

How to Become a Flight Instructor

Get Paid to Fly - Finally!

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If you're interested in becoming a flight instructor, then you're in luck -- flight instructors are in high demand right now, and this particular career path is expected to remain in demand for quite a few years, according to some experts.

Pilots choose to become flight instructors for many reasons. For many, it's a dream job and a primary source of income. For others, it's the next step on the way to becoming a commercial pilot or an airline pilot. And for some, it's a hobby that they can enjoy as a side job or just for fun. Most -- if not all -- flight instructors will tell you that they learned more after becoming a certified flight instructor (CFI) than they knew going into it.

The FAA issues a Certified Flight Instructor Certificate (CFI) and a Certified Flight Instructor - Instrument (CFII or CFI-I) add-on certificate. For your initial flight instructor certificate, the check ride is done with an FAA examiner. For the add-on instrument certificate, any designated examiner will do.

Here are the steps for obtaining an FAA-certified flight instructor certificate:

- **01 Know the Eligibility Requirements**

Flight instructor applicants must be at least 18 years old, be able to read, speak, write and understand English, and hold either a commercial pilot certificate or an airline transport pilot (ATP) certificate.

- **02 Update Your Medical Certificate**

Since you must hold at least a commercial pilot certificate to begin flight instructor training, the chances are good that you already have a valid aviation medical certificate.

You'll need at least a 3rd class medical to act as pilot-in-command of an aircraft while instructing, but in fact, a flight instructor is not required to have a current medical certificate if they aren't acting as pilot in command or performing duties of a required crewmember. Most instructors are eager to log PIC flight hours, though, and opt to maintain a valid medical certificate. It will also prevent you from having to turn away beginning students who cannot yet act as pilot in command. Regardless, you'll act as pilot in command during your check ride for the certified flight instructor certificate, so there's no reason to put it off if you don't already have one.

- **03 Take the FAA Written Exam and FOI**

For the CFI certificate, there are two initial exams that you must take: The FOI (Fundamentals of Instruction) Exam and the FAA Certified Flight Instructor Knowledge Exam. The FOI covers topics related to teaching, such as the learning process, effective teaching elements, training techniques, etc. You probably want to get a study guide for this, such as one from Gleim, just like the knowledge exam. The knowledge exam covers everything that you have learned up until this point, including all recreational, private and commercial topics, as well as instrument, multi-engine and high-performance topics. Almost any topic you can think of could be included.

- **04 Prepare Your Lesson Plans**

It's best to prepare by using the same plans that you intend to use as an active instructor. Spend the time and energy on this part now, and you'll be forever grateful to yourself. Print off drawing, charts, diagrams and anything that will aid in your discussion of a topic. Buy the cool gadgets, such as the miniature airplane or holding computer if you think it will help you explain a topic. Print off relevant advisory circulars (ACs) and FAA safety briefings for each lesson if you think it will help your future students.

Don't forget to make sure your lesson plans include everything in the FAA Practical Test Standards (PTS) for each lesson. (For example, if the PTS references decision making, make sure you include a plan to evaluate the student's decision making during each flight or each lesson.)

- **05 Practice Instructing!**

Your CFI training will most likely be with a more experienced instructor. If you haven't flown in a while, the beginning part of your training might be a review. You'll practice all of the maneuvers up to PTS standards and make sure you're up to date with local area operations and FARs.

Most of your CFI training, however, will be from the right seat. You'll practice instructing a pretend student, demonstrating maneuvers, watching the "student" perform the same maneuvers and then evaluating and coaching the student. On the ground, you'll teach your instructor as you would a student on the different topics, and you'll brief and de-brief the student before and after each flight. You will, essentially, role-play until you're comfortable teaching anything and everything in multiple scenarios! Don't forget to use your lesson plans!

- **06 Take the Checkride!**

Once you've mastered the new role as a flight instructor, your instructor will sign you off for the check ride. Since you've taken check rides before, you know what to expect -- for the most part. Be aware, however, that the CFI check ride is known to be the most grueling of all of them, and many instructors have endured multi-day check rides (16 + hours!) before passing. There is a lot of material to cover, and some examiners like to cover each detail on the ground to ensure you're prepared. Others will cover a few items and, if satisfied, will move on to the flight. But don't skimp on anything. Be prepared as much as possible.

Remember, the examiner is testing to see what kind of instructor you'll be, so act professionally at all times and dress appropriately. Pretend the examiner is a student and over-explain everything. Don't skimp on the safety briefing, and don't let the examiner/student get away with doing anything illegal. Watch them closely!