

My Tips for Learning CW KK4ITX

- **Learning CW** is like learning another language. Learning will come to you differently than for anybody else and you need to find the method to learn that works for you. Accept, from the start, that you won't learn CW in a few nights or while you are watching a movie, reading a book or playing a video game.
- I made up a **Code Chart** (on the CW Page) that you can print out on heavy card stock. Two will fit on a page, make four charts. Put one in your vehicle, one next to your easy chair, use one for a book mark and put one near your HF radio and computer.
- **Next**, find a computer, tablet or Ipad program to practice with. You need instant feedback to know if what you are doing is right or wrong..... **BAD habits** are hard to break, so do not start wrong and later try to correct yourself. You will go through more than one piece of software before you are happy. The program you choose should allow you to Key, Hear and See what you are doing. You need feedback so that you don't practice wrong. I use a program called FLDIGI (Digital Page) on my computer. Once you learn how to use it you can use your imagination to get all kinds of feedback. Most of these programs are free or cost just a buck or two.
- **Your first Key should be a Straight Key.** I know that this is an area of potential disagreement with the "Pros", keep it simple and cheap, make one if you want, it's not hard. Why do I recommend this? Because, you want to learn code, not how to use a machine. If you need to improvise one day it is simple to make a basic key but not so if you need a more complex piece of gear and an automatic keyer to get your message through. Don't get me wrong, these Keys are fine add ons and grand meticulously made pieces of workmanship that let you send at breakneck speed, but remember you and most others can't COPY that fast!
- **Avoid anything automatic** and use the computer/tablet programs just to CONFIRM what you think you are sending is what you indeed sent. Heck, most of the software will let you type in what you want to say and it will spit out the code over the air, that's cheating (in my book) if you are sending it over the air but if you use it to learn the sounds on playback, well that is a great way to learn. Set any of the program speeds to about 13 WPM, that seems to be about the best speed to start at.
- There are certain words that you will know that should be coming and after awhile they will just flow through your brain without even thinking. CQs, Call Signs, QTH, Antenna, Name and so on. You need to actually listen to QSOs to get the flow of a common QSO. So listen to your radio even if you do not totally understand all of that noise..... soon you will recognize some of the more common "words" being used and you will also learn the etiquette of this communication mode.
- When you practice, always start with this common format if you're looking for anyone, anywhere..... **CQ CQ CQ DE YOURCALL YOURCALL** and usually end in **K** and then wait for a reply. For my Call, learning this alone would give me about 25% of all of the characters I need to learn to communicate in CW. It's like having an EASY BUTTON !
- This tip came from a friend when I expressed frustration in learning to translate. Anytime you find yourself ● — — ● — ●● — ●● — ● — — ● , read the menu or signs around you and translate them to code (in your head or else you might be arrested). Do the same as you see billboards and road signs as you drive, but please, don't get distracted! The real key here is to JOT DOWN those letters and

numbers that you missed, those are the ones you need to practice more. You'll be surprised at your progress and you will quickly learn where you need to bone up.

- **Practice** with a friend that knows CW and someone who will tell you honestly if you are easy to copy or are sloppy and hard to understand, and don't get all in a tiff when you don't get great ratings, you will get better, don't blame your buddy for your shortcomings.
- The ARRL (**W1AW**) has a Weekly Schedule of broadcasts in CW at varying **SLOW** speeds working UP from 5-15 WPM and in five steps with decreasing and **FAST** speeds working down from 35 WPM (too fast for me) to 10 WPM. The schedule is found on their website and you can simply hit the link on the **CW Page** to find it. Don't start here but use it as "background music" and once you have some stuff under your belt, let 'er rip. At least do the **Slow Code**, copy as much as you can, leaving a space for each letter you didn't get. Date each attempt and keep them as your records of progress.
- The **ARRL (W1AW)** broadcasts on 160/80/40/20/15/17/10 & 2m..... Unless you are within 30 miles of W1AW you won't get them on 2m and if you don't have an HF rig yet but you do have at least a Tech Grade License, you can use Echolink. So you and the rest of us with bad Band conditions can still copy the program from W1AW via clear Echolink same schedule as HF. Simply search for W1AW and save it to your Favorites for easy access.
- Ready for a CW on Air Contest ?? Yes you are. You don't have to actually key to learn. Every contest has a format and an exchange that takes place in order for the entry to be valid. Simply look up the contest online, read the rules and tune in. You will know what to expect. Write it down and date it so that you can see your progress.
- You need to keep your mind in the CW mode especially during the initial learning process so you should practice 15 to 30 minutes every day. The time in the restaurant or doctors office translating signs counts and will keep you in the groove. I believe the key to learning CW is to keep it in the front of your thinking process so that if you use it whenever can, you will retain the info much easier.
- When you do get on the air and try your hand at Live CW, try it at 5 watts or so, you will become accustomed to the effort and most operators will probably ignore you but that's OK. My first contact was at about 2,300 miles using 5w and I was speechless..... And so was he, it was the first CW contact for both of us !! Fun, memorable and exciting all wrapped up, what a rush !
- **My Bottom Line:** If you can send and receive at 10wpm with 99% accuracy that is better than 60wpm at 80% accuracy. Accuracy to me is the single most important component here. We need accurate, confirmed info before we pass it on.

These are mostly my Tips from the top of my head, there will be more to come I expect as we all progress and share information. If you have ANY suggestions or musings that we can share here please email me your info and we'll include it as time and space permits.

73,

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