

Straight Key Century Club (SKCC)
Canadian Straight Key Month (CSKM)
2026 Operating Guide ~ English Version 20260830

For the month of September, SKCC will celebrate Canada on the air with the music of manually-timed morse code. CSKM hunters can not only receive QSL cards, but also work toward a special certificate for contacting 6 or more call areas, earn bragging rights for sweeps and by collecting band-slots, and take further steps toward their Canadian Maple, DXQ, DXC, and Prefix awards, not to mention QRP, TKA, and other awards. Operators can be propelled toward their CTS and other awards as well; many CSKM operators double the fun with xOTA activations. All in all, the more activity we can generate the better, and that means it is the job of the CSKM coordinators to help the operators generate more activity and have fun doing so.

Hence this guide!

The following are all the steps you can take in a “maximalist” approach. But, only two steps are actually required “rules”: sending “/CSKM” during your SKCC exchange (section 5) and sending your log to CSKM@skccgroup.com (section 6). Otherwise, you can operate as much or little, as seriously or casually, as you’d like.

1. A few things to note

- CSKM operators are required to use straight keys, sideswipers, and bugs, or other keys as exempted or approved by the SKCC Board.
- Amateur bands from 160m to 6m—*except for 60m*—for which you have operating privileges for CW transmission can be used.
- All CSKM operators *use their own callsigns*; there is no special event callsign in 2026. If you are operating outside of your callsign’s call area, or if you are operating under a foreign call sign, do add the region specifier (e.g., VA6VIV/VY0 and W7VC/VE5).
- We now have only one CSKM coordinator email: **CSKM@skccgroup.com**. Emails sent to this address will be forwarded to all coordinators, and whichever coordinator gets to your email first will reply to you first. You are welcome to contact individual, specific coordinator(s) as you please, for any reason, but this may result in longer response time for things like scheduling and log submission.
- For 2026, “rare entities” pretty much means anywhere but Ontario. Hopefully, this will change quickly. Still, if you are not operating from Ontario, please advertise your plans early and often. If you are operating from Ontario, please advertise your plans early and often; otherwise, you may well become a “rare entity”!

2. Make Plans and Preparations

Optional, but such a good idea!

- Email CSKM@skccgroup.com to let the coordinators know that you plan to operate for CSKM this year. This will put you on the mailing list for updates, tips, and information about operator perks.
- If you will be operating when/where internet access is spotty or nonexistent, or if your rig is far away from your device with internet access, also email CSKM@skccgroup.com ahead of time. The coordinators can find a way to spot you as you operate.
- Choose a few time slots that will not impinge on your life, and will allow you to make a decent number of QSOs, given band conditions, people's bed time, other SKCC events, etc. Yes, CSKM is in effect during SSS, WES, and SKSs! Email CSKM@skccgroup.com your operating plans; you can be vague and flexible or very specific and firm. Dates and time should ideally be specified in UTC, but the coordinators can math.
- Typical special event "shifts" are scheduled in 1 hour increments, but you can schedule for any length. And, you are not bound by your plans; you can start or end early or late as you see fit, or hop on anytime on a whim.
- Some operators prefer to start a separate log file for each of their CSKM shifts. Some operators prefer to log on their regular "master" log, and then export each shift. All are welcome, but it would be best if the logs are sent in within a day of operating, which means some preparations may be needed ahead of time.
- Check your rigs, amps, antennae, computers, rotators, and keys! They have a nasty habit of gumming up during a big pile-up. If you have a tube linear that requires periodic gettering, or if you are trying out a new rig or key or logger, give them a whirl ahead of time.
- Let your family and pets know you will be indisposed. Friends and relatives who often drop by unannounced may subconsciously decide to visit you when you specifically said you are unavailable; well, time to master the art of ignoring the doorbell...

3. Advertise

Optional, but essential for a busy, productive shift.

- Again, email CSKM@skccgroup.com to alert the coordinators of your plans. If there is enough time ahead, the coordinators will use all sorts of aggressive... ummm... dynamic... yeah... strategies to generate more interest for your shift. For rare entities and rare bands, there will be staggering amounts of hype.

- If you are planning to operate at an especially interesting location—POTA, SOTA, IOTA, museum ships and other places with cool QSL cards, CQ Zone 2, in a hotel room with a magloop during a thunderstorm—or a rare band—pretty much anything but 20m and 40m—be sure to advertise it on groups.io and/or Sked. For 80m and 160m, depending on your QTH, it is a question of who will stay up late or wake up early to catch you; the longer notice the hunters get, the more likely they will show up. Ask the coordinators to help spot you if your internet access is iffy while operating, or if you are having trouble with Sked or groups.io.
- In everything you do to advertise your upcoming shift, mention “CSKM”. It will get the hunters’ attention. On Groups.io, there is a “#CSKM” hashtag. On Sked, there is a new feature, Watch Alerts, that can be set up to spot CSKM messages.
- On sked.skccgroup.com, post a message under the “Everyone” tab about 10-30 minutes ahead of your shift. This is done by logging in, then typing in the message box below, and then hitting return/enter. A typical message looks like this:

***** CSKM 1300Z-1400Z NL *****

You can also advertise your frequency.

===== CSKM/BC 14050 =====

Or special rigs you are using; people will want to hear what you sound like, especially if you are nice and chirpy and/or super QRP!

***** CSKM MB 14057 Collins AN/PRC-47 *****

+++++ CSKM 7055 /NB Rock-bound Homebrew 1W! +++++

You can edit your message by clicking on the “edit” link.

- On sked.skccgroup.com, make sure you go “active”, by clicking on the “go active” button, and post a status by typing in the box in the upper-right-hand corner and then hitting return/enter.

CSKM 14050 NU

If you are a brand-new Centurion, Tribune, or Senator, or if you are on a Centurion Run or Senate Run, be sure to mention it in your status.

CSKM NS 3553 New member 65/100 toward “C”

CSKM 1810 New T in YT (Yes, it rhymes!)

CSKM PE 7118 Senate Run 178/200 Tx8 2026-07-01

- If you are getting bumped off your frequency, post your QSY on Sked.
- You can use emojis to punch up your message, both under “Everyone” and in the status box. Go to an emoji-listing site, copy, and paste.
- Clicking on “Go Active” and then “Go Inactive” will make your status box blink in red; this is a good way to get the hunters’ attention for a QSY or if you know people gave up on trying to get you during a pile-up.
- At any time, if you see that Sked is busy, go ahead and advertise an upcoming rare region/band activation.

=OMG=OMG=OMG= CSKM CY9 activation 26-09-21 2000Z-2200Z =OMG=OMG=OMG=

QST*QST CSKM/ON 160m tonite 3-Sep 0400Z-0600Z. Stay up! **QST*QST**

4. Call CQ

or take Sked requests or answer someone else’s CQ...
whatever it takes to start a QSO!

- Before your shift begins, make sure you are not hungry or thirsty. Visit the bathroom, and make sure children and pets, if any, are not on the verge of needing something urgently.
- Find a clear frequency by checking Sked, with careful listening, and by using tools such as:

https://dxcluster.ha8tk.s.hu/rbn_ct1boh/

A frequency may sound clear to you, but there may be a strong station somewhere that you can’t hear and nevertheless is obscuring your signal. Don’t forget the SKCC calling frequencies around xx114 if the band is busy; posting on Sked will ensure that people will find you there.

- Don’t forget to “QRL?” at least twice; while you are waiting for a response is a good time to post your frequency on Sked.
- Recommended CQ formats are something like:

CQ CQ CSKM de VA3FRL VA3FRL CSKM

CQ CQ CQ CSKM de VA6VIV VA6VIV CSKM/AB

CQ CQ CSKM de VA6VIV/VE5 VA6VIV/VE5 CSKM

“CQ SKCC” is not recommended, because that may discourage non-members from contacting you. CSKM is as much an advertisement for SKCC as it is a service for SKCC members, so we want those non-members.

- If you are open to requests, go ahead and advertise it on your Sked status:

CSKM/QC taking requests 80m 40m 30m

- And don't be shy to answer another SKCC member's—or anyone's—CQ! What a pleasant surprise it will be for them to get that coveted “/CSKM” in the exchange!
- If you are giving up on a band, or done for the day, post that on Sked as well. Often, this refreshes people's attention, and you may get a last-minute call.

***** CSKM YT Moving to 30m *****

***** CSKM QRT TU QSOs = back tomorrow 2026-09-13 0000Z *****

- If you see another CSKM operator who is being neglected, you can shill for them, too.

Spot: CSKM VE9DCD NB Denis CQing on 18081, not busy, 599 in NT

5. The CSKM Exchange

Well, obviously... not optional!

- *This is the easy part.* Send “/CSKM” after your name during a standard SKCC exchange:

W7VC 54N AB BILL/CSKM 20930S BK

If you are reading the hunter at 339 or less and/or the hunter is sending QRS, repetition is a good idea.

W7VC 22N 22N AB AB BILL BILL/CSKM 20930S 20930S BK

Prefer to be long-winded? No problem!

W7VC W7VC DE VA6VIV TNX FER CALL JORDAN = GUD CU = UR 5NN 599 AB AB
BILL BILL /CSKM SKCC NR 20930S 20930S MY KEY IS SS = HW CPI? BK

If the hunter is not a member, or if you are not sure, be sure to include “SKCC NR” before your NR. This helps advertise SKCC, as you may then get someone asking:

BK WHAT IS CSKM? SKCC? BK

So, prepare an answer you can send.

BK CSKM IS SKCC CANADIAN STRAIGHT KEY MONTH SPECIAL EVENT = PSE SEE
SKCCGROUP.COM SKCCGROUP.COM BK

- At any point during the month of September, you are having an SKCC QSO, whether you called the CQ or someone tail-ended you or you answered someone's CQ or you're chatting with a friend or a neighbor or a raccoon—a *licensed* raccoon, one presumes—just throw in that /CSKM. Make their day. As long as you send in your log, they will get the credit.
- And no problem if you are hoping for a ragchew. Generally, though, if you'd like to ragchew, you should say so on your status, so that people who are not prepared to ragchew—folks who are shy about their head copy ability, for instance—leave you alone. Still, don't be surprised if someone approaches you on the air or on Sked and wants a quick CSKM exchange.
- The hunter does *not* have to be an SKCC member. Some SKCC members will not send their number, by accident, because they forgot their number, or because they are not using an SKCC-approved key. They do not even need to send you their name, QTH/SPC, or "none" for the QSO to count for CSKM. If you have their call and RST, and you've sent *your own* full SKCC/CSKM exchange, it counts! As long as you send in your log, they will get the credit.

Important: If the hunter did not send you a complete SKCC exchange or you could not hear it, obviously, this exchange does *not* count toward any of the SKCC awards *for you*, even as it counts for CSKM. You will need to notate it somehow—by saying "incomplete" or "XXX" in the comments, for instance—so that you can delete the entry or relevant fields in the log—after you've sent it to CSKM@skccgroup.com, of course!—and make sure it does not get sent in with your SKCC award application. If the hunter is a member and you need or want their NR, just ask for it:

BK SKCC NR NR ? BK

and don't be surprised if you hear back:

BK SRI HR PADDLE BK

- If you can only operate QRP, prefer to operate QRP, or are working toward a QRP award, QRP is more than welcome. Advertising that you are QRP on Sked may in fact attract more hunters, some even QRP themselves. Otherwise, QRO and, if possible, QRO+ is encouraged, to maximize the reach of CSKM. Make it easy for the hunters!

- QRS or QRQ? Up to you. Most hunters will match the operator's speed, and most operators will match the hunter's speed. Whatever speed you feel comfortable with and whatever speed you believe will help make the QSO happen. If you can do any speed, medium-speed CQs are likely best, so QRS hunters are not intimidated, and so QRQ hunters do not slow down for you too much; then you match the speed of the call, and then you match the speed of their exchange. Make it easy for the hunters!
- There is no penalty or problem for dups. If you have a hunter coming back to you, go ahead and QSO with them again. They may have a good reason for trying you again —lost their log entry, typed it in wrong, pursuing different awards with different rigs, xOTA activation this time around, etc.—so there is no harm in that. Obviously, you can make it quick or prioritize others if you have a pile-up.

6. Send in your log!

Also not optional... but flexible!

- The preferred format for a submitted log is an ADIF file, emailed to the coordinators at CSKM@skccgroup.com.
- The preferred file name format for the ADIF file is, for the first submitted log:

VE3-VA3FRL-0N-01.adi

then:

VE3-VA3FRL-0N-02.adi

And so forth. You can see that we want to absolutely make sure we have your QTH/SPC correct. If you use this exact format, which the log uploading software system filter procedure thingie requires, it will make the coordinators' life much, much easier. (TNX!)

- The SKCCLogger is strongly recommended, as its native file format is ADIF, and it has many useful features built-in, such as membership look up in the log entry window, SKCC award application generator, and a skimmer that also spots from Sked. See:

<https://github.com/K7MJG/SKCCLogger-releases>

- But, any logging mechanism can be used. If you have a logger that does not easily export to ADIF, or you prefer paper logs and/or are struggling with an electronic logger, send us what you can, and we'll do our best to make it work. We can fix your filename and make other corrections and conversions as needed. If you have an especially sticky situation—or a literally sticky situation—drop us a line at CSKM@skccgroup.com, and we will help you figure it out.

- The coordinators prefer to get a log whenever a shift ends. If you are having QSOs here and there throughout the day, you can send in a log for the whole day. One log for the whole week is better than no log at all! Still, timely arrival of the logs keeps the hunters happy—keeps them from getting anxious—and keeps the coordinators' mailboxes free of logcheck requests.
- Each log entry should have at minimum: QSO date, QSO time on, RST sent, RST received, band, and, of course, the other operator's call. Standard stuff.
- Your QTH/SPC is needed for proper credit, but we can guess it from your callsign or, ahem, the ADIF file name.
- If there is an inaccurate entry—a typo, clock was wrong, rig interface problem, etc.—do your best to correct them and/or let us know. Some errors can be ignored, and, if needed, we can contact the hunter(s) or ask for help on Facebook and groups.io to reconstruct the information.
- **Important:** Believe it or not, the coordinators screw up the log uploading process quite often! Keep a running tally of your CSKM QSOs. Each time you send in your log, and once you get a reply from a coordinator that it has been uploaded, check the QSO count that shows up on the CSKM page under:

Results => Station Statistics

And let us know if there are any discrepancies.

- If you get any logcheck requests from a hunter, you can handle it yourself, or you can simply forward the message to CSKM@skccgroup.com. It's what the coordinators do.

7. Other ways to help CSKM succeed

Your contribution to CSKM does not end with your CSKM shift!

- Recruit more CSKM operators! Elmer them. Encourage them. Get your contesters friends and xOTA friends to join SKCC.
- Tell others at your local club or gatherings about CSKM. Anyone can work CSKM stations and receive a QSL card, win the certificate, collect band-slots, etc. And, we can always use more operators; signing up to be an SKCC member is quick, easy, and free. Help put your region on the air!
- Need to travel? Consider taking a rig-and-antenna with you, especially if you are going to another call area. Heard that an SKCC member is coming to visit your area? Offer to let them use your station.

- If you get a request for a QSL card or email, you can follow your own QSL policy. If you normally do not reply to QSLs, please consider at least replying with a note or email thanking them for participating in CSKM and letting them know they can request a CSKM QSL card via the SKCC bureau. Uploads to LoTW and other electronic QSLs are up to you, under your own callsign; SKCC will not be doing any electronic QSL uploads.
- As the month rolls along, the number of QSOs will drop off. Still, there will be plenty of hunters hungry for new operators and new band-area slots till the end of the month. There are hunters who do not join CSKM until it is well underway, and plenty who do not hear or remember about it until near the end, despite all the hype. Plan ahead to make things interesting for the hunters, such as xOTA, bands you haven't tried, hours you don't usually operate, etc. The point is to keep Canada on the air all month long!
- Some day, we'll be able to schedule operators for every (reasonable) hour of CSKM!

And most of all, Have Fun!

Well, one can imagine, this is indeed optional... Or, is it?