

## SVFR©

Interestingly, if you were to look through any number of flight training programs, you would be most unlikely to find SVFR as part of the program. All too many pilots encounter SVFR for the first time alone, inexperienced, and unaware.

When I am called to give a pilot a checkout in a new aircraft I generally try to hit him with, "Have you ever flown SVFR?" Most often they have never been in SVFR conditions and have no plans to get the experience. I do not fly in SVFR conditions, rain, or winds of 30 knots for fun. I do train my students and other pilots in those conditions, however. I do it because, at some point in our careers toward becoming old pilots we may face conditions not of our choosing.

Not too many years ago student pilots could ask for and get SVFR clearances. Bad things happened just often enough so now only pilots can get SVFR. Like IFR, SVFR increases the utility of flying. On occasion, it is possible, safe, and legal to make an airport arrival under SVFR when IFR flights cannot. My personal feeling is that a pilot should be trained in the use of SVFR, not to be used as challenge to weather conditions, but rather, as a parachute through an unplanned condition. SVFR at night is very near an emergency situation. That said here is how to do day SVFR.

The first requisite for SVFR is knowledge. You must know the FARs, you must know the area, you know your own capabilities. SVFR flight can only be flown with a Class C, D, or E clearance. A SVFR clearance can only be given when ceilings are less than 1000 feet and visibility is less than three miles but more than one mile as is determined by a qualified weather observer. In SVFR conditions ATC has special restrictions that allow only one aircraft in the airspace at a time, unless visual contact is established between the aircraft. This contact may be by ATC having seen both aircraft or one aircraft seeing the other and accepting avoidance responsibility. An IFR aircraft either arriving or departing has use of less than VFR Class C, D, or E airspace before SVFR aircraft. This means that when an IFR aircraft is inbound to the airspace or inside the airspace no SVFR aircraft will be allowed to enter or leave until ATC has visual with the IFR aircraft. If an IFR aircraft is departing SVFR aircraft will be told to remain above specific altitudes or clear of the airspace. If a number of IFR departures or arrivals occur in sequence this can be quite a while.

Well, finally, its your turn. But instead of a clearance ATC has told you to do any one of a number of things. You may be told to remain clear of the airspace footprint in a direction or orientated to a specific place. You may be told to overfly the field and remain above a specific altitude while circling overhead and awaiting clearance. It is not unusual to have the best visibility vertically to the ground as opposed to slant range visibility.

Prior to issuing the clearance ATC may require you to acknowledge visual contact with another aircraft either IFR or VFR. Additionally, ATC may put a time restraint on your clearance such having you give assurance that you will be able to be on the ground in two minutes. From overhead your clearance may read,

**"Cessna 6185K is cleared into the Concord Class Delta  
Airspace with reference to departing aircraft to  
descend in right traffic for 32 R maintain SVFR**

**while in the Class Delta airspace report descending  
through 1500 report right downwind"**

Good radio communications do not have punctuation and should be written that way.

All the time you have been overhead you have been writing down the 'givens' of the clearance while leaving space for 'surprises'. Notice how much of SVFR clearances is "canned". Always the same.

Now all you have to do is read it back as you have written it down. Devise your own shorthand.

The other type of SVFR arrival is where you are told to hold outside the airspace footprint in a specific direction from the airport while you await your clearance. Assume that you have been told to remain clear to the southeast and to expect your clearance in five minutes or by a given time.

**"Cessna 6185K is cleared into the Concord Class Delta  
airspace from the southeast maintain SVFR at or below  
1500 while in the Class Delta Airspace report entering  
the Class Delta airspace report left downwind 19L"**

Again you will see that much of it is "canned" as before. The only changes are the direction and runway. All other clearances will be much the same. You could even write the clearance down before you get into the plane. Just leave a couple of blanks for surprises. I used to have my SVFR clearances on my lapboard.

SVFR departures are even easier. You get your clearance from clearance delivery or ground control. You indicate the direction of departure. The clearance will be,

**"Cessna 6185K is cleared out of the Concord Class Delta  
airspace to the Northwest maintain SVFR at or below  
1500 while in the Class Delta airspace report clear of  
the Class Delta airspace for VFR which ever occurs  
first"**

Since you have written it down in "shorthand" already the readback is easy. Good preparation for IFR training.

The altitude mentioned in all SVFR clearances has to do with the altitude at which radar coverage exists. There is usually a 'letter of agreement' between the tower and approach that determines this altitude. The airport, airspace name, reporting requirements and staying SVFR are common to all SVFR clearances.

Visit a tower and make a copy of the SVFR form that they use. You'll see what I mean. The last word on SVFR is that it will not be an enjoyable experience if you do not know the area. You must know where you are at every moment during SVFR or you shouldn't be there. Do not do SVFR into an unfamiliar airport. Do fly your home area and learn the minimum safe altitudes for at least ten miles around. Get with an old instructor and have a new experience.