all once.
- ☐ **Week 3:** Flash cards daily, practice test every other day.
- ☐ **Week 4:** A test a day. 85%+ three in a row? Book it.

Read more
Why You Should Upgrade to General and the rest of our Amateur Radio guides.

Plan your gear
The free *What to Get to Start Your Comms* one-pager and our Comms PACE guide.

Train offline
Ready Trainer puts the whole FFTP course library, communications included, on one USB drive.

The full guide: *How to Obtain Your Amateur Radio License*
fortunefavorsthepreparedcom/comms/ham-radio/get-licensed/

The QR code opens the guide. Exam rules from 47 CFR Part 97; fees and pools checked against the FCC, ARRL VEC and NCVEC, November 2026.

Remember, Fortune Favors the Prepared
Semper Paratus, Semper Gumby