The QSL Book

QSL Resources For Amateur Radio Operators

And Shortwave Listeners

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Basic QSL Information

There are some basics to know when it comes to sending out QSL cards if you expect to receive one in return that is. It isn't rocket science. But the lack of one piece of information could render your QSL worthless to other stations. Some of these items listed below are simple to understand and some aren't. I present this list of QSL basics in alphabetical order:

Yes, the spelling is wrong but it's been this way for many, many years. Most likely shortened by CW ops. The actual word here is *bureau* which is nothing more than a clearing house for QSL cards. Some think the buro is a single entity. But it's actually more a *network* of national and regional buros working towards a common goal. To get QSL confirmations from many DX stations you mail your card to your U.S. QSL buro. They sort your cards into stacks of other operator's cards going to the same DX buro. When they accumulate a set amount of cards, Germany for example, they mail them to the German QSL buro. Upon arrival the volunteers at the German buro will distribute them to local amateurs.

One more thing about the buros before I go deeper into the pros and cons of using the QSL buros. As far as I can determine all those working at the QSL buros, DX and U.S.) are *volunteers*. The folks are the oil that keeps the QSL machine running smooth. Without their tireless efforts there wouldn't be any QSL buros in operation today. Thank them when you correspond with them. Strive to submit your cards in a manner which will make their job easier. The easier you make their job the faster you should get a return QSL.

(BURO **PROS**) The pros *for* using the buro is the savings realized by sending cards via the buro. All your cards go through your outgoing buro to for distribution to DX buros. Saving your some money. The savings in envelopes and postage alone is worth the cost of sending your cards via your buro.

(BURO **CONS**) The only real issue *against* using the buro is *time*. It takes a long time for QSL cards to go from your outgoing buro to the DX buro and then on to the DX station. The return trip is just about as long (sometimes longer). It isn't at all unusual to see a QSL confirmation arrives in the original sender's mail box after one or two *years*. But still, the buro offers such a cost savings that many hams prefer it over direct mail QSL cards.

There are some DX stations that will only process outgoing QSL cards via their buro due to the cost of postage. Many times they do the buro only route due to the sheer number of incoming cards they receive. If you have ever processed a hundred or more QSL cards via your latest buro package. The processing of envelopes demonstrates why some operators use the buro for exchanging cards.

Date – There isn't an established *standard* when it comes to entering the QSO date on your outgoing QSL cards. But there *is* an un-official method satisfying all national date formats. Here in the U.S. a date format of *MM/DD/YYYY* is an acceptable method of displaying the date. Such as on forms used on job applications, credit card applications and so forth. Most international date formats are like formatted as such: *DD/MM/YYYY*. You can use this format several ways: 14/Jun/2016 or using Roman

numerals: 14/VI/2016. The Roman numerals representing the month. This format is a better one for any use of displaying a date, even better than the current one in the United States.

What's the big deal you ask? Well let's use a hypothetical QSO with a station in England. I send the card off to the DX station with the date of *07/10/2013*. Which is July (*07*) the 13th to those of us in the United States. The QSL card arrives at the QTH of the station in England. But they find no record of your QSO with them on 07/10/2013 because they read the date as *October* the *7th* of 2013. They can look at their log on *July* the 10th seeing as how the QSL card came from an American operator. But the question to ask is *will they*?

When you get a batch of cards the last thing you want to do is to figure out what date the other station worked you on. Using the format for means our example date of *07/10/2013* would then become *10/JUL/2013*. Or even 10/VII/2013. This hybrid date format is quite easy to understand no matter what format the other station uses.

Envelopes – If you've received cards direct from Europe you've received different sized envelopes. Those envelopes used in the U.S. are known as #10 Business Envelopes. The smaller ones quite popular in the U.S. for QSLs are called Business Reply Envelopes.

Just a short reminder here, not all QSL cards are created equal when it comes to size. Many DX (European & South American) QSL cards are larger than the average U.S. card. So you need to make sure to send them an envelope they can actually use. Forcing another station to supply an envelope for *your* QSL card is a way to have your QSL card rejected or ignored.

For reference purposes:

#10 Envelopes are 4.125-in-x-9.5-in (mm: 104.775 x 241.3)

Business Reply Envelopes are inches: 3.75 x 6.75 (mm: 95.25 x 171.45)

European Envelopes C6 are 114x162 (4.49in x 6.38in)

You should use a #10 for more than one QSL because of thickness issues. *Always send a #10 envelope to a DX station if you don't send a C6 envelope. If their QSL won't fit your envelope you might not get that shiny new QSL you wanted.*

Green Stamp – *A* U.S. *one-dollar bill*. The dollar bill is acceptable for DX operators to use for purchasing postage in their country. A green stamp lets them buy postage which you can't buy to mail your confirmation QSL card back to you.

Be careful when sending U.S. dollars to some DX locations. It is illegal in some countries to have foreign currencies in your possession.[1] There are precautions about theft when sending green stamps overseas elsewhere in this book.

Handwriting – What? Okay, so you use a computer to process all your QSL cards. And that is a good idea, especially if your handwriting isn't the best. But then, not everyone uses computers to fill out cards or self-adhesive labels. They *write* their QSL information on their cards so this section is for them. Those of you who write the QSO information onto your QSL cards only need to remember one word –

legibility. If the DX station or their QSL Manager can't read your handwriting you may not receive your QSL. Sorry, that's the way it is and I can't blame them since I've done a little QSL Manager work myself over the years.

My own cursive writing is rather hard to read once I write a lot. So I resorted to printing instead of cursive handwriting. It takes a little longer on my part but at least the other operator can make out what I'm sending them. A great many DX operators might understand your native language. But it doesn't mean they all will. So try to stick to amateur radio terminology when writing any notes on your QSL cards to DX stations. Be sure to read the section in the rear of The QSL Book for the use of languages in your QSL cards.

Information – Always, always, always fill out the QSL card completely - *no matter what*. An incomplete QSL card is almost worthless to another operator. You need their card for DXCC and they need your card for WAS - *but your QSL lacks all the information they need*. So ask yourself *why* they should send you QSL in return?

IRC – The *International Reply Coupon*, an outdated method of purchasing postage. IRCs used to be bought in the U.S. to send along with a QSL card to DX countries for the return of a QSL card. The United States and other countries had begun to phase out IRCs when The QSL Book was first published.

These were small, thin coupon-like documents. A DX station could use them to buy postage in their country without using foreign currency. I could fill a book up with the problems encountered at U.S. Post Offices when it came to purchasing IRCs. Some enterprising hams have a small business going where they buy/sell/trade IRCs. So you may have better luck using them rather than the U.S. Post Office nearest you.

Alternatives to the IRC are the green stamps, euros, PayPal, and even bitcoin. Each of them better than the IRC.

OQRS – This is short for *On-line QSL Request System* which is a web page for a DXpedition, or special event station. Sometimes it's a semi-rare DX country. This has become an attractive way of obtaining QSL cards. Regardless of what country you operate from.

There will be a form on the web page which you fill in to make a payment to the other operator's PayPal™ account. This payment you make will be in exchange for QSL confirmation of *all* of the contacts made with them.

Those using the OQRS system generally have a set amount required for QSL cards. Note that those are the *least* amounts. The organizers of these events all seek donations to offset the huge costs of a DXpedition. Or even a smaller scale special event.

Some folks may complain about the "high prices" used in OQRS so let's take a quick look at one example. The smallest donation for OQRS for our example DXpedition is five dollars (U.S.) via the PayPal™ interface on their web site. These stations generally will tell you not to send them *your* QSL because they have no real use for them. Right there you save the cost of the card which is an average of

thirty-five cents for the cheaper QSL cards. If you use some of the high-end printed QSL cards you may save up to a dollar by not sending a card.

Next you need to add in the cost of two envelopes, one to send *your* QSL and one to receive *their* QSL. The envelopes should cost about twenty-eight cents each. Since they are both number 10 business size envelopes.

Outgoing postage from the United States to an overseas QSL manager is over a dollar as of this edition. You need to include at least two green stamps for the DX station (or their QSL manager) to send you a return QSL card.

So now we have an estimated total of $4.11 and you haven't even filled it out yet. You may wind up adding an extra green stamp as some DX are now requiring three green stamps instead of just two.

Along with the money and effort you save there will be a two to three week time savings. Since you aren't sending your QSL to them first. There are some QSL managers located in the United States that *might* lower this estimate. But that isn't always the case. The OQRS system is still a good system for obtaining a QSL card. And it wouldn't hurt any to throw a few extra bucks their way to help pay expenses. The amateur radio community supports DXpeditions with donations. Otherwise you might see the number of events drop.

Sending The QSL – You don't plain postcards a great deal anymore. But it does pop up from time to time: *sticking a postcard stamp on a QSL card and then sending it off in the mail*. While there's nothing *wrong* with sending a QSL card in that manner. But it can lead to problems for the recipient due to the careless handling procedures of the post office. It may save *you* some postage and the cost of an envelope. But a *bare* QSL card can become useless by the postal imprints made on them. Again, you want to make sure your QSL card has some worth to the other station when you send one off. Otherwise they have no reason to reply to your QSL request.

QSL – confirmation of a contact between two amateur radio operators. Or on behalf of a shortwave listener who has copied a contact between amateur radio operators.

QSL Manager – Without a doubt the QSL manager is one of the unsung heroes of our hobby. QSL managers are tireless souls who manage the QSL duties of another station. Generally a DX station, a DXpedition, or a special event station. QSL managers have saved the amateur radio community both time and money. The next time you send something to a QSL manager you might add a little note. Or a couple of extra green stamps for the manager's use. One thing you should always try to do is to see if the QSL manager has a web page up with instructions on QSLing. Many of them have specific ways they want QSL requests sent in to them. It would be fitting for you to follow their instructions to the "*T*". Deviating from their routine may make a difference in wheteher you get a QSL or not.

SAE – A *S*elf-*A*ddressed *E*nvelope. An envelope with the address of the intended recipient of the return envelope (that would be *you*). The SAE goes to DX stations with adequate funds for return postage from the DX country. Some U.S. stations will send DX station their country's postage stamps. Purchased

online from the DX country. Never affix these stamps to the envelope itself. Just paperclip them onto the envelope is good enough. Another thing to keep in mind is that some DX stations don't want stamps of any kind, even from their own country. Best to do some research on the DX station's QSL policies *before* you go to all the trouble to send them your QSL.

Take note of the "*self-addressed*" part. People will put a partially completed envelope into the outgoing envelope. Expecting the other op (or QSL manager) to fill it out for them. Making a DX station or QSL manager work to process your card might cause a delay in processing your QSL request. It might be that you won't receive a return QSL at all. Just because you failed to completely fill out *your* own return envelope.

SASE – Like the SAE with the exception that a SASE is "self-addressed" with postage affixed to it. This is for QSL confirmations between operators located in the same country. For operators chasing awards within their own countries.

What's that you say? You won't send SASEs to stations within your home country? And you wonder why your return QSL rate is so low?

The saying that the QSL is the ultimate courtesy also works in reverse. If you need/want a QSL from one of your countrymen then it always pays to send an SASE to someone whose QSL card you need. Remember it's *you* who needs them, not the other way around.

The best routine to use is to check a station's QRZ page for QSL policies. There are stations who state "No SASE required" while others need one. Don't slack off and send a card to a station into the Dakotas without first checking. That contact you made for your last state for WAS may go unanswered. Because you failed to follow their QSL policies.

Security Envelopes – These are envelopes made to prevent anyone from detecting the contents. Which they do by holding them up to a light source. Unscrupulous people see amateur radio call signs on an envelope. Soon they will hold it up to a light to see if it contains currency. If it does there is a good chance they'll either steal the entire envelope or just the funds from within it. Either way your QSL is not going to reach its destination. And you won't be receiving the confirmation from the DX station. It will do no good to single out any country in particular. But it would be best if you used security envelops when sending QSLs along with greenstamps.

Self-Sealing Envelopes – The nifty envelopes with a pull-off strip on the sealing area. You pull the strip off, and close the envelope up and it is ready to for the mail.

You can get on the good side of a QSL Manager or a DX station sending along self-sealing envelopes for their use. This takes a great deal of time and effort out of processing return QSL cards. You can be sure yours will be one of the first processed if you use these envelopes. In fact, many QSL Managers *need* self-sealing envelopes for the return QSL. Or they will send yours backs via the buro. Just imagine sealing several hundred envelops for a station!

Time – Although time isn't all that on an outgoing QSL card there are a few things a beginner needs to know. One exception being certain awards programs. The most important thing about the time on a QSL card, and your logs, is that ***all contact time is to be in UTC only***. Not Eastern Daylight Savings Time. Not Pacific Standard time, nor any other regional time format.

All times on a QSL card are to be in UTC 24-hour format without exception. No amateur radio operator is going to take the effort to convert 8:02PM EST time over to UTC for you. And they might not return your original card with a note on it. *It's your responsibility to see to it that all information on a QSL card is both accurate and legible.* More on TIME in another chapter.

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[1] It is beyond the scope of this eBook to provide an up to date list of countries where it is not legal for them to possess foreign currencies. Particularly American currency.