



Adapting for Success in VHF Contesting

Mt. Airy VHF Radio Club

December 18, 2025



Period I: The “Old” Days

Key Characteristics

- Mostly SSB/CW with some FM
- All in-contest communication with contesters is over the air
- DX spots, chat pages, texts, etc. not allowed
- Scatter QSOs mostly random SSB



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Operating Approach

- Call CQ
- Utilize activity hours
- Find a station run the bands
- Find rovers
- BIC
- Turn antennas (a lot)
- Try to obtain information about who plans to operate
- SOIR



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Period 2: In Contest Communication Plus Early Digital

Key Characteristics

- Still mostly SSB/CW with some FM plus digital scatter
- Can text / call stations
- Use of chat pages, DX spots, etc.
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Period 3: WSJTX

Key Characteristics

- FT8 becomes dominant mode on 6M and significant on 2M
- FT8 makes it harder to QSY up the bands
- Set frequencies for digital modes
- Continuation of in-contest communication and usage for digital modes



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Operating Approach

- Maximizing score requires a blend of digital and SSB/CW
- Combination of chat pages, texts and QSY mode on FT8 to move stations
- BIC now requires addition of eyes on the screen(s)

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Challenges / Opportunities

- ✗ Frustration for analog operators
- ✗ More effort to run bands
- ✗ Fewer rovers available
- ✓ Can run multiple bands at one time
 - S03R or more!
- ✓ Digital offers possibility of long haul Tropo scatter (FT8/Q65) QSOs on all bands as well as MS (MSK144) on 6,2, and 222



In Summary



- Significant change in VHF contesting from Period 1 to Period 3
- Fewer runs and Analog QSOs

BUT

- More 6M activity, long haul QSOs and ways to reach those you might miss in-contest communication
- Key is to optimize your score and fun by finding a way to adjust to change
- Future Opportunity at KITEO to improve Station layout and Computer Automation