

10 things examiners love to see And what they say about you



For every new pilot acting as pilot of an aircraft, there are at least two people who went out on a limb to make it happen. One is the flight instructor who set his or her signature to an application form, recommending to the FAA that pilot privileges be granted. The other person whose professional judgment is required to loose a new pilot on the skies is the designated examiner who, with much less time to evaluate the applicant, made the CFI's judgment official.

Both parties, if conscientious and professional, recognize this process for what it is. Both have seen pilot applicants come and go and have come to recognize signs associated with success and failure. Long before you and your examiner board the aircraft for the flight that will justify and reward your training, he or she will have already developed a hunch about the outcome. What do examiners look for in an applicant for a pilot certificate? Here are 10 tips. Some will help to ensure that your flight exam actually makes it to the flying stage, and the rest will help carry you across the finish line after you and your examiner take to the air.

1. Good paperwork.

FAA Form 8710-1, Airman Certificate and/or Rating Application, is a notorious deal-breaker for people showing up for check rides, so much so that when flight instructors attend their periodic refresher clinics, considerable time is spent getting the bureaucratic demands right in CFIs' heads. This is one reason why your check ride begins with review of your paperwork. Your logbook, student pilot certificate, and knowledge-test documentation must be in order, and timely, or you may not be eligible for your flight test.

More's the pity that this investment of instructor and examiner time is necessary when you consider that Form 8710 comes with a set of detailed instructions for how to, and whether to, fill in the various data boxes. They include such details as writing down your height in inches, not in feet and inches; and answering "yes" in Block M to the question, "Do you now hold or have you ever held an FAA pilot certificate?" Why answer yes? You hold a student pilot certificate.

Practice filling out this important document using AOPA's Interactive Form 8710 (www.aopa.org/turbomedical). Print it out, get your CFI's signature, and take the form with you to the examiner--or use it as a guide if your examiner asks you to complete the FAA's online Integrated Airman Certificate and/or Rating Application (IACRA).



2. Who's your CFI?

Here's added incentive for a flight instructor to maintain high standards and a good record of students passing check rides: reputation matters. Look at it this way: You get together with an examiner, not knowing that she had to flunk a student the previous day. Not only did the student pilot fail, but the examiner was dismayed to discover that the student's knowledge on an extremely basic point was sadly lacking--so lacking that the flight test ended at that point.

You're next--and it was *your* flight instructor who recommended yesterday's victim for that disastrous check ride. Don't expect any presumption of competence from this examiner under such circumstances. However, a CFI whose signature on an FAA Form 8710-1 sends positive signals to the designated examiner makes a comparable impression

on the positive side.

3. Know the PTS

Showing up for a flight test without knowing the practical test standards for that exam is like showing up for an airline flight without a ticket. You won't have a prayer of getting where you want to go. The PTS is your Everything Guide to the flight test. It explains your role, your instructor's role, and the examiner's role. It discusses ground rules for the test, tells you how to prepare (such as explaining that you will be assigned to pre-plan a cross-country flight on which much of the exam will be based), states acceptable tolerances for maneuvers, and describes what is considered a disqualifying performance.

The PTS details the special-emphasis areas examiners are required to focus on. It describes how they must use realistic distractions to check your ability to focus on your pilot workload. The PTS even gives you the source publications for the knowledge you must "exhibit" during flight and ground tasks--see each task for those references. Surely a publication like the PTS is worth its weight in gold; a flight test applicant would be crazy not to know it inside and out. Well, you'd be surprised....

4. Know how to find things

There are some questions you should be able to answer without hesitation when asked by the examiner. What color is the fuel for your aircraft? What is the emergency radio frequency? What would you do if the engine quit right after takeoff?

But not everything falls into that category: What are the hours of operation of the control tower at the airport to which your assigned cross-country is planned? Is Taxiway Juliet available at night? How would we contact flight service at the midpoint of the flight? Suppose you are now a private pilot but you have not flown for four months--can you bring a passenger along on the flight? How much baggage can you

place in your aircraft's rearmost baggage compartment? Does a baggage load impose any other operating restrictions on the aircraft? Questions of this type test your ability to find the answers in the appropriate source publications.



5. Current publications

On a related subject, it's great to show that you can look up flight information in the *Airport/Facilities Directory* (AF/D) or on the sectional chart covering your route. But while you have the book to your nose trying to find out whether Runway 33L is available for touch and goes at five in the morning, don't be surprised if your examiner leans forward to study its cover. He or she is looking for the effective dates of the publication. If you want your flight test to be a happy day, it had better fall between those two dates. Your sectional chart also expires, and you'll find the expiration date on the cover. Even if the examiner does not send you packing for the offense of showing up with a (just barely) expired chart, it is the top of a very slippery slope.

6. Clearing turns, clearing turns, clearing turns!

You're in the air now. Great. Just as "location, location, location" is the source of value in a parcel of real estate, it is impossible to overstate the importance of traffic-avoidance maneuvering and scanning. Clearing turns before very maneuver--perform one unless the examiner specifically instructs otherwise. (He or she may be clearing the airspace to save you time.) Lower the nose on occasion during long climbs, and check to the sides as well. Let's face it, a flight test is a weird outing. You're not really going anywhere but you must pretend you are. Between tasks, there is a tendency to simply drone along on any random heading until you get your next set of instructions from the examiner. Don't just sit there. Fly positively, and that means keeping your eye out for traffic at all times.

7. Coordination

Do your feet press the pedals every time your hands apply pressure to ailerons or elevators? If not, you are probably letting the aircraft slog through your maneuver in a disorderly fashion. An experienced pilot such as an examiner will not have to check a slip-skid ball to see your sloppiness displayed in black and white. He or she will simply feel it as uncorrected adverse yaw or left-turning tendency tries to sling him sideways into the doorpost, or makes him knock shoulders with you.

But, if your left rudder pedal goes into action when you begin a turn to the left with the ailerons, and if your right pedal goes down a mite when you begin the rollout to the right, the examiner will stay centered in his seat and a smile will stay centered on his face. Nor will he tense up when you commence demonstrating flight at minimum controllable airspeed and stall recoveries. That is because he knows that a pilot who flies with coordination will perform neat, clean stall demonstrations, never

dangling him inconsiderately at the brink of an inadvertent spin entry.

8. Slow but smooth

Following up on the above, how a pilot performs flight at minimum controllable airspeed tells you a lot--probably more than any other single task. If you have not worked yourself into a lather on multiple occasions performing flight at minimum controllable airspeed *at length* during your dual instruction, do so before you see your examiner. You'll see a difference in your flying--guaranteed!

Control coordination is at its most challenging during flight at high angles of attack, with its high drag component and reduced control effectiveness. Stall avoidance is a constant concern. Maintaining altitude and rolling out smoothly on assigned headings is real work. Turns must be made with gentle bank and extreme care. Other maneuvers, such as maximum-performance takeoffs and landings, can dazzle and amaze. But flying a few nautical miles with precision while the stall warning wails and the altimeter needles stay put is not something you can do by raw luck. It takes skill, good training, and a clear understanding of what you are trying to achieve (and avoid) during the maneuver.

9. Handling unexpected events

You know you will be asked to perform a go-around at some point during your check ride, so you are ready. Same goes for a simulated engine failure. It is how you handle the truly unexpected event on a check ride that gives an examiner a glimpse of you as a true decision maker. Deciding on your own to go around because of a poor landing approach, or an encounter with low-level wind shear, or because someone cuts you off, are examples. Or, a landing or takeoff clearance behind a larger aircraft might raise concerns about wake turbulence. The examiner will take great interest in your awareness of the demands of the situation. On-board equipment could fail, and while the examiner will never lapse into passivity and jeopardize safety, it is an opportunity to observe your response.

10. Don't eat the peppermint

And finally, don't eat the peppermint--it could be poisoned. Well, not literally. But if you are flying along with the stall buzzer buzzing, or wrestling with a choppy crosswind on short final when the examiner extends a hand to offer you a tasty piece of candy, don't take the bait! This the famous "realistic distraction" mentioned earlier. Focus on your flying. Claim your candy later if you must. Other distractions could include her reaching out for no apparent reason and shutting down a radio, or asking you a question that is better deferred until your workload lessens, or dropping something onto the floor. The list of possibilities is endless--but if you are well prepared for the ride, you'll know it when it happens, and not be taken in.

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