

Getting Started with Flight Training



1. Get set up with the FAA

a. Create an IACRA account

[Integrated Airman Certification and Rating Application](#) (IACRA) is the FAA's web-based certification/rating application that guides the user through the FAA's airman application process. You'll use this system throughout your flying life to apply for certificates, ratings, and sign documents.

b. Apply for a student pilot certificate

Once you've created your IACRA account, follow the steps in the [New User Guide](#) to apply for your student pilot certificate. While you won't need the student pilot certificate to start taking lessons, you will need it to fly solo. Since the processing time is now six to eight weeks, it pays to get this done early. Please note that you will need to meet with your instructor and complete this part of the process on the same computer.

c. DC security training

Everyone that flies within 60 nautical miles of the DCA airport needs to complete the Washington DC Special Flight Rules Area (SFRA) training offered by the FAA. It's offered on the [FAA website](#) free of charge, and the certificate is automatically given upon completion and valid indefinitely.

2. Obtain a medical certificate

a. Determine what class medical you need

The FAA issues three classes of medical certificates, first, second, and third, with the first class having the shortest validity period and requiring the most scrutiny. As a private pilot, you will need a third class medical. If you are considering or pursuing a commercial pilot certificate, or intend to become a flight instructor, you will require a second class medical to perform those duties. A first class medical is only required for the Air Transport Pilot certificate, which is required for airline pilots. The average cost of a third class medical is between \$75 and \$150. A first class medical can cost as much as \$200.

b. Find a Medical Examiner and make an appointment

You can find a Designated Aviation Medical Examiner using [this FAA website](#). Once you find an AME that suits your needs in terms of location and medical class services provided, call them to set up an appointment. You'll need your

medical certificate before you fly solo, which may be as early as a few weeks into flight training, so complete this step early.

3. Set up your ground training to study for the written test

a. Decide between home study or in-person training

The private and commercial pilot certificates, as well as the instrument rating, require you to pass both a written knowledge test and a practical exam (often called the checkride). FAA written tests are administered exclusively by [PSI exams](#). In order to take the written test, you'll need an endorsement from your Flight Instructor. Generally, you should plan to take the written test around 30 hours into your flight training.

You can do the required ground training in-person with your Flight Instructor, or purchase a home study course. We recommend purchasing a home study course, as they are comprehensive, come with videos and practice exams, and can be completed at your own pace from any place you have a computer, tablet, or phone available. Upon completion they will give you the endorsement required to take the written test.

b. Choose a home study course

Many companies offer home study courses, and they are all great in their own way. Be sure to research and determine which one suits your needs and style before purchasing! We don't endorse any provider in particular, but here are some options:

- i. <https://www.sportys.com/training.html>
- ii. <https://kingschools.com>
- iii. <https://www.gleimaviation.com/shop/ppkitcd/>
- iv. <https://rodmachado.com/products/rod-machados-40-hour-private-pilot-earning-ground-school>

c. Get additional study materials

You'll need some additional materials to supplement your ground training course. At a minimum you will need to get a copy of the Federal Aviation Regulations/Aeronautical Information Manual (FAR/AIM), which contains all the rules and procedures for flying in the U.S. Most online book stores and aviation shops sell these, but there are also phone apps available.

In addition to the FAR/AIM, we recommend getting a copy of the following:

- [FAA Airplane Flying Handbook](#)
- [FAA Pilot's Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge](#)

All of these are available as a free PDF from the FAA. For a printed copy we recommend [ASA](#).

4. Purchase flight training supplies

a. Logbook

You will need a logbook to log your flight time and ground instruction. Logging flight time in a pilot logbook is the way to prove to the FAA that you have met certain flight training requirements. Keep it in a safe location, because if you lose it you will have no way to use all your prior flight experience towards a certificate or rating! If you're just starting out, we recommend a small and simple one like [this one](#). If you're aiming to fly professionally or fly a lot, a [bigger logbook](#) might be right for you.

b. Flight planning equipment

For planning flights, you'll need the following:

- An E6B computer (analog or digital). There are E6B apps, but you will not be allowed use this in the testing center when you take your written test.
- A [VFR sectional chart](#) of the area where your airport is located. If a [Terminal Area Chart \(TAC\)](#) is available, get a copy of that one as well.
- A [plotter](#). A ruler will do as well, but an aviation plotter has the appropriate chart scales and measurements printed on it.

c. Equipment for in the airplane

- A kneeboard to store some of your charts and keep paper to write on while in the airplane. We recommend a kneeboard that contains the most important VFR regulations as a reference, like [this one](#).
- Headlamp and flashlight, for night flying. Make sure that the ones you purchase have red light, as white light is too blinding to fly with at night.
- Flight bag; not necessary but recommended, to keep all your flying things in one place.

d. Digital tools

Most pilots these days use some form of digital equipment to help them plan their flights and obtain situational awareness during flight. The two most popular apps are [Garmin Pilot](#) and [ForeFlight](#), with ForeFlight only being available for iOS devices. These tools centralize and provide you with a wealth of information, but you will initially have to learn to plan a flight using a paper chart and a calculator. Talk to your instructor before making this investment.

e. Aviation headset

While some student pilots like renting or borrowing headsets that may be available at the place where they take flight training and rent their aircraft, getting your own headset early on is a good idea. Headsets come in all shapes and sizes, ranging from \$250 to well over \$1000, with or without Active Noise Reduction (ANR). Here's our recommendations:

- [David Clark H10-13.4](#): Classic, been around forever, will last 20 years, but a little tight on the clamping force.
- [Lightspeed Sierra](#): At \$699, this entry level ANR headset is packed with many of the features you'll find on \$1100 headsets.
- [Bose A20](#): This top-tier option is the best headset money can buy. They are extremely comfortable and super quiet.

5. Protect yourself against the unexpected

a. Consider purchasing renter's insurance

All our airplanes are fully insured against damage to other people, their property, and to the aircraft itself. Our insurance has a deductible of \$2,500 per occurrence, meaning that in the unfortunate event that something happens to you while you are flying the aircraft, you may be responsible for those first \$2,500 in aircraft damage. It is always a good idea to protect yourself against the unexpected, so we recommend you purchase renters insurance. Some insurance companies that provide such insurance are [AP Aerospace](#) and [Avemco](#).

b. Consider becoming an AOPA member

The [Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association](#) (AOPA) exists to protect and to grow the incredible privilege that called general aviation. Not only does becoming a member give you great benefits in the form of (training) resources and materials, discounts (including on renter's insurance), and financing options, it can also offer your peace of mind in case of unexpected legal troubles. AOPA offers Pilot Protection Services (PPS), meaning they will help with you anything related to FAA enforcement actions, license suspensions and revocations, and the aftermath of accidents and incidents. An AOPA membership is free for student pilots.

Most of the supplies mentioned can be found at the [Sporty's Pilot Shop](#).