



# VARAC

# GETTING STARTED

Created for the March 2026 LWRA QRP/Tailgate Tech

## What is VarAC?

VarAC is a free, Windows-based application that lets amateur radio operators do real-time, keyboard-to-keyboard chat and message passing over HF/VHF/UHF using the VARA modem/protocol.

You can send emails, vmails, play games over VarAC, communicate directly with hams real time on the keyboard, as well as transfer files and images. It even has an emcomm mode.

## What do I need to get started?

For our Tailgate Tech, we will be using 10 meters on VarAC. So, you're going to need:

- An HF radio with a sound interface (either internal or external)
- VARA HF - which can be downloaded at <https://downloads.winlink.org/> then select VARA Products, then select the latest version of VARA HF zip file. At the time of this article that was [VARA HF v4.9.0 setup.zip](#)
- VarAC - which can be downloaded at <https://www.varac-hamradio.com/>

Once you have downloaded both of those programs, you will want to install both of them. When both are installed, and you start VarAC, it will automatically load up your installed VARA HF program which it uses to communicate.

There is a short video on YouTube that will show you the configuration of VarAC and VARA HF at <https://youtu.be/L6ffdsHQYT1?si=0cKs9RAfkp0b7SkK>

## Tips for VarAC

- Although VarAC can be found across the bands, the most popular place to find and make contacts is on 20 meters (14.105), followed by the 40 meter band (7.105). For our QRP, we will be using the ten meter band (28.105).

- Tune your rig to 28.105 MHz USB and enable beacons.
- VarAC uses the VARA modem, which supports two main bandwidth modes: 500 Hz (narrowband, for weak signals and calling frequencies) and 2300 Hz (wideband, for faster transfers after QSY).
- The aforementioned statement of QSY means to select a slot (a nearby frequency) to have a QSO as the main frequency 28.105 is used for beacons or for VarAC to make a station calling CQ notification.
- When you call CQ, VarAC will ask you to select a slot to move to, and anyone wanting to respond to your CQ can elect to do so, and they will be moved to the slot you have chosen.
- Once you "connect" with a station, you can type back and forth with them, play a game, send a file or an image, or... if they have their stations setup as email/vmail gateways, send your messages through them.
- There is now a new BBS feature, as well as some AI functionality on some stations to explore.

## Where can I learn more about VarAC?

You can learn more about VarAC at <https://www.varac-hamradio.com/> They also have a VarAC Academy there if you'd like more advanced training.

They also have a Forum (Groups) available at <https://www.varac-hamradio.com/groups> where your individual questions will gain responses from experienced VarAC users.

VarAC is continually being updated! When I first looked at VarAC some years back, it was nowhere near what it is now.

You'll find VarAC to be more fulfilling when making your HF digital contacts than simply just exchanging signal reports.

TAILGATE TECH