

# Day 2-7: Exploring the Mesh

Now that your node is online, spend the rest of your first week learning what the mesh can do and how to read what it is telling you. Each day below has a focused activity - nothing takes more than 15 - 20 minutes.

## Day 2: Send your first message

Open the [Meshtastic app](#) and tap the **Messages** tab. Select the primary channel (LongFast or whatever your community uses). Type a short greeting and send it. Your message will be received by every node on the same channel within radio range and hop count. Do not be discouraged if no one replies immediately - many nodes run headlessly without a human at the other end. The important thing is confirming your message is transmitted without error.

## Day 3: Browse the node list

Navigate to the **Nodes** tab. You will see a list of every node your network has heard recently, along with their last-heard time, distance (if both nodes have GPS), RSSI, and SNR. Note which nodes are nearby vs far away. Pay attention to whether you are hearing nodes directly (0 hops) or via relays (1, 2, or 3 hops). This gives you your first picture of the local mesh topology.

## Day 4: Try a direct message

Pick a node from the list that shows as recently heard and close by. Tap it, then tap **Direct Message**. Send a short message. Direct messages are addressed specifically to that node and encrypted separately from channel traffic. Note whether you receive an ACK (acknowledgement) - a checkmark or delivery indicator in the app. ACKs confirm the destination node received and processed your message, which is a stronger signal than just a broadcast going out.

## Day 5: Explore the map view

Switch to the **Map** tab. Zoom out progressively to see how many nodes are visible in your area, your city, your region. On a well-developed mesh, you may see dozens of nodes spread across a county or metro area. Tap individual nodes to see their details. The phone app map shows node positions without connection lines. On [meshmap.net](#), selecting a node may show lines indicating LoRa communication (these are not necessarily direct links). Either way, you are looking at a live picture of the community mesh you are now part of.

# Day 6: Check channel utilization

Check channel utilization in your node's device metrics (**Nodes** → **your node** → **Device Metrics**) or on the device's own screen. Healthy meshes run well below 25%. If you see utilization above that, your channel is congested - messages will increasingly collide and fail to deliver. Lightly-used community meshes typically sit at low single-digit percentages, so knowing your baseline now will help you notice if something goes wrong later.

# Day 7: Try the [range test module](#)

Enable the **Range Test** plugin in **Settings** → **Modules** → **Range Test**. Set it to transmit a short ping packet every 60 seconds. Then take your phone and node for a walk or drive around your neighborhood, monitoring the **Nodes** tab as you go. Watch how RSSI and SNR change as you move farther from infrastructure nodes. This gives you intuitive understanding of LoRa propagation characteristics - how buildings attenuate the signal, how elevation matters, and where the coverage edges are.

# Joining your local community

The mesh is more useful when you know who else is on it. Most regional mesh communities maintain a presence on Discord or Signal groups where members coordinate channel keys, share node placement tips, and help troubleshoot issues. The node map at [meshmap.net](https://meshmap.net) shows where other nodes are located and can help you spot active areas to find local groups. Reaching out introduces you to the people behind the nodes you have been hearing all week.

---

Revision #5

Created 2026-05-03 06:37:40 UTC by Mesh America Admin

Updated 2026-06-08 19:55:11 UTC by Mesh America Admin