

## ARRL Outgoing QSL Bureau

I have gotten a couple of questions about QSLs – Does anyone send paper QSL cards anymore? Isn't it very expensive to send cards to non-US stations? It may be time to discuss the ARRL QSL bureau. There are two parts, the outgoing and incoming bureau. For this edition, we will address the outgoing bureau. Next week, we can discuss the incoming bureau.

There are a couple of reasons to collect QSL cards. There are a few awards that are not linked with LoTW, there are some hams who don't use LoTW but will confirm via a paper card, there are some beautiful and creative QSL cards to be seen, and there is a tradition of exchanging cards. My first "DX" was with VE3FGO and I still have that card from 1970!

The information that is typically on a QSL card is both callsigns, the location of the station you are confirming as shown in the DXCC Entity list, the date and time (ALWAYS use UTC time), the frequency, and the mode used. The signal report is NOT required, but, is usually included. It is also helpful if the QSL displays the ITU and CQ Zones, grid square designation, and the US county. Most hams now include club affiliations and their email address as well. All this information, along with a bit of personalization, can fit on a standard 3.5" by 5.5" card. Many hams put their location information and callsign on the front and the QSO information on the back. If you are handwriting information on the card and you make a mistake, throw the card out and start over. The station receiving the card may not be able to use what appears to be an "altered" QSL card.

There are several advantages to using the ARRL Outgoing QSL Bureau including a good percentage of returned cards, least expensive, and it can be used to send to foreign QSL managers. The disadvantages are that the bureau is not used by all DXers and it takes time. I have gotten cards for QSOs that were older than 5 years! I am hearing from some of the bureau volunteers that the volume of QSL cards processed has increased dramatically due largely to the use of FT8 by so many hams. More QSOs more QSLs!



*Figure 1 ARRL Outgoing QSL Bureau*

The basic concept is that you bundle up your cards and send them to the ARRL. The cards are then sorted by entity and then, at some predetermined time interval, sent to the remote QSL bureaus.

Of course, there are rules that you need to follow so that the ARRL Outgoing QSL Bureau can process the cards and get them added to the shipments to foreign QSL bureaus. (More details can be found at <http://www.arrl.org/outgoing-qsl-service> .)

I want to highlight a few critical points in this process:

- Send larger packages of card to the bureau. I usually send a hundred or so quarterly. At a minimum, I send a package yearly.
- Write the recipients call sign on the back of the card, use upper-left hand side; and flip cards forward facing the same direction. Business side up with no blank sides facing forward. This allows the sorter to quickly determine where the card needs to be sent without reading the front of the card. For instance, if 6Y1V uses OH3RB as the QSL manager, you would put OH3RB on the back-left hand side of the card along the edge. Print this CLEARLY!
- Sort cards in alphabetical order according to parent and alternate prefixes. This is important for slotting the cards and eliminates returns because cards went to the wrong bureau. Keep all country prefixes together. Example: The prefix 2E belong to England so these cards will go with your G cards for England. The prefix TM is for France, so these cards will go with your F cards.
- Do not separate the cards with slips of paper, rubber bands, etc. This only slows down handling of the cards.

When you prepare the package for the bureau, you must include:

- Proof of ARRL Membership
- Fees & Payment – There is a charge for this service that covers shipping costs. The charge is a \$7 QSL Bureau fee and \$1.15 per ounce. For example, a package containing 1.5 pounds of cards — 24 ounces, or about 225 cards — will cost \$34.60. Please see the information below for additional pricing details. The minimum charge is \$8.15 for one ounce or less. The same 200+ cards sent with an air mail stamp alone would cost \$106 not counting return postage or the envelope. Quite the bargain!
- Pay by check or money order with your callsign written on the check. I include an SASE that the volunteers will put in the mail to let you know that the cards were received.
- Put all of this together (QSL Cards, Proof of Membership, Fee, and an SASE if desired) and ship it to:

ARRL Outgoing QSL Service  
225 Main Street  
Newington, CT 06111-1494