SureTalk Radio.com

Your Guide to Getting a

U.S. Ham Radio License

FCC Amateur Radio Service — classes, exams, costs and next steps

A plain-language overview prepared by SureTalkRadio for our customers and friends. **Information current as of November 2026.**

Do I need a ham license for SureTalkRadio? No license is needed for SureTalkRadio's push-to-talk service, which runs over a prioritized, encrypted LTE cellular network (range depends on LTE coverage). A ham license is needed only if you want to **transmit on amateur radio frequencies**. Some SureTalkRadio models (D10, D16) also include built-in UHF/VHF radio-to-radio; ask us which license, if any, applies to the frequencies you plan to use.

1. What is a ham license, and why get one?

Amateur ("ham") radio is an FCC-licensed service for personal, **non-commercial** radio communication, experimentation and self-training. Licensed hams can talk across town on local repeaters, across the country or around the world on HF (shortwave), through satellites, and with digital modes—without relying on the internet or cell networks. Many people get licensed for emergency preparedness, outdoor recreation, community service (such as public-event and disaster communications), or the technical hobby itself. Note that amateur radio may not be used for business communications or for pay.

How it compares with GMRS and FRS

Service	License?	Exam?	Good to know
Amateur (ham)	Yes — individual, 10 years; $35 FCC fee	Yes (Technician to start)	Widest range of frequencies, power and modes; personal/non-commercial use only.
GMRS	Yes — 10 years; $35 FCC fee; covers your immediate family	No	UHF channels near 462/467 MHz; repeaters allowed; typically 1–25 miles. Applicant must be 18+.
FRS	No ("licensed by rule")	No	22 shared channels, low power (0.5–2 W); short range; personal or business use.

2. License classes, privileges and exams

The FCC issues three license classes today. Each higher class requires passing the lower exams too, and the volunteer examiners give you credit for exams you have already passed. **There is no Morse code requirement**—the code test was eliminated in 2007. All exams are multiple choice, drawn from public question pools.

License class	Exam element(s)	Questions	Passing score	Privileges at a glance
Technician (entry level)	Element 2	35	26 correct (74%)	All amateur bands above 50 MHz (VHF/UHF and up)—local and regional voice, repeaters, digital, satellites—plus limited HF: Morse code on parts of 80, 40 and 15 m, and voice/digital on part of 10 m.
General	Element 2 + Element 3	35	26 correct (74%)	Privileges on all 29 amateur bands, including most of the HF bands used for nationwide and worldwide contacts.

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License class	Exam element(s)	Questions	Passing score	Privileges at a glance
Amateur Extra	Elements 2, 3 + Element 4	50	37 correct (74%)	All U.S. amateur privileges on all bands and modes, including additional HF spectrum reserved for Extra class.

Questions and passing scores: 47 CFR §97.503. "Questions" refers to the exam element for that class. Technician HF and power details: 47 CFR §97.301 and §97.313.

Current question pools (in effect in late 2026)

- **Technician (Element 2):** new pool effective **July 1, 2026**, valid through June 30, 2030.
- **General (Element 3):** effective July 1, 2023, valid through **June 30, 2027**. A revised General pool is due to replace it on July 1, 2027—if you will test after that date, study the new pool.
- **Amateur Extra (Element 4):** effective July 1, 2024, valid through June 30, 2028.

Pools are maintained by the NCVEC Question Pool Committee and revised on a four-year rotation. Always make sure your book or app matches the pool in effect on your exam date.

3. How to study

- **HamStudy.org** (free on the web): adaptive study mode, flash cards and unlimited practice exams for all three current pools. Its offline app is free on Android and $3.99 one-time on iOS.
- **ARRL License Manuals:** the ARRL Ham Radio License Manual, 6th edition (Technician, for exams July 1, 2026–June 30, 2030), lists at $32.95; ARRL also publishes General and Extra manuals.
- **Practice exams:** take timed practice tests until you consistently score well above the passing mark.
- **Local clubs and classes:** many clubs offer license classes, study groups and mentors ("Elmers"). Use the ARRL club search (link below) to find one near you.
- **Other options:** video courses, flash-card books and paid online courses are widely available; just confirm they cover the current pool.

4. How and where to take the exam

Exams are given by teams of at least three accredited Volunteer Examiners (VEs) working under a Volunteer Examiner Coordinator (VEC), such as ARRL VEC, W5YI-VEC, GLAARG or Laurel VEC. You can test **in person** (often at a library, club or community building) or **remotely** by video conference with an online VE team.

Step one: get your FRN first

Before exam day, create an account in the FCC's **CORES** system and register to receive your **FCC Registration Number (FRN)**. VE teams require the FRN on your application, and you will use the same CORES login to pay your FCC fee after you pass. A valid email address is also required—the FCC sends your license by email.

Find a session

- **ARRL exam session search:** search by ZIP code or state for in-person sessions; it also lists sessions run by other VECs and remote/online options.
- **HamStudy.org session finder:** lists upcoming in-person and remote sessions from many VE teams, with fees and open seats.

What to bring (in person)

- Your **FRN** and one **photo ID** (driver's license, passport, state ID, military ID or school photo ID). If you don't have photo ID, ask the team which two alternate IDs it accepts.
- The **exam session fee** (cash or check, as the team requests); two #2 pencils and a pen; a basic calculator with memory cleared (no phones).
- If upgrading: proof of your current license and any CSCE (pass certificate) from a previous session. Requirements vary by team—confirm when you register.

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5. What it costs

Item	Typical cost	Notes
FCC application fee	**$35**	Paid online to the FCC in CORES after you pass—never to the VE team. Also applies to renewals and vanity call sign requests. No fee to upgrade.
Exam session fee	**$0–$15**	Set by the VEC/team: ARRL VEC $15 (reduced to $5 for under-18 candidates), W5YI-VEC $14; some teams test free.
Study materials	**$0–$40+**	HamStudy.org website is free; apps and printed manuals typically $4–$35; full online courses cost more.
Radio (optional)	**Varies**	Not required to get licensed.

Youth tip: ARRL VEC covers the $35 FCC fee for new licensees under 18 who test with an ARRL VEC team, and some other VECs run youth programs too.

Paying the $35 FCC fee

- After your VE team submits your results, the FCC emails payment instructions to the address on your application (check spam/junk).
- You don't have to wait for the email: log in to **CORES** with your FRN, find the pending application and pay. **You have 10 calendar days**—if you miss it, the application is dismissed (contact your VEC to refile; you don't need to retest while your CSCE is valid).
- Review your application before paying; if your name or license class is wrong, call your VEC first. The FCC notes some people have trouble paying from a phone or tablet—a desktop computer is recommended.

6. After you pass

- **Your call sign:** once the fee is paid and the application is granted, your call sign appears in the FCC **ULS** license database and the FCC emails a link to your official license. **You may begin transmitting as soon as your license shows in ULS**—no paper license is needed.
- **License term:** 10 years. Renew online (in ULS) up to 90 days before expiration; renewal carries the $35 fee. There is a 2-year grace period to renew after expiration, but you may **not** transmit until it is renewed.
- **Vanity call signs:** you can request a specific available call sign (for example, one with your initials) for the $35 fee. Your class determines which call sign formats you can request.
- **Upgrading:** pass Element 3 to become General, then Element 4 for Amateur Extra. Your CSCE gives you credit for up to 365 days, and there is no FCC fee for an upgrade.
- **Keep your info current:** update your mailing and email address in ULS if they change.

Your path to a ham license in 6 steps

1	**Choose your goal.** Most people start with Technician (one 35-question exam).
2	**Study.** Use HamStudy.org or an ARRL License Manual based on the current pool; take practice exams until you pass comfortably.
3	**Get your FRN.** Register in FCC CORES and save your FRN and password.
4	**Book an exam.** Find an in-person or remote session with the ARRL exam search or HamStudy.org; confirm the fee and what to bring.
5	**Pass and pay.** Pay the $35 FCC fee in CORES within 10 days after your application is filed.
6	**Get on the air.** Look up your new call sign in ULS—once it appears, you are licensed for 10 years.

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In Utah?

Utah has an active amateur radio community, with regular exam sessions (including in the Salt Lake City area) and clubs across the state. To find a nearby club or exam, use the **ARRL club search** and **ARRL exam session search** (enter your ZIP code or choose Utah), or browse the **HamStudy.org session finder**. Remote exams are another convenient option if there is no session near you.

Helpful links

FCC – Amateur Radio Service
https://www.fcc.gov/wireless/bureau-divisions/mobility-division/amateur-radio-service

FCC – Exam elements and passing scores
https://www.fcc.gov/wireless/bureau-divisions/mobility-division/amateur-radio-service/examinations

FCC CORES – get an FRN / pay fees
https://apps.fcc.gov/cores/userLogin.do

FCC ULS – license search and online filing
https://www.fcc.gov/uls

FCC – Personal and amateur license fees
https://www.fcc.gov/personal-service-and-amateur-application-fees

FCC – Volunteer Examiner Coordinators list
https://www.fcc.gov/wireless/bureau-divisions/mobility-division/amateur-radio-service/volunteer-examiner-coordinators

FCC – GMRS
https://www.fcc.gov/wireless/bureau-divisions/mobility-division/general-mobile-radio-service-gmrs

FCC – FRS
https://www.fcc.gov/wireless/bureau-divisions/mobility-division/family-radio-service-frs

ARRL – Getting licensed
https://www.arrl.org/getting-licensed

ARRL – Find an exam session (in person or online)
https://www.arrl.org/find-an-amateur-radio-license-exam-session

ARRL – What to bring to an exam
https://www.arrl.org/what-to-bring-to-an-exam-session

ARRL – FCC application fee instructions
https://www.arrl.org/fcc-application-fee

ARRL – Question pools
https://www.arrl.org/question-pools

ARRL – Find a club
https://www.arrl.org/find-a-club

NCVEC – Question pools
https://www.ncvec.org/index.php/amateur-question-pools

HamStudy.org – Study tools
https://hamstudy.org/

HamStudy.org – Exam session finder
https://hamstudy.org/sessions

W5YI-VEC
https://www.w5yi-vec.org/

Questions about radios for your team? We're happy to help.

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