

7 Things Pilots Need To Know Before Their Next Flight Review

Has it been a while since you've taken the left seat, and you're in need of a refresher? Here's what you need to know before taking your Flight Review and getting back in the air.

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By flying with a flight instructor, you can complete a flight review and get back in the pilot's seat in no time. Here's a brief look at seven big things that have changed in general aviation over the last few years.

1. It's Not a "Biennial" Flight Review Anymore

What the FAA used to call a biennial flight review (usually abbreviated BFR), is now just called a periodic flight review, or just simply a flight review. The basics are the same as before, including the minimum requirements for at least one hour of ground instruction and one hour of flight instruction from a Certified Flight Instructor (CFI). And it still must be conducted within the last twenty-four months for you to operate as the Pilot-in-Command.

The reason the FAA has removed the term “biennial” from all of the regulations and supporting materials is to emphasize that you should maintain your currency in a more sustained, on-going way, rather than just thinking about it every other year.

To that end, the FAA promotes its [WINGS program](#). If you’ve completed one phase of the WINGS program during the previous twenty-four months, you don’t need the traditional flight review. But what exactly entails a “phase” of the program? Well, you can custom build your program on [faasatey.gov](#). You get credit for all sorts of different things, like flying with a CFI or attending a seminar.

Generally, if you complete a phase, you will have done much more than one hour of ground and one hour of flight. But, you will have completed it throughout the two years instead of doing it all at once.

2. Medical Certificate Reform

Probably the most significant shakeup for private pilots is the new [BasicMed requirements](#). It’s now possible for many pilots who have needed a Third Class Medical Certificate to fly to use a valid state driver’s license and their regular doctor’s checkup. The spirit is to make it easier to keep your health in check and avoid the customary obstacle of visiting the AME every 24 or 60 months.

If you haven’t been to the AME in a while, you may be surprised to find out that all visits now start before you get to the doctor. Before arriving, complete a medical application online at [FAA MedXPress](#).

3. ICAO Standards

There’s also been a few changes in recent years to bring FAA procedures more in-line with the International Civil Aviation Organization’s (ICAO) standards. For one, all pilots must be proficient in the English language. This is now part of FAA check rides, and the new plastic pilot certificates carry an endorsement that reads “English Proficient.” By the way, all pilots operating now must have the new-style [plastic certificates](#).

A few terms have changed as well. While at towered airports, you may now hear, “Line up and wait,” instead of, “Taxi into position and hold.”

Finally, all flight plans, including VFR ones, are now filed on the [ICAO-standard flight plan form](#).

4. Airspace Changes

If the last time you flew, you worried about transiting an ARSA, you’ve got some studying to do. But if it was a Class C area, you’re going to be okay. The only significant changes have been the new requirement to have ADS-B out equipment on board. This very closely matches the zones where you previously had to have a Mode-C transponder. But the transponders are fancier now, and they send out your GPS position to enable satellite-based air traffic control.

NOTAMs (Notices to Airmen) and TFRs (Temporary Flight Restrictions) are still very big deals. They can pop up with little notice and ruin your day. The most surprising ones follow the president and vice-president’s travel. Regardless of the type or purpose, every pilot needs to get a full and thorough preflight briefing to ensure their area isn’t affected. Preflight briefings are now easily accomplished through [1800WXBRIEF.com](#).

US Customs and Border Protection has created a new electronic manifest that must be used for pilots flying internationally. You can learn more at [eAPIS](#).

5. Taxi Clearances and Runway Safety

Runway safety is still a hot topic, and there's always room for improvement. Every flight training event should include something to help you steer clear of trouble while operating at airports.

There is a new mandate that requires a specific clearance for each runway crossing when taxiing, which is clearer than the old way. If you're approaching a runway and haven't been given permission to cross it, you've got to hold short.

Airport diagrams are now available for most fields in the [Chart Supplements](#), previously known as the Airport/Facility Directory. Hotspots, where other pilots have run into trouble while navigating at the airport, are shown. Always use the airport diagram on every flight.

6. Review Your Maneuvers

Many flight instructors use scenario training, but maneuvers are still an essential part of any flight. What maneuvers should you practice beforehand? Look up anything related to flying the type of plane you operate or the types of trips you take. Takeoffs, landings, slow flight, and stalls are no-brainers. But remember to review those emergency procedures, too.

There is also a focus on establishing stabilized approaches and landings. This concept had previously been taught mostly to turbine pilots, but it's vital to all types of pilots. The basic concept is that you stabilize the plane during its final descent, and if it's not, you should go around and try again.

You can also expect some automation system failures, especially if you're flying a glass cockpit.

7. New Rules and Regulations

Here are just a few of the other regulations that have been updated.

- A new grade of pilot license has been created for sport pilots flying Light-Sport Aircraft (LSAs). These planes are two-seaters with speed and weight restrictions.
- All pilots are now required to carry a state-issued photo ID, along with their other documents.
- The FAA instituted the Pilot's Bill of Rights, which offers some due process protections during the FAA administrative process.
- Instrument currency rules have been updated to allow for the use of full-flight simulators and aviation training devices (ATDs).
- Many pilots are now using iPads and other tablets as Electronic Flight Bags to replace their paper charts. Read more in the [FAA Advisory Circular](#).
- FAR Part 107 has been created for Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV, or "drone") operators. These days, you'll likely see many more drone operations NOTAMs while flying.

One of the first things we learn when we become pilots is that things are always changing and that it's best to stay on top of all of these issues. But everyone plays catch up from time to time. This list is a brief introduction to some of the latest issues. Don't worry too much, though. The rudder pedals are right where you left them.