

Training Program©

I make a practice of having prospective students come to my home (office) for a couple of hours to discuss flying. I request that a student arrive on time with a tape recorder. Too much information is covered to be remembered, otherwise. We begin by discussing their needs, motivation, prior experience, requirements, and background. Sometimes, the specific future flying plans of the a student requires somewhat different instruction. I advise getting any insurance and appropriate flight medical before beginning training or making any purchases.

A student is not expected to know much in the beginning. Often a little bit of knowledge can make the situation more difficult. As an instructor, I will ask many questions. It is not my intention to demean the student. I need to find out the student's limits of knowledge. I need to know what you don't know. When I get a wrong answer, it probably means that I asked the wrong question. A major part of teaching is knowing the question to ask that will enable the student to identify the upper limit of his knowledge. The correct question and answer combination leaves the student with a sense of accomplishment. It allows the instructor room for further extension of that knowledge. Questions are a learning/teaching tool.

The study process is just beginning with the completion of traditional ground and flight readings. The initial information package is just the foundation upon which to build. I set up a flight and study program according to the situation as I see it. I explain how the success of any teaching I may do depends on their background. The better the student understands the value and necessity of the study program, the more likely I will find a well-prepared student for each flight.

Thanks to the use of the tape recorder much greater instructional efficiency can be obtained. More time can be spent on the ground both in preparation for the flight and in flight review. The student knows that the information is available for review. The tape recorder in the air gives the student an opportunity to re-fly the exercise. The student will hear directions over the intercom system that he responded to without thinking. Things will be said on the radio tape that never reached his consciousness during the actual flight. It is suggested that the student playback the tapes initially while driving and then during study periods where notes and outlines of information should be compiled on 4 x 6 cards or a computer file. This information can be a valuable review program later. Just because information is on the tape does not mean that the instructor can assume it is understood and capable of being applied.

The best time to begin flying lessons is in the late fall. This is the time of the year when weather will allow development of go/no-go judgment in the student. It also allows the exposure of the student to SVFR (Special Visual Flight Rules) and other adverse weather under the guidance of the instructor. Weather will help determine the spacing of instruction. Cross country flight conditions will provide a desirable mix of winds and weather. Night flight requirements can be met well before midnight. By late spring the student should finish his requirements and complete the flight test just in time for the good weather of summer. The summer is used to develop hours and experience. By winter, selective flying can continue secured by the knowledge acquired the previous year. Too many students give up flying when faced with winter weather unlike any they experienced during a summer of instruction.

In recent years the "total immersion" method of flight instruction has come into vogue as an efficiency/cost saving mechanism. It works, at a cost in experience. A certain amount of seasoning experience that is acquired by extending the instruction over varying weather conditions is lost by such concentration. Compressed training both in ground and flight training makes it possible to produce an educated fool who flies. I would like my students to grow in experience by enjoying flying. As a pilot advances up the flying ladder, he will find that ratings and knowledge are expected but experience is preferred. Experience is an unpleasant teacher since it gives the test first and the lesson afterwards.

The ideal is any teaching program is a plan that gives maximum positive transfer of a selected learning skill to a progression of tasks with a minimum of interference between skills learned in separate tasks. What this means is that the making of 30(banks in basic flight maneuvers in level, climbing, and descent will be applied to the traffic pattern as they are performed with variations in flap configuration. This is a complex process where the instructor and student are seeking consistency, smoothness, anticipation, and safety awareness.

Instructors begin to customize of their training program before the first flight. For the individual's motivation, background and time the instructor must invent different way to present ground, flight and post flight instruction. The instructor's program should expose the student with the full field of required knowledge but familiarize him with the local situation. The very first flight lesson must have planned objectives both immediate and of longer range. The student must be aware of the immediate and perhaps of the longer range ones as well. The best way to waste the time and money devoted to flying is to not know what is to be accomplished. Every lesson has stated or written objectives and measurable results. A properly integrated flight/ground program will bring the student to the airplane prepared for that lesson, expectant of a partial review and eager to be prepared for the next flight.

I often believe I became a flight instructor to get even. Much of my own instruction was excessively wasteful of time and money. A student is under considerable physical and emotional stress when learning to fly. If cost is contributing to the student's stress, it would be best to stop flying until funds are acquired. Learning to fly is expensive, and no amount of anxiety is going to change the cost. Don't waste time trying to change things that can't be changed. Use of the correct terminology is an essential part of flying. Vocabulary development is a must. An instructor must be a good at making any explanation fit into the student's level of comprehension. The best explanations take place on the ground; the best demonstrations take place in the air.

There are only two types of flight instructors; those who are trying to get out of instructing and those who are trying to stay in instructing. I am trying to remain an instructor because I see a need. The treasure of valuable experience, required of an instructor, can only be built up by operational time. Unfortunately, it is time that causes a reduction in experienced instructors.