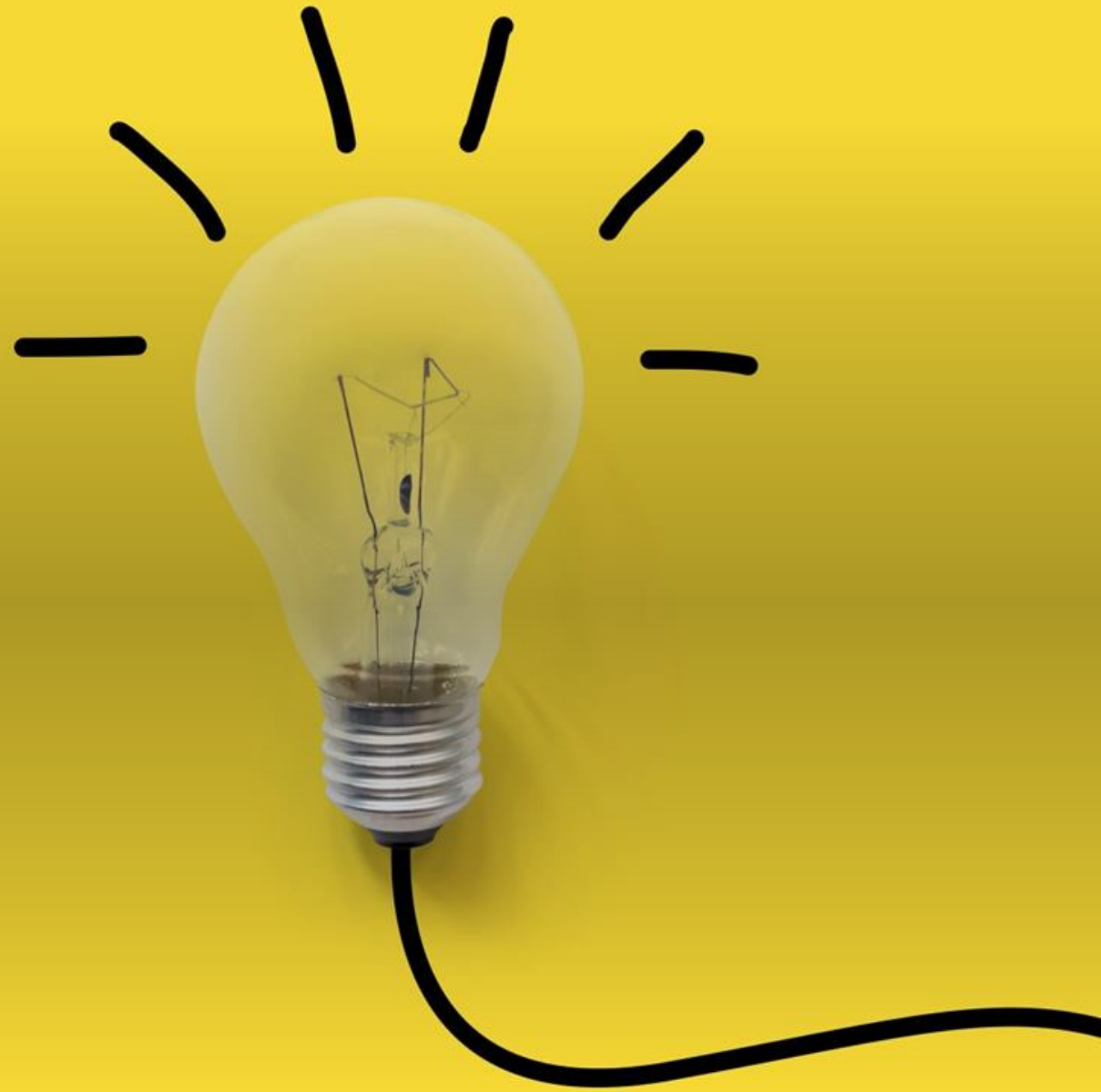


Thinking About Learning Morse Code?

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Brief History of Morse Code



- The first commercial Morse Code message was sent via wires on **May 24, 1844**, almost 176 years ago! (UK experimented with wired Morse in 1841).
- What we call "Morse Code" today is actually "International Morse Code" as defined by the ITU (Samuel Morse used "American Morse" back in the 1800's)
- In April of 2000, the requirement for Morse Code proficiency was reduced to 5 WPM for all license classes, then eliminated entirely in February of 2007.
- Old Timers predicted the death of Amateur Radio, and of course they were wrong. There are more hams today than ever before. They also predicted the death of CW. Also wrong! After a dip in sales for a few years, vendors of CW related items have reported record sales & interest.

Why Learn Morse Code?

After obtaining General Class privileges, the gateway to global communication via HF, learning Morse Code unlocks many new and exciting opportunities:

- CW will get through where other modes fail (superior signal to noise ration)
- QRP – simple, low cost, CW-only radios are easy to build and fun to operate on batteries.
- CW is often the mode of choice for DX chasers. It's often easier to contact a rare one on CW than SSB
- CW (and digital) are the only modes available on the 30 Meter band

How NOT to learn Morse Code

- QST was FULL of “Learn Morse Code Quick” teaching systems in the 60’s and 70’s. Most were based on some sort of visual clue. I can remember ads like “Hear dot-dash-dot, that looks like a Race Car – that’s the letter R, easy right?”
- Some decided to use musical clues as a memory aid
- There are still people hawking programs that use memory mnemonics like “when you hear dah-dit-dit, think “Dog Did It”.

These are **NOT** the way to learn the code. Morse Code is an auditory experience. Converting it to anything else makes it harder for your brain to associate the sound with the letter. Honestly that big visual aid isn’t the right way either – Morse Code is NOT visual

So what IS the best way to learn the code?

How to “properly” learn Morse Code

- Embrace the idea that Morse Code is an **auditory experience**. Use proven methods to convert the sound you hear to the letters you write or type (or keep track of in your head) without involving any unnecessary middle mnemonics.
- The military and others spent lots of time & money investigating how to train their CW operators. Two things came out of those studies
 - **Koch** – reduced sets of characters, increased over time, learned at desired speed (like 18 or 20 WPM)
 - **Farnsworth** – sending characters at high speed with greater spacing

For your Smart Devices

- “CW Trainer (\$3) on Android (phones, tablets – Amazon Fire) – probably the best tool I’ve seen. Even allows the user to pick the audio tone, if it is a pure sine wave, or harmonic rich, and to properly shape the sidetone to avoid “clicks”. It fully (and intuitively) supports Farnsworth and Koch methods. Can send letter groups, call signs, words, or custom text.”
- “Ham Morse” (\$5) on iPhone. Very good tool, supports Farnsworth and Koch methods, has letter, call signs, words, QSOs and even news stories. Somewhat less intuitive interface than the Android App above
- And MANY more (often more of a typing test than a Morse Code test, and frequently setup as a game

Some online resources

- <http://www.justlearnmorsecode.com/> (Free Windows Download)
- <https://cwops.org/> (Morse Code Society – paid membership, some tools)
- <https://www.fistsna.org/> (Another society)
- <http://www.arrl.org/learning-morse-code> (CDs, audio files)

On Air

- W1AW CW Practice (9 AM Tue-Fri) (4 PM, 7 PM, 10 PM Mon-Fri) on 1.8024, 3.5815, 7.0475 MHz
- W1AW CW Bulletins (18 WPM) (2 PM, 8 PM, 11 PM, Mon-Fri)
- Contests!
- Dxing!
- And our fellow ham buddies on air!