

Meriden Amateur Radio Club, Inc.



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W1NRG



Motivating Amateur Radio Clubs to Open New Initiatives (MARCONI)

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Program 5: VE/FCC DIGITAL LICENSE SESSIONS

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Operational Guidelines

Statement of Program Purpose: To encourage and enable individuals of all ages to acquire an amateur radio license or upgrade an existing license by providing regularly scheduled VE/FCC licensing sessions throughout the year. New licensees should be offered the opportunity to join the Club sponsoring the VE/FCC session, thereby enhancing the likelihood that the successful candidate will acquire additional radio skills they would not otherwise have available to them if they were left on their own. Importantly, this makes it more likely the new ham will truly use their license and actually get OnAir. This process also strengthens the Club by providing it with an opportunity to increase its membership and improve member participation in this and other Club activities. Having a Club sponsor a VE/FCC License Session substantially improves the field of amateur radio, both for the examinee taking the test, and the Club sponsoring the session. Clubs whose membership and activity may have declined will likely find that these sessions can lead to a regrowth in Club membership and an increase in member activity.

Scope of a VE/FCC License Session Program: A VE/FCC License Session is administered by Licensed Amateur Radio individuals who have been certified to administer the tests for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Amateur Radio Licenses. These individuals are referred to as Volunteer Examiners (VEs).

They are working as designated administrators for the FCC. The Sessions must be in coordination with a Volunteer Examination Coordinator (VEC) i.e. The Amateur Radio Relay League (ARRL). The Meriden Amateur Radio Club (MARC) schedules testing sessions on a regular basis (2nd Saturday of every month at 0900 ET). The session requires a minimum of three VEs to administer and oversee the testing which must be done in coordination with the VEC. It is essential that the sponsoring Club hold regularly scheduled sessions that should be publicized. Knowing that a Club sponsoring a VE/FCC session can be depended upon to hold recurring sessions on a reliable basis, such as monthly, greatly enhances attendance at these sessions, once the news spreads by word of mouth and on social media.

Typical VE/FCC License Session Scenario (Case Study):

Note: While this was typical of a VE testing session at that time, current sessions are now digital.

MARC held a license testing session on a Saturday in January. Information on the upcoming test session had been posted on the ARRL website months earlier. This gave the location and time of the test and provided contact information for anyone wanting to sign up and provided a means for someone to ask any questions before the test. Walk-in applicants were also allowed for those who did not make an advance reservation.

On the date of the exam there were six VEs present (a minimum of three are required for testing) and five individuals taking the test. The test was distributed to the individuals. Upon completion of the examination each test was corrected on-site, by three VEs. The required paperwork was completed, and a copy of their Certification of Successful Completion of Examination was given to each individual who passed the test.

Four individuals took the test for Technician with three passing and one failing. One individual went on to take the General test which he passed. There was one individual who held a General Class license, and he took the Extra test and passed thereby upgrading to Amateur Extra Class license. Test results were forwarded to the ARRL in Newington which in turn forwarded the information electronically to the FCC. The FCC in turn contacted each individual who after paying the license fee, would be issued their new call sign or upgraded license.

Getting Started:

- Get certified as a VE. To participate in a VE/FCC Session, one must first pass a VE examination. The Volunteer Examiner Manual, which contains all the information a VE needs to know to pass the test, is available at the ARRL web site. It is best to employ a licensed Amateur Extra ham, since they are the only ones who can test those taking the Amateur Extra and the General tests. VEs with only a General Class license can only test those examinees taking the Technician test.
- Secure a location suitable for testing. Such a location should be indoors if the weather is inclement, well ventilated, with an adequate number of tables and chairs, adequate space allowing for room between test takers, heat and or air conditioning, and above all QUIET.
- Coordinate with the ARRL or your local VEC for permission to give tests. The ARRL is a VEC and employs dedicated staff who communicate with the FCC and coordinate VE/FCC sessions at Clubs and venues across the US.

Preparation for Setting Up a Digital VE/FCC License Session: Testing is now digital utilizing software provided by ExamTools.org. Examinations will no longer be on paper. VEs will need a computer and/or tablet to administer the test and must be registered on ExamTools.org and also approved by their local VEC (ARRL). Those taking the test will also need access to a computer and/or tablet to be able to take the exam. Although it is not mandatory, it is recommended that the administering club have available tablets dedicated for this purpose for use by those taking the test. Upcoming testing sessions should be posted on HamStudy.org where applicants can sign up for the test session.

Conducting VE/FCC License Session: Proper advance planning will make the session go smoothly. Ensure you will have a minimum of three VEs present that are registered on ExamTools.org. You can always have more. Ensure the location is available and conducive to test taking. Seating should allow enough space for individuals to be comfortable without crowding and have room for any materials they might need. I.e. pencils,

paper, calculators, etc. Have materials well organized before the session begins. Welcome the candidates as they arrive.

VE/FCC License Session Challenges: Proper planning will minimize challenges in holding VE/FCC license sessions. However, there is always the possibility of unforeseen circumstances occurring. It is the obligation of the VEs to accommodate individuals needing to overcome obstacles to enable them to take the test. Some examples may be:

- The candidate does not have an FCC Registration Number (FRN) when arriving. Having a computer and web access available at the VE/FCC session site, can enable them to obtain their FRN from the FCC website at the session.
- The candidate has not registered on HamStudy.org to take the test. This can be done at the session before testing begins.
- The candidate is less than 13 years of age. Parents must provide consent for children under 13 by completing and submitting a [COPPA Parental Consent Form](#) to the VE team during the licensing process. This can be done on-line.
- The candidate is vision impaired and cannot read the test questions. A VE may read the questions to them in a private area where they do not disturb other test takers. Three VEs must be in the area where they can observe.
- Physical Limitations: A VE may assist the candidate, if required, to complete the exam.

VE/FCC License Session Costs: Costs are minimal for the candidate. They are charged a fee of \$15.00 to take the test. Costs for Clubs may vary. Clubs may wish to purchase tablets for candidates use. This is strongly recommended to avoid problems with candidate's personal computers. These can be donated or funds may be obtained through grants. Currently, there is also an FCC license issue fee in the amount of \$35.00 which the candidate pays directly to the FCC.

VE/FCC License Session Rewards: Individuals passing the exams are rewarded with the beginning of what can be a life-long hobby. Clubs sponsoring the tests may be rewarded by gaining new members. Have Club information available to give to the individuals and invite them to visit your Club. We provide a packet of information after our Club's VE/FCC Session. All examinees receive a handout about RF safety and FCC rules regarding RF exposure before the exams. At the conclusion of their exam each new successful examinee receives a congratulatory hand out which explains the next steps to obtain their call sign along with a list of helpful web resources, an ARRL Band Plan, a phonetic alphabet table, a recommendation to join a Club, and our Club membership application including a second-year free membership if they do join. All examinees, both new and upgraded, receive an additional packet with information about our Club with more details about who we are and our activities. We include an 'Activities Table' showing all of our Club activities and nets for each day of the week along with a list of our year's activities. Finally, we provide a tour of the facility including the radio room that is available to all of our members. Show a genuine interest in the examinee's successful completion of the test, and you may just be rewarded with a new Club member. If an examinee fails, encourage him/her to retake the exam or give them tips on how to study more effectively. Never ignore them or just say "tough luck", or "better luck next time." Offer to provide an Elmer to help them pass the next examination.

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MARCONI PROGRAM

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