

Now what?©

A few weeks ago I was asked for suggestions as to how should a student continue after getting her license. the specific request was for ideas for becoming an excellent pilot. I responded with about twenty suggestions. The Email or posting, I forget which, disappeared into cyberspace. The following is an attempt at reconstruction. It does not have the spontaneity and flow of the original as with most reproductions of anything.

Except for the fortunate few, we should find ways to make our flying more economic. I belong to a club. I have always belonged to clubs. The \$8000+ fixed annual cost for an airplane can be shared. An owner friend of mine spent over \$24,000 on his single-engine plane in 1995. My \$35 monthly dues is multiplied by twenty every month to cover the fixed costs of one aircraft. The club is a non-profit corporation that carries better coverage for its aircraft and members than do most FBOs. As a club member I am an aircraft owner. I have many of the benefits of ownership while greatly limiting my costs.

When flying you should work on making what you do both economic and efficient. Safety need not be sacrificed. Begin with the preflight. Make your preflight one that limits the amount of wasted motion, duplication of effort, and back-tracking. Pour sump drain fuel back into the tanks. Plan your start, radio work, taxiing, and runup so that you minimize time on the ground. Little things like using the finger to set the space of throttle movement for runup will save seconds on every flight. Memorize sounds.

You should be working your checklists so that there is a sequence, a pattern that fits the way you do things. Now, try to make it smoother, more logical, and shorter. Use your fingers one at a time to sequence things to do or touch. Make the process as simple as you can and one you can't drop under the seat. Make a flip lapboard to keep aircraft data, flight plan sequence, position report sequence and other items of occasional use. A long narrow one is less likely to interfere with the yoke.

Know your aircraft handbook and aircraft systems. Every re-reading of the POH will improve both your knowledge and understanding. Little things like tire pressure, minimum oil, useful load, and airspeeds always need to be reviewed and refreshed in our minds. Washing an airplane is a very educational experience. Do it. Ask a mechanic to let you participate in an annual inspection. Ask questions.

Plan each flight so that a minimum time is spent on the ground. Plan your departure, route, and arrival for the greatest efficiency. Often a 270 overhead departure gets you to altitude and on course best. Plan your high or low flight options to take the best advantage of aircraft performance, wind, and your own preferences. Contrary to a popular opinion, my wife's, all winds need not be headwinds.

Give every takeoff a distinctive character by selecting one parameter such as airspeed or heading and work on reducing the margins. Short, soft, x-wind, downwind of course but consider experimenting with full flap takeoff with recovery to normal, on a very long runway determine what it takes if you lose an engine at 200 feet.

Landings offer an unlimited variety of possibilities. Slips from abeam the numbers are fun. Simulated engine failure at 400' on final in full

flap configuration. Go-arounds at every lower altitudes and lower airspeeds.

Excellence is best demonstrated in low speed flying. Work on your ability to trim for hands-off operations whenever and wherever possible.

Put aside a certain part of your flying funds for special purposes like aerobatics and gliding. You don't know what you can do with an airplane until you have actually done it. Skills learned while gliding will make you a more efficient pilot, a safer pilot, and a better pilot. Begin working on your IFR rating. Do a lot of reading first. Catch some training rides in the back seat.

You will need to improve your radio work. You might write out ahead of time all that you expect to say between two airports. Include what you expect to hear from ATC. Go over it until you have eliminated all unnecessary words but have retained the meaning. Take a copy with you and read it in sequence over the flight. Tape record the flight. You will never be good enough on the radio. Challenge your flights for opportunities to use the radio. Make PIREPS to Flight Watch and the FSSs. Monitor Center frequencies to become familiar with how the Big Boys talk. Pay particular attention to the way they say numbers, headings, and altitudes. When you feel ready, join the fun. Now reverse the process and make a flight with minimum radio operations. Excellence can be demonstrated both ways.

Begin working on precision flying. Develop performance and cruise tables for your aircraft. How much fuel, how far, how fast. As a student you have worked toward the 5/5/50 club for airspeed, heading, and altitude. As a pilot work on your 2/2/20 membership. If you have occasion to fly the same route often, work on ways to make the flight more efficient. How many motions are required to level off from climb? How long does it take to acquire hands-off level flight? Do it again and again to acquire greater efficiency of motion and conservation of time. Do the same for slow flight. Work on your arrival descents. Turn your altitude into airspeed.

I am not a great believer in touch-and-gos. I believe there is more a more practical and efficient use of flight time in going from place to place. Departures and arrivals at unfamiliar airports require that you admit ignorance. This too, is a skill. Know as much as you can but be aggressive in admitting unfamiliarity. You should make a point to make as many flights as possible beyond 50 NM to build up cross-country time. Fly different directions from your home field and use as much pilotage as possible. Work out ground speeds and then contact a radar facility for a ground speed check. Make a flight using everything you have available in the aircraft. Make the same flight again with single com radio and transponder. On a selected flight to be repeated keep track of how often you look down into the cockpit. On subsequent flight make a point to reduce your head-down condition to zero. When you fly with others make a game out of who can pick up traffic conflicts first.

Make some minimum altitude flights. What is the lowest safe and legal altitude you can use to fly from A to B? You want to study any area you may expect to fly at night in the day. Learn where the radio towers are, the power lines, and the last resort airport. Get competent in flying SVFR. Find if there is a facility with DF (direction finding) ability in your area. Practice a DF steer. It's old fashioned but it is a procedure you might need someday. Find a military base that offers no-gyro approaches. Try to do at least one a year. VFR if you must, under the hood if you can.

Make at least 25% of your flights at night. Be very careful to get good VFR at night. Safety will be greatest if there is at least a quarter moon. Fly familiar routes where you have good knowledge of terrain. Don't fly single-engine night over mountains and water for fun. Alternate the use of landing light on landings. You want to be competent without the light. Taxiing at night on an uncontrolled airport is a whole different world.

Fly with as many different instructors as opportunities allow. Take your flight reviews in different areas and even different airports. If you travel commercially to distant cities, make a point of taking an instructor on an area flight to as many airports as money allows. This is the kind of flight many instructors seldom get to do. Interestingly, you never seem to forget an airport.

Visit towers at every opportunity. The people are first class. Same can be said about FSS and radar facilities. I have never had a bad experience while visiting an FAA facility. When you know their side of the picture it makes you more understanding as to why you should do certain things.

Do at least two hours of reading for every hour of flying. Historical flights are interesting to study. Subscribe to Flight Training Magazine, FAA General Aviation News, Callback, and at least one magazine. Get in a newsletter if funds allow. Arrange to share resources with other pilots. Join AOPA and any organization that is in your interest area. Get on the FAA Advisory Circular mailing list. When you visit airports and FAA facilities collect all the reading material you can. Work backwards from the latest material to the oldest. You will never catch up with the Wright Brothers telegram.