



## The Best of *Flight Training Magazine*

Brought to you by the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association

### 10 reasons to go around

By: Dan Namowitz

*"What is he doing down there?"*

This you wonder as you start your turn from the downwind to the base leg, while casting nervous glances downward at the taxiing airplane that promised to vacate the runway in a few seconds but, despite those assurances, seems to have no clear exit strategy.

You can feel that the enigmatic action of the aircraft on the runway has put you off your game. You've done all you could to help out from on high, reconfiguring earlier than usual, slowing down more than you'd like, elongating your pattern, communicating with him in an "Everything's cool, man," tone of voice. Now the urge to get on the radio and complain is strong. Still, you tell yourself that the pilot taxiing toward the only egress point at the runway intersection can see the bright pinpoint of your landing light staring him in the face. He can size up the situation--and in spite of it, he appears to be in no haste to get out of your way. You are on short final now, just a few hundred feet above the ground, and you can almost read the expiration date on the other fellow's sectional chart. Enough. You throttle up, close your carb heat, raise the nose to climb attitude, and get out of there. You'll have plenty of time to analyze the situation later. Right now it's a better idea to fly the pattern again and set up for a distraction-free landing.

There are dozens of reasons why a go-around, or so-called *balked landing*, can mark the conclusion of a final approach. One thing all the causes have in common is a surprise factor, mingled with other emotions: disappointment, frustration, anger. Pilots know from their reading, and from experience, that flying precisely when "in a state" is difficult, raising the risk factor of go-arounds. That is why someone who stays proficient is more likely to fight off distraction successfully. You can always save the sour-grapes aspect of it all for later.

Go-arounds are easy enough to carry off--even by a startled pilot flaring an aircraft mere millimeters above the runway--if the sequence is well practiced and memorized. But it's an easy maneuver to bungle when befuddled. Get the sequence wrong--commonly by retracting flaps before adding power, or by broadcasting your intention to go around before doing anything aerodynamically useful toward achieving it--and you'll dent your ego and other things. Or worse.

It is to avoid just such an outcome that 10 common go-around scenarios are described. Chances are you have already been in one or more of these situations, and you will be again. The important thing to remember is that you do not have to be urgently unhappy with whatever situation is unfolding when you decide to abort a landing. Even mild discomfort is satisfactory grounds for going around, and no one with any sense will criticize you for it.

1. Avoiding a conflict on a runway as depicted above may be the most common reason for go-arounds of the genre involving another aircraft. You are landing, with the traffic on the ground in sight, but he or she fails to clear the runway promptly.
2. Or someone taxies out unexpectedly just as you are getting ready to touch down. This could be carelessness on the other pilot's part, but it also happens sometimes that he just does not see or hear you, despite honest efforts, and sincerely regrets disrupting your approach.
3. A far more nerve-wracking situation develops when both aircraft are airborne and neither has the other in sight. Think how you'd feel while flying a left base leg to Runway 10 if another aircraft suddenly announced that it is in the pattern, on a left base leg to Runway 10. Yes, you'd try and work things out by radio and scanning for the traffic, which might resolve things and might not. (Remember, not all go-arounds must be initiated from the final approach.) Nor do unseen aircraft have to be on the same pattern leg to be troublesome. You're on your left base, a half-mile from the threshold. Another aircraft reports a one-mile final, but you can't spot it. How long can you wait? Even if you could find him now, that's probably way too close for safe maneuvering. And remember: day-VFR conditions in the vicinity of nontowered airports are famously associated with midair collisions.
4. Go-arounds can also involve multiple aircraft, and these events too come in all shapes and sizes. A flock of single-engine Cessnas descends on an airport on a fine spring morning, its pilots hungry for breakfast and camaraderie. A commuter airliner is arriving from another direction, on shall we say it's flying an "abbreviated" pattern. Confusion results from all these simultaneous arrivals and not everyone gets down on the first try--including the commuter. Here's a variation on that theme, provided by a 400-hour private pilot: "The only time I can recall recently going around because of traffic was when a line of Army helicopters taxied, one after another, onto the runway as I turned final. I think there were eight of them. They said they'd be off the ground in plenty of time and they probably would have, but I just threw in the towel and went around." Good choice.
5. At a tower-controlled airport, air traffic control could suddenly command you to go around for any number of reasons all concerned with separation of traffic, so be ready. Years ago the failure of a brake on the Cessna 172 I was flying with a student pilot caused a twin-engine aircraft behind me to go around when our Cessna could not make the turn onto a taxiway at Portland, Maine. I apologized on the ramp, and the other fellow, a charter pilot with passengers, was a real gentleman about the whole thing--a class act. There could be other reasons. Faster traffic overtaking you on final could be making the controller nervous. Jets can only slow down so much; your time to land, decelerate, and taxi clear all must be continually evaluated. And frankly, it is a better idea for him to make *you* go around than it is to make a Boeing 767 with 250 people aboard go around. A variation on this theme is for you to see the situation shaping up and to *volunteer* to go around.
6. You may decide to go around with no other aircraft anywhere in the vicinity. Errors and misjudgments rule the roost of causes here, and a go-around is your ace in the hole. Too high on final, and that forward slip isn't helping? Too fast and not slowing down enough? Go around and set it up again. Likewise, overshooting the final and knowing it is wise to avoid a steep turn at low speed and low altitude is a sure go-around cue with accident-avoidance properties of a high magnitude.

7. So, you fought off the demons on final, but now you touch down a mite hard, and bounce. Quick judgment is needed here--you are about to enter a sea of landing woes that causes many, many accidents. Only one creature lives in this troubled ocean: the *porpoise*. Remember the porpoise? The term refers to an aircraft that lands hard, rebounds into the air, almost stalls, gets jammed down toward the runway again by the scared pilot, and lands hard again. This touchdown is worse than the first, and the cycle repeats until something breaks. The anguished motions of the aircraft resemble an exaggerated version of how the beloved marine mammal appears to surge in and out of the water as it swims along. But everything depends on how you handle that first bounce. You can save the landing, if the impact wasn't too bad and didn't toss you too high back into the air, by adding a quick touch of power and making a second try at flaring to land. But don't jam the nose down during that second attempt--that's what gets the porpoising cycle started. If there's any doubt, just go around.
8. When the pilot isn't a source of mischief, the atmosphere can be. You made a fair turn to final, and your speed and altitude are OK, but now a low-level gusty surface-friction wind kicks up. Or a crosswind you've been handling well suddenly gets the drop on you, and you can't get the nose pointed down the runway center line for touchdown. That's another strong cue for a go-around. Speaking of wind, just because the wind was out of the northwest when you took off an hour ago, that doesn't mean it will be northwesterly when you return. Maybe the automated weather broadcast is dozing, or the windsock contradicts the unicom operator's wind vector as reported on a computer screen in the office. Perhaps a herd mentality has set in, and everyone flying the pattern is accepting a tailwind on final. Be skeptical. Be different. Go around and make things right.
9. One of the best reasons for a go-around is, "Because I said so." You are on a gorgeous approach. It's truly nailed, and the flight instructor riding along, or pilot examiner, is obviously impressed. Suddenly he commands, "Go around." You comply, but you want to know why the approach was spoiled before its glorious completion. Resist the temptation to activate the (fortunately imaginary) ejector seat. The truth is, you are being paid a compliment. You made the sale without even having to land! From a training point of view, perform a nice go-around when no apparent reason to have to do so suggests itself, and you will show that you can put aside doubt, wonderment, even anger, and get on with the job at hand.
10. Finally, one of the most important reasons to go around--now and in the future--is to be ready for the nine eventualities described above, and their many aunts, uncles, and cousins, waiting for you out there. A pointer on any go-around: usually you will climb straight ahead at best rate of climb airspeed, but remember to maneuver "to the side of the runway/ landing area to clear and avoid opposing traffic," as stated in the Private Pilot Practical Test Standards.

Few pilots left to their own devices fly go-arounds voluntarily. Unless required by circumstance, or an authority figure to show what they've got, they let these critical skills decay. Fly one now and then for fun and profit, and it will be there for you later, when it counts.

## Want to know more?

Additional information on topics discussed in this article may be found at [ft.aopa.org](http://ft.aopa.org).

## Free Flight Training resources and educational tools for students!

Take advantage of AOPA's FREE, no risk six-month Student Trial Membership, including six FREE issues of Flight Training magazine. Zero obligation! Get your FREE student membership by going online to: [ft.aopa.org/free2](http://ft.aopa.org/free2)

Compliments of:



421 Aviation Way • Frederick, MD 21701-4798 • 800-USA-AOPA (872)-2672 • [ft.aopa.org](http://ft.aopa.org)

The free student membership is available to students in their initial training who reside in the U.S. It cannot be combined with a paid AOPA membership.