

# How To Prepare For Your Checkride

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Every pilot, whether a student seeking his or her first certificate or a seasoned airline captain obliged to pass a twice-annual proficiency check, must contend with a sometimes dreaded checkride. Naturally, all pilots must be prepared to perform the tasks required for a given certificate or rating when it is time to take a practical test.

But there's more to preparing for a checkride than mastering maneuvers and memorizing regulations. Under the strain of an impending checkride some students don't pay attention to the little things, and some instructors forget to warn them about the details of the test. How do you prepare and avoid common mistakes? Tips from local examiners and a flight instructor below will help.

## Practical Test Standards Description

AREAS OF OPERATION are phases of the practical test arranged in a logical sequence within each standard. They begin with Preflight Preparation and end with Post-flight Procedures. The examiner, however, may conduct the practical test in any sequence that will result in a complete and efficient test; however, the ground portion of the practical test shall be accomplished before the flight portion.

TASKs are titles of knowledge areas, flight procedures, or maneuvers appropriate to an AREA OF OPERATION. The abbreviation( s) within parentheses immediately following a TASK refer to the category and/or class aircraft appropriate to that TASK. The meaning of each abbreviation is as follows.

- ASEL Airplane— Single-Engine Land
- AMEL Airplane— Multiengine Land
- ASES Airplane— Single-Engine Sea
- AMES Airplane— Multiengine Sea 8

## Special Emphasis Areas

Examiners shall place special emphasis upon areas of aircraft operations considered critical to flight safety.

Among these are:

1. positive aircraft control;

2. procedures for positive exchange of flight controls (who is flying the airplane);
3. stall/ spin awareness;
4. collision avoidance;
5. wake turbulence avoidance;
6. Land and Hold Short Operations (LAHSO);
7. runway incursion avoidance;
8. controlled flight into terrain (CFIT);
9. aeronautical decision making (ADM);
10. checklist usage; and
11. other areas deemed appropriate to any phase of the practical test.

Although these areas may not be specifically addressed under each TASK, they are essential to flight safety and will be evaluated during the practical test. In all instances, the applicant's actions will relate to the complete situation.

### **Tips For Checkride Preparation**

#### **Tip #1: Read the Practical Test Standards (PTS)**

Thankfully, the FAA's practical test standards (PTS) take away most of the guesswork about what to expect on your checkride. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the PTS for your certificate or rating. Don't forget to read the introductory section, which includes special emphasis items to be tested throughout the checkride. The practical test standards for private and commercial pilots were updated June 1, 2012. Visit the FAA's Practical Test Standards (PTS) for the most up-to-date information. Another good read is AOPA's Pilot's Checkride Guide (PDF) because it supplements the private pilot and instrument rating PTS with some helpful tips.

#### **Tip #2: Use a Study Guide**

As suggested above, you shouldn't rely solely on an study guide book to be able to answer questions. But these books are a great place to start in order to be sure you know your stuff. ASA publishes oral exam guide books for various certificates and ratings. Companies like Jeppesen include checkride study guides in their pilot training kits.

#### **Tip #3: Trust Your Instructor**

It should set your mind at ease (at least a little bit!) to know that you're probably over-prepared for the checkride without realizing it. Good instructors will train you beyond the bare minimum standards. They'll only endorse you for the checkride when they're confident you're ready and able to pass. Examiners have faith in your instructor's opinion that you've been properly trained.

#### **Tip #4: Don't Fear Your Examiner**

As AvWeb columnist Linda Pendleton writes in an oldie-but-goodie article about becoming a DPE, “Your local, neighborhood DPE is a pilot just like you — and a human being, believe it or not!”

Examiners are on your side. Remember, they are flight instructors who know what students go through in training. Woody, whose professional life is centered in education, says,

“Candidates should remember that the examiner has to come through the same route they did in order to learn to fly an airplane. I enjoy watching people grow and helping people achieve what they want to achieve.”

Shane and Woody both recommend that you, not your instructor, make the call to schedule your checkride. This way, you’ll have a chance to get to know your examiner and ask questions directly. “If you call ahead of time, we can create conversation,” Woody says.

#### Tip #5: Take a Mock Checkride

You’ll probably feel more confident about passing your checkride if you take a mock checkride with an instructor first. If you can do this with someone you don’t normally fly with, there are two bonuses: you’ll get a second opinion and you’ll get more used to that whole “flying with a stranger” idea.

A mock checkride or final “stage check” is often built into a professionally written training syllabus. In fact, a syllabus usually includes more than one stage check, giving you opportunities to have your progress evaluated throughout training.

#### Tip #6: Have Your Paperwork in Order

Since that new certificate is yours to lose, make sure you don’t botch the whole thing with a paperwork snafu on the day of your checkride. Shane suggests to make sure that your aircraft is airworthy and current on all its inspections. Check its logbooks.

Don’t overlook your own endorsements, either. You might be endorsed to take the checkride, but is your 90-day solo endorsement current?

#### Tip #7: Talk Yourself Through

“I find that applicants who talk themselves through do better than those who don’t,” Shane

says.

As you perform maneuvers, do checklists, set up equipment, or even make a mistake, talk through all of it out loud so the examiner knows what you're thinking. It will make it much easier for him or her to evaluate your judgment and give you the benefit of the doubt.

#### Tip #8: Don't Worry About Being Perfect

Would you be less stressed-out if you knew you don't have to do everything perfectly to pass a checkride? The standards have some built-in room for error — that's why there's all those plus-and-minus symbols. Just stay within the tolerances.

Shane says it's okay to look something up or use a "cheat sheet" as long as you don't do it excessively. He would rather see you look something up correctly than try to guess at an answer.

"I know everyone's nervous. There's no question about that," Woody says. He knows that your checkride flight might not be your best-ever performance. It doesn't have to be! It just needs to meet the PTS standards. Think of it as yet another learning opportunity.

#### Tip #9: Take Care of Yourself and Relax

It should go without saying that you need to be physically and mentally ready for your checkride. Remember the "I'M SAFE" checklist? It applies here. It might be difficult, but try to get a good night's sleep before your checkride. Don't wait until the last minute to take care of the planning and preparation.

Above all, try to relax. Part of an examiner's job is to try and put you at ease before the test officially begins.

[Source](#)