



# Night VFR Checkup

## Pilot Requirements

- ✓ **Currency.** Three takeoffs and landings to a **full stop** in category, class, and type within preceding 90 days. (Perfect time to practice IFR procedures, even if not filing an IFR flight plan.)
- ✓ **Proficiency.** Not the same as legal currency, but every bit as important.
- ✓ **Oxygen (for flight above 5,000 or 10,000 MSL).** Night vision is one of the first things to go if you become hypoxic.

## Flight Planning (Especially x-country flights)

- ✓ **Route selection.** If you have an engine failure, the nearby terrain and airports assume supreme importance. Choose wisely.
- ✓ **Appropriate charts.** IFR charts are more readable after dark.
- ✓ **Course lines in black or blue.** Red lines on a chart disappear completely in red cockpit lighting, and yellow highlighter lines aren't much better.
- ✓ **Charted altitudes.** Determine safe altitudes in advance.
- ✓ **Weather briefing.** Many pilots prefer to double their daytime VFR minimums over flat terrain; quadruple them in mountainous terrain.
- ✓ **Temperature/dew point spread.** Fog is a terrible thing to discover by surprise.
- ✓ **Night-related NOTAMs.** Look for runway or beacon lights out, nearby towers, etc.
- ✓ **Fuel.** Many pilots insist on a minimum of one-hour reserve over their absolute worst-case scenario. Planning a fuel stop? Make sure you check availability of services in the evening hours.
- ✓ **IFR flight plan or ATC flight following.** ATC is as good as 911 for getting help on the way.

- ✓ **IFR skills.** Over unlit terrain on a dark night, basic instrument proficiency is strongly encouraged. Has it been a while since you've used these skills? If so, get some hands-on practice in with a safety pilot or better yet, a flight instructor.
- ✓ **Reading glasses.** It's much harder to see charts clearly at night. (If you're under 40, go ahead and laugh...for now.)

## Aircraft Preflight

- ✓ **Navigation/anti-collision lights.** Verify operation. Be familiar with location and operation of interior switches.
- ✓ **Landing/taxi lights.** Verify operation. Be familiar with location and operation of interior switches.
- ✓ **Panel/interior lights.** Verify operation. Be familiar with location and operation of interior switches.
- ✓ **Electrical system.** Verify health of battery, generator, alternator, and voltage regulator.
- ✓ **Flashlights.** Two, minimum – one for exterior preflight, and a smaller dimmable one on a lanyard around neck (or at least nearby).

## Airport Operations

- ✓ **Airport taxi diagrams.** Take a taxi diagram with you. It's easier to get lost at night in a vast sea of lights at a large airport than in the jungle.
- ✓ **VASI/PAPI or ILS glide slope guidance.** Use them to add a considerable margin of safety on approach.
- ✓ **Airport environment.** Shorter, darker and more obstructed fields are bigger challenges.