

The APP TRAP: How Getting "Addicted" to HamStudy Got Me What I Wanted

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It's just past six in the morning. I'm hunched over a bowl of oatmeal at the kitchen counter, spoon in one hand, phone in the other. I tap the mini antenna icon, and the HamStudy app pulses to life.

I select the Amateur Extra link. A glance at the clock over the pantry door tells me I have just enough time for another practice test. I breeze through the first eight questions. Then, I hit number nine: "*Which of the following describes an optical shaft encoder?*" I know this one, but I can't remember the answer. I scan through the answers until I spot it: "Patterned wheel." That's the one. "A light source with a patterned wheel." I don't understand the question or the answer as much as I would like, but I'm certain about my choice.

I've been studying for almost two months now and have been through what feels like a hundred tests at this point. I think I've seen this question at least a dozen times; every time I get it wrong, the HamStudy app cycles it back into the rotation. It's what I love about this program. As I pass question thirty-five, my pulse slows. I can miss twelve out of fifty questions and still get a passing grade. By my count, I've only missed a couple so far.

I blame my husband (N1KLM) for this obsession. He'd wanted his ham license since college, back when the FCC still required Morse code. Since the [testing requirements changed in 2007](#), he finally dove back in. In 2025, he blew through his Technician, General, and Extra exams in rapid succession.

Soon after he passed his General license exam, packages containing various odds and ends began arriving at our door. I started asking questions, and he answered using words I did not understand: Vector network analyzer, toroids, ferrets, as in (?)... no, *ferrite* beads, something about a dipole, and did he say counterpoise? We are a "play together, work together" couple, so I was happy to help him build something called a "ham shack," which it turns out has nothing to do with a shack, in the closet in his office.

Next on the list was the antenna. We live in an HOA community, so he had to be creative. He wanted to put up a 40-meter End-Fed Half-Wave antenna, with a loading coil to make it 80-meters. "End" what? I pitched in and helped him wind copper around a piece of PVC to make a loading coil, then snip pieces off the antenna until the SWR dips were in the right places. I'll admit, I was still concerned about the coax cable strung across my yard, until I watched his ICOM 7300 crackle to life. Did we really just do that?

Despite my lukewarm reception to his new hobby, I decided I would at least make an attempt to learn more about it. So, when the local Ham Radio club offered a Technician course, I signed up. I was only a few weeks into my Technician course when I asked my husband if he thought I could pass the Extra exam. He looked at me with a knowing smirk. "Maybe," he said. *Wasn't I*

only planning to get my feet wet? I guess we both knew then that I was about to use this hobby as a personal challenge.

The material in the Ham Radio School Technician License Course reminded me of my Physical Science class in 8th grade. I enjoyed that class and it seemed like this course was pulling from a lot of the same elements. When I was halfway through the course, my husband told me to download the HamStudy app and start taking practice tests. I failed my first test, but I hadn't finished the course, so I kind of expected to fail. The Study Mode link was more my speed. It doled out one question at a time. Whenever I got a question wrong, the information tab provided me with a full explanation. A good portion of the explanations also had useful hints. Running through questions on a daily basis became pretty addictive, and before I knew it, I had dumped my doom-scrolling habit for time on HamStudy.org.

Within a couple of weeks on the HamStudy app I was really starting to jam. I felt oddly confident, considering I still had a month to go before testing day. I felt so good, in fact, I wondered if I might go on and take the General exam.

“You think I can do it?” I asked my husband.
“Why not?”

Yeah, why not, I thought. What do I have to lose?

The next time I logged into the HamStudy app, I clicked on the General Study Mode. By this point I was getting pretty familiar with most of the technical jargon, but the context of the General exam questions was completely over my head. I kept going, working through the explanation tabs every time I guessed wrong, which was most of the time. Within a couple of days, I started to remember some of the answers. I was committed now.

There were moments when I still wasn't sure why I was doing any of this. The amount of information was almost overwhelming. I'm not an engineer. I don't have a background in any of this stuff. I started using word associations. If 'device' was in the question, I looked for 'device' in the answer. I pulled out keywords like 'below' to help me remember that it corresponded with 'decreasing.' And if I didn't like the hint, I made one up myself. But was this learning or was I just memorizing? I felt like I was cheating. Despite everything, my methods were working. At the end of each day, I racked up another few percentage points on my HamStudy competency score. Slowly but surely, I realized I was learning. I was starting to connect the dots.

I passed my Technician and my General license exams on the same day in December 2025. It was an awesome feeling. Before I let the proverbial ink dry on my license grant, I decided I was all in on the Extra license. I was determined not to let the knowledge I had gained go to waste. That's the advice everyone gives you and that was what I was going to do. The pool of questions on the Technician License exam is just over 400. That grows to 450 for the General License

exam. The pool of questions for the Extra exam is over 700. And a quick look at some of the questions let me know I was in the deep end of the pool this time around.

Other than being able to get on the same frequency bands as my husband, I didn't have a real reason to get my Extra license. That is, unless feeling intelligent is a reason, and that was a good enough reason for me. It was time to retreat and repeat. So, I went back to the online Ham Radio School program and logged back onto the HamStudy app.

In February 2026, I passed my Extra exam. In that moment, it felt really good to live in the *rarefied air* of an Extra, although I am fully aware that I don't understand a fraction of the stuff most Hams out there know. After all, this is a "learn as you go" type of hobby. I think most Hams would actually call it an "experiment as you go" kind of hobby. And that seems to be the fun of it.

Ham Radio Operators, at least the people I have gotten to know over the past couple of months, are a very intelligent bunch. They come from all walks of life, from the obvious electrical or mechanical engineering backgrounds to information technology, medicine, law, military, emergency management operations, and so on. Our local club has one member who stood on the mobile launch platform at NASA's Kennedy Space Center. These are pretty cool people. They are also some of the friendliest people I have ever met, who are excited to make new friends anywhere. It just might be part of their DNA. Tune into any of the Ham Radio frequencies and you will hear people from all over this country and all over the world making contacts with people they have never met before. Another thing I quickly found out is that they are more than eager to teach you anything you want to know and help you in any way they can.

I am not an engineer, I don't code, and although I loved Biology in high school, I hated chemistry and didn't even bother taking physics. Despite all that, I'm inquisitive by nature and a do-it-yourself type. Both are essential characteristics of a good Ham. I also love learning new stuff. That's how I made it through three tests.

So, if you're looking for a challenge that clears the brain fog of social media, fall into the "App Trap." Head over to [HamStudy.org](https://www.hamstudy.org) and see how far you can get. You might just find yourself hunched over a bowl of oatmeal at 6:00 AM, chasing a passing score.