

# Is it Ham Radio?

One of the recurring “issues” in the ham radio world is the question of whether technology is ham radio or not. It's often framed as a black and white question and loaded with moral and prescriptive tones.

My view is that (1) it's not black and white, and (2) the outcome only affects my own level of interest and doesn't say anything about what others should be doing. It also has nothing to do with the mode (FM, AM, SSB, Analog, Digital). Instead, it depends on how much dependencies the technology has on a bigger network like the internet. Here are a few examples to illustrate my point (there's many many more).

## Simplex and Repeaters



- To me, 2m simplex, stand-alone repeaters, and RF linked repeaters are close to 100% ham radio.
- I could nit pick and further sub-divide these in terms of how self-reliant they are (solar vs grid power for example), but that's a different axis.

## Echolink



Echolink starts muddying the water a bit.

- When someone uses their phone to connect to an Echolink node via the internet, which then connects to a repeater via RF, half of the conversation is via RF and the other half is over the internet.
- But when two people use their phones to send each other text messages or have a phone-to-phone

conversation, then Echolink acts just like any other internet chat app.

## IRLP



IRLP is a bit similar to Echolink but with more RF:

- When used to connect two (or more) repeaters together, most of the heavy work is via RF.
- But if someone has their own IRLP node at home and use it to connect to other repeaters, then it's a short step away from having an IRLP app on a phone that connects directly to the other repeater and do away with one of the radios.

## DMR



Finally, DMR can fall almost everywhere on this continuum.

- When used in simplex or via a stand-alone (or RF connected) repeater, there's little difference with FM (other than it needs to be registered using the internet, which could push it a bit to the right).
- When repeaters are linked together (via the internet), then it's close to IRLP.
- When when people use their own hotspots, then it's close to personal IRLP simplex nodes.
- Finally, there's an app called [DroidStar](#) (that I haven't tried yet), that allows access to the DMR network straight from an internet connected phone. It's not as bad as Echolink-to-Echolink conversations, but it's getting pretty close.

## Conclusion

Reasonable people can disagree where different technologies fall on the spectrum, but the points are that

- “Is it ham radio?”:
  - Is not a yes/no question.
  - Has nothing to do with whether something is digital or not (P2P packet is as far left as FM simplex to me).
  - And isn't prescriptive of what others should do.

It's also not a straight forward indicator of whether I'll be interested in something either. Currently, I'm not interested in investing hundreds of dollars into a DMR radio and hotspot, but I'll give the (free) DroidStar app a try (what have I got to lose?).