

# **PRIVATE PILOT CHECK RIDE DAY**

Congratulations! You're ready for your check ride! That's a big day in the life of any pilot. You're probably a little nervous (or maybe a lot) nervous. Don't worry, that's perfectly normal. But if you're properly prepared...and your flight instructor won't sign you off until he/she is confident you are...you'll be just fine. Really, you will be!

## **WHAT TO EXPECT**

There are two parts to the check ride...also called the Practical Test. The "oral" portion will come first. That's simply a conversation between you and your Designated Pilot Examiner (DPE) covering your overall knowledge of the subject areas being evaluated. That's usually around 2 hours or so depending on many factors.

The "flight" portion will follow. During the flight, you'll demonstrate the maneuvers and other flight skills you've already performed many, many times with your flight instructor (CFI).

Your check ride is governed by the FAA's Airman Certification Standards (ACS). Everything you are expected to be familiar with is there. Here's the link:

[https://www.faa.gov/training\\_testing/testing/acs/private\\_airplane\\_acs\\_6.pdf](https://www.faa.gov/training_testing/testing/acs/private_airplane_acs_6.pdf) Your DPE cannot ask you about anything that's not in this document, so there should be no surprises during the evaluation!

## **WHEN YOU FIRST MEET YOUR DPE**

It's perfectly ok to ask to meet with your DPE well before your test day. There's nothing "official" here, it's just a chance to say hello and see that he/she is just a regular person! But if for some reason that's not possible...and sometimes it's not...there's no cause for concern.

Assuming you don't have the chance to meet in advance, your DPE will take the time to get acquainted with you. He/she may ask about your other interests or hobbies, or what got you interested in flying. It's also your chance to ask him/her similar questions. This time is important. Take advantage of it. You're probably nervous as mentioned above and the opportunity for "small talk" can be calming.

## **THE PAPERWORK**

When the FAA is involved, nothing happens without paperwork! Before the check ride can "officially" begin, your DPE must qualify you.

You should have your photo ID, pilot certificate, and medical certificate (the originals...copies are NOT acceptable) with you to present along with your pilot logbook. Make sure you and your CFI have thoroughly reviewed your logbook to verify you meet all of the FAA requirements. Logbook errors are a big reason why check rides get cancelled before they start. Don't let that happen to you!! *NOTE: There is a check list of things to bring with you in Section 7 of the ACS so there's no excuse for forgetting anything*

Next, the aircraft logs must be reviewed. Be prepared to show the DPE that the aircraft is legally airworthy. You'll do this by locating the entries for the annual inspection, the 100-hour inspection (if that's required...in some instances it isn't), the pitot/static/transponder certification, the AD compliance list along with the airworthiness certificate, registration, weight/balance document, and the aircraft operating limitations...the so-called "AROW" documents. In some cases, an aircraft radio license is also required if the aircraft is being operated outside the USA.

DO NOT wait until the morning of the check ride to review all of this with your CFI. As with your pilot logbook, errors in the aircraft logbooks can cancel a ride before it gets started.

Your DPE is required to give you a briefing that describes how the check ride will be accomplished. That briefing will include an idea of how long it will take, reference to the ACS to be used, the three possible outcomes of the evaluation (Temporary Certificate, Letter of Discontinuance, Notice of Disapproval) and some other things. This is an excellent opportunity to ask any questions you may have about the process!

Assuming all the paperwork is satisfactory, and with the briefing accomplished, your DPE will move to IACRA. This is the electronic check ride application form that you and your CFI worked together to complete. The DPE will verify your identification, etc., review the Privacy Act and the Pilot's Bill Of Rights with you. Then, you'll electronically sign the IACRA application.

At this point, once you've signed the IACRA application, the check ride has officially begun.

## **THE ORAL**

If you're well-prepared, most orals last around 2 hours or less. The ACS is broken down into Areas Of Operation. For each AOA, there are multiple TASKS. The oral portion generally covers AOA I and II, although your DPE may elect to discuss other AOAs on the ground prior to flying.

The oral will be based on a 'scenario' that your DPE will have provided to you well in advance of your check ride date. The scenario will be the "reason" for making the flight today. For example, you are attending an out-of-town wedding and will be flying yourself and some family members to the event.

During the discussion, you'll be asked various questions such as how/why you picked the chosen route. This could lead to a discussion about fuel requirements, weight and balance issues, weather conditions and hazards, how you determined the aircraft was airworthy, how you determined you, as the pilot, are legal of make the trip and other subject matter covered by the various TASKS in AOA I and II.

You won't know it all. No one does. Among other things, the secret to a successful oral is knowing where to find the answer to things you either don't know or aren't sure about. So, bring your Airplane Flying Handbook, your Pilot Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge, and the FAR/AIM along with any other reference material you have. And don't forget to bring your copy of the ACS!! Generally speaking, DPEs don't allow Google searches.

## **THE FLIGHT**

With the oral successfully completed, you're half-way home! Now, you just need to show your DPE that you can fly the airplane. Refer back to the ACS and AOAs III through XII for the maneuvers you'll be expected to demonstrate. The standards (tolerances) for everything are clearly shown and you are expected to know what they are. Perfection is NOT the standard. Safety, good judgement, and proficiency commensurate with your experience (you're not going to fly like a 10,000 hour pilot...and you're not expected to!) are of primary importance. You WILL make mistakes. Guaranteed. But, if you do, acknowledge them and, most importantly, correct them. As long as this doesn't become excessive, you'll be just fine.

If you read the ACS (Appendix 1: Unsatisfactory Performance) it says: “Typical areas of unsatisfactory performance and grounds for disqualification include:

- Any action or lack of action by the applicant that required corrective intervention by the evaluator to maintain safe flight
- Failure to use proper and effective visual scanning techniques to clear the area before and while performing maneuvers
- **Consistently exceeding tolerances stated in the skill elements of the Task**
- **Failure to take prompt corrective action when tolerances are exceeded**
- Failure to exercise risk management

Pay particular attention to the bullet points in **bold**. The ACS doesn't say you can never exceed the standards. It says you can't **consistently** exceed the standards...and to fix it if you do! Again, perfection is not the standard. Fix the mistakes you will inevitably make and show the DPE that you are safe!

### **AFTER THE RIDE**

Assuming all goes well, the DPE will shake your hand and offer his/her congratulations. There's still paperwork to do. After all, it IS the FAA! Your examiner will prepare your Temporary Pilot Certificate and hand it to you on the spot. Congratulations. You are now a Private Pilot! Now's the time for celebratory photos. Your DPE will gladly pose for one with you if you like. And, if you wish, he/she will also sign your logbook.

### **ONE FINAL THOUGHT**

The DPE wants you to pass, really! There is great joy in handing the successful applicant a Temporary Pilot Certificate. Seeing the smile on their face at this moment is incredibly gratifying for the DPE. Keep that in mind and it'll help you stay calm and focused.

NOTE: While this was written with the Private Pilot Check Ride in mind, it also applies to check rides for additional ratings and certificates.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Designated Pilot Examiner Pat Brown was bitten by the flying bug early. He began taking lessons at age 16, earning his Private Pilot license shortly after his 17th birthday. Today, 11,000+ hours later, he holds a Commercial Pilot certificate for Gliders, Single-Engine Land/Seaplane, and Multi-Engine Land aircraft and is a Gold Seal Flight Instructor for gliders, single and multi-engine aircraft, with nearly 6000 hours of instruction given. He is also a recipient of the FAA's Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award. Pat is the co-developer of AOPA's Rusty Pilot and Back To Your Roots seminars and presents them regularly, both as online live webinars and in-person to enthusiastic audiences.

