

Five Ways To Improve Your MiQP Score

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Here are five suggestions which may improve your score in the Michigan QSO Party (MiQP). Most of these are common sense when you think about it, but after nine years of checking MiQP log entries, I've often seen entrants missing one or more. Take these for what they're worth and factor the strategies into your operating plan and your MiQP score will likely improve.

1. Operate The Entire Contest Period – MiQP is short enough (it's only twelve hours long) that there are no typical "slow times" or lulls in activity. As a result, in general any time that you miss on the air results in points that you miss in your score. So the first goal is to clear out the twelve hour contest period, the timing of which (noon to midnight) was chosen by the sponsors to make it easy to do. First of all, get any chores or responsibilities taken care of ahead of time, and ask your family to not disturb you during the contest. Second, plan any breaks for meals or bathroom trips to be as short as possible, then get back to the radio quickly.

For multi-op stations, make a schedule for your operating team and ask your operators to commit to keeping it. While respecting individual preferences, plan to rotate your operators. It is easier to focus and "push" for a short time at the mic or key, and putting a "fresh" operator in the chair will keep the rate high and prevent operator burnout.

2. Operate Both Phone and CW – Many people prefer operating one mode or the other. However, when the contacts start coming slowly and you think you've worked everybody, switching to the "other" mode will often provide a fresh batch of stations to work. Perhaps more importantly, because multipliers are counted on each mode separately, spending time on both modes generally results in a better overall multiplier count. While a 50/50 split of CW-to-phone QSOs might be ideal, most of the serious, full-time MiQP scores are about 2:1 in favor of phone.

For multi-op stations, know the preferences of your operators and try to attract both CW and phone operators to be on your team.

3. Keep Track of The Multipliers You've Worked – If you're logging on a computer, most contesting programs count and provide a display of the multipliers you've worked. If logging on paper, use the multiplier sheet available from the "Downloads" section of the MiQP web site. It is important to maximize the number of multipliers worked. To help do this, adjust where you're operating to increase your opportunity to encounter new multipliers. If one mode is low on mults versus the other mode, spend more time on the mode with the low count. It is also important to know "what" you've worked - if you've worked a lot of Michigan counties, but not many out-of-state entities (or vice versa), switch to a band with better propagation to the deficient area. Also, if you work a station who you need on the "other" mode for a multiplier, it never hurts to ask the station if they'll QSY to the other mode for you.

4. Watch For The Mobiles – MiQP has excellent activity from mobile stations, which often provide the only activity from sparsely-populated counties (and thus the only way to get the multiplier). However, they're usually only in the county for a short time before they move on to the next one. Because of this, mobile stations tend to focus on calling CQ, so you typically have to go find them. If you're tuning around the band working stations, you'll probably encounter the mobiles easily enough. However, if you're having a lot of success calling CQ, every half hour or so you might consider pausing for a few minutes to tune around the MiQP frequencies (both modes) on the best band for propagation to the mobiles from your QTH.
5. Call CQ – If you're a Michigan station, MiQP is all about you so don't hesitate to call CQ. If you're a non-Michigan station, you can call "CQ Michigan" but be realistic in your expectations. For the Michigan station, it's all about advertising the fact that you're in Michigan. On phone, you might say your county name as part of your CQ. On CW, you might occasionally add your county abbreviation as a portable identifier.

Many small stations are reluctant to call CQ, perhaps because they don't believe it will work for them. But experience has shown that even a QRP station can get answers to CQs in MiQP – perhaps not all the time, but if band conditions are favorable and you have a reasonable antenna (say, some sort of a dipole), just about any Michigan station can get answers to CQs in MiQP. If conditions on a band seem good and you can find a clear frequency, let fly with a CQ. Generally, I've found a 2 x 2 CQ to work best – for example "CQ Contest CQ Contest from K8MQP, Kilo Eight Mike Quebec Papa, Contest" or the CW equivalent. Also, your CQing will be more successful if you can make the resulting QSOs quickly, so that any other callers won't have to wait long. Unless conditions are really poor, quickly give the information just once – for example, "K8MQP, you're number sixty-eight in Saginaw County, over". On CW, use the fastest sending speed which you are comfortable with.

Applying these strategies will almost certainly improve your MiQP score. We'll see you in the next contest!