



Q Code

The 25 most used codes

The Q code was standardised by the ITU at the beginning of the 20th century to facilitate telegraph communications between operators not speaking the same language. In amateur radio, it remains widely used in CW, in certain digital modes but also in phone. Here are the 25 codes you will encounter daily.

1. The principle: question or statement

Each Q code has two meanings, depending on the context:

- Followed by a *question mark* or at the start of an interrogative transmission: it is a *question*.
- Without a question mark: it is a *statement* (answer, information).

Example:

- *QRZ ?* = «Who is calling me ?»
- *QRZ DL1ABC* = «You are being called by DL1ABC.»

2. The 25 essential codes

<i>Code</i>	<i>Question</i>	<i>Statement</i>
<i>QRA</i>	What is the name of your station ?	The name of my station is...
<i>QRB</i>	How far are you from my station	The distance between our stations is [distance]
<i>QRG</i>	What is my exact frequency ?	Your frequency is...
<i>QRK</i>	What is the readability of my signals ? (1-5)	The readability is 1 Unintelligible 2 Barely readable 3 Readable with difficulty 4 Readable 5 Perfectly clear
<i>QRL</i>	Are you busy ? Is the frequency in use ?	I am busy / the frequency is in use.
<i>QRM</i>	Are you being interfered with by other stations ?	I am being interfered with (man-made interference).
<i>QRN</i>	Are you troubled by static ?	I am troubled by static (atmospheric).
<i>QRO</i>	Shall I increase my power ?	Increase power.

<i>QRP</i>	Shall I decrease my power ?	Decrease power. (<i>by extension: «low power»</i>)
<i>QRQ</i>	Shall I send faster ?	Send faster.
<i>QRS</i>	Shall I send more slowly ?	Send more slowly.
<i>QRT</i>	Shall I stop transmitting ?	Stop transmitting.
<i>QRU</i>	Have you anything for me ?	I have nothing for you.
<i>QRV</i>	Are you ready ?	I am ready.
<i>QRX</i>	When will you call me again ?	I will call you at... (<i>often: «stand by»</i>)
<i>QRZ</i>	Who is calling me ?	You are being called by...
<i>QSA</i>	What is the strength of my signals (or of the signals of...)?	The strength of your signals (or of the signals of...) is: 1: barely perceptible ; 2: weak ; 3: fairly good ; 4: good ; 5: very good.
<i>QSB</i>	Are my signals fading ?	Your signals are fading.
<i>QSD</i>	Is my keying defective?	Your keying is defective
<i>QSL</i>	Can you acknowledge receipt ?	I acknowledge receipt. (<i>by extension: the QSL card</i>)
<i>QSO</i>	Can you communicate with... ?	I can communicate with... (<i>by extension: a radio contact</i>)
<i>QSP</i>	Will you relay to...	I can relay to...
<i>QSY</i>	Shall I change frequency ?	Change your frequency to...
<i>QTH</i>	What is your location ?	My location is...
<i>QTR</i>	What is the exact time ?	The exact time is...

3. Examples of real QSOs in CW:

- CQ CQ CQ DE ON7VZ ON7VZ K
- ON7VZ DE F5XYZ F5XYZ K
- F5XYZ DE ON7VZ TU UR RST 599 NAME DAN QTH OLLIGNIES BK
- ON7VZ DE F5XYZ R TU 599 NAME PIERRE QTH NICE
- QSL? K
- QSL TU 73 SK

Free translation: general call, reply, exchange of reports/names/QTH, confirmation, greetings.

4. Examples of real QSOs in phone:

- ON7VZ from DL5XYZ, your QTH please ?
- My QTH is Ollignies, Belgium. QSL ?

5. To avoid

- **Overloading with Q code in phone** : «QSL my QTH ?» sounds pedantic in SSB. Use natural language: «Did you copy my QTH ?»
- **Confusing QRM and QRN** : QRM = interference from other stations or electronic interference, QRN = atmospheric noise (storms, static).
- **QRZ for «repeat»** : this is a common false friend. QRZ means «who is calling me ?», not «repeat». For a repeat, use «please repeat» or «again» in phone, «AGN» in CW.

6. The Q code in every sauce

It is also common to use Q codes in phone conversations while diverting them somewhat from their original meaning. Here are a few examples with a context sentence.

- QRL also means work. Example: «we can get in touch after the QRL» means «we get in touch after I get home from work».
- QRA means home. Example «if you want me to look at your circuit, you can drop by the QRA» means «if you want me to look at your circuit, you can drop by my place».
- QSY also means physical travel. Example «Tomorrow I'm doing a QSY to Namur to meet some OMs» means «Tomorrow I'm travelling to Namur to meet some OMs».
- QRK and QSA are often replaced in practice by the RST (Readability / Strength / Tone). Example «Report 59» in phone or «RST 599» in CW.
- QRT is also used in the informal context during a QSO. Example «73's to you, I'm going QRT».
- QRO is also used informally for greetings. Example «73' QRO to all» means «big greetings to you all».
- QRP = «low power» : this has become a usage by extension. Officially, QRP means «decrease power». The QRP community uses the code in its broader sense without

anyone taking offence, to let correspondents know that the station is transmitting at reduced power. Example «CQ from ON2XYZ QRP Station».

- But QRP can also sometimes designate the child of the OM or YL, when making a QSO with a French-speaking ham.

You will learn many diversions of the code through the QSOs you will practise.

7. The Q code in digital modes

FT8 and FT4 do not use the Q code (the messages are too short), but in JS8Call, RTTY or PSK31, the Q codes come back in force — abbreviation obliges.

Going further

The complete list of the amateur Q code is defined by the **ITU-R Recommendation M.1172**. More than 80 codes exist, but 90 % of traffic is done with the 25 above. Master them, and you will read a CW QSO or understand a phone QSO without a dictionary.

Good codes — sorry, good QSOs.

In PDF annex, the official ITU-R Recommendation M.1172 from the ITU in English and French (official languages of the ITU).