



Safety Hot Spot: Pilot Proficiency and the Flight Review

Proficiency

- ✓ **Proficient vs. current** — Currency and proficiency aren't the same thing. The FAA sets minimum standards for *currency*—which has a lot to do with staying legal, but not much to do with being a competent pilot. Bottom line? Flying is **not** "just like riding a bicycle." Individual needs vary, but for the vast majority of us, meeting FAA requirements (and nothing more) is simply not enough.
- ✓ **Practice makes perfect?** — The obvious solution to the proficiency problem is to do more flying. But when it comes to proficiency—being prepared to handle any situation with which you might reasonably be presented—quality beats quantity. Push yourself. 100 hours of pattern work in the past year (all of it on windless days) might make for smooth calm-wind landings, but it won't count for much the first time you're faced with a 15-knot crosswind. To quote Vince Lombardi: "Practice does not make perfect. Only perfect practice makes perfect."
- ✓ **No airplane? No problem!** — Quality time in the airplane is important, but it's not the only way to keep your head in the game. Taking free ASF online courses is a great way to brush up on the basics, or learn new things. PC-based flight simulators can help you stay sharp (particularly for IFR). In fact, just *thinking* about flying—mentally rehearsing a cross-country flight, for example—will help you maintain your "edge."
- ✓ **Wing it** — Participating in the FAA Wings Program can help you stay proficient and current. Completing a phase of the program counts as a flight review—and you get a Wings lapel pin to boot! Learn how ASF online courses can help you [earn Wings credit](#).

Flight Review

- ✓ **Two years** — The FAA doesn't call it a "biennial" anymore, but you still need one every two years. *In order to act as PIC of an aircraft, you must have completed a flight review (or an acceptable substitute—see FAR 61.56) within the previous 24 calendar months.* For example: If you completed a review on May 3, 2006, you'd be legal until May 31, 2008—the end of the same month, two years later.
- ✓ **Acting PIC** — What does it mean to "act as PIC"? Basically, it means that you're the one in charge—the person ultimately responsible for the flight. Of course, when you're flying solo, you're always the PIC. Because of this (and contrary to what some pilots may think), it's **not** legal to fly solo without a current flight review.
- ✓ **Bang for your buck** — Since you're legally required to have a flight review, why not get the most for your money? View it as an opportunity to sharpen rusty skills and learn new things. Be up-front with the CFI about areas in which you could use some work, talk with him/her about the kind of flying you normally do, and don't be afraid to ask questions. It's good to be challenged once in a while, so if the CFI pushes a bit beyond your "comfort zone," know that he/she has the best of intentions.
- ✓ **Medical** — A current medical certificate is not required to complete a flight review. If you don't have a medical, be sure to bring it up beforehand: Your CFI will have to agree to act as PIC for the flight.
- ✓ **Pass/fail?** — You can't "fail" a flight review. You either successfully complete one—in which case the CFI endorses your logbook—or you don't, in which case nothing happens. If you prefer not to, you're not required to return to the same CFI to finish up. Whatever the situation, though, remember that one hour of flight is the FAA's *minimum* requirement.

Instrument Currency/Proficiency

- ✓ **Currency Requirements** — In order to act as PIC under IFR (whether in instrument meteorological conditions or not), the FAA requires six instrument approaches, intercepting/tracking courses, and holding within the previous six months. An instrument proficiency check within the previous six months will also suffice. For specifics, see FAR 61.57(c).
- ✓ **I need *what*?** — Pilots are sometimes confused about when they're *required* to have an instrument proficiency check (IPC). Here's the scoop: If it's been more than six calendar months since you were last instrument current, you have to complete an IPC to *become* current.
- ✓ **IPC requirements** — The FAA now requires that pilots demonstrate specific tasks from the instrument rating Practical Test Standards (PTS) during an IPC. In the [Instrument Rating PTS](#), find the "Rating Task Table" and read down the column labeled "IPC."
- ✓ **Stay proficient** — Instrument flying is a "use it or lose it" skill. Individual needs vary, but we suggest that, in addition to FAA currency requirements, you have: a) at least one hour of simulated or actual instrument time in the previous month; b) at least one instrument approach in the same period; and c) an IPC in the previous six months.

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