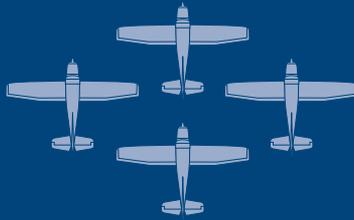


FIELD GUIDE TO FLIGHT TRAINING

# Flight Schools



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# Flight Schools

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Setting futures  
in flight.

As a flight school owner, you know first-hand the satisfaction of seeing your customers progress from novice students to capable and accomplished pilots. Those smiling faces. That temporary certificate. A brand new pilot has joined the family!

You also know first-hand the challenges of running a business. As a flight school operator, you have undoubtedly experienced many of the social, technological, and economic shifts that impact general aviation today, and adapted your business strategy accordingly. But how can you continue to evolve, ensuring that your students are successful, your instructors are satisfied, and your business is profitable?

The worksheets and suggestions in this guide were designed to help you determine what's working in your flight school, explore new methods and approaches to flight training, and implement changes that will lead to lasting success. Like using a checklist to shut out distractions, continually referring to this guide can help you maintain focus on flight training personalization elements which keep students interested and inspired.

# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

FOR YOU, BY YOU

The information and suggestions in this guide came from your peers. Over the course of a year, AOPA talked to flight instructors, schools, and students around the country about what matters most when it comes to flight training. Next, we distilled these findings into a series of actionable ideas, worksheets, tips, and suggestions.

Every flight school is unique in terms of resources, location, technology, and support networks; you are the expert in the nuances of running your own school. By combining your flight school perspective with the results of our flight training research, we can begin to build the future of flight training, as a community.

## ADD YOUR EXPERTISE

This guide is not intended to tell you what to do. Rather, it is intended to help you evaluate the tools already in place at your flight school, evolve new support methods, and assess ways that you can create a flight school experience that benefits your students as well as instructors.

By making small, immediate changes and working gradually towards appropriate shifts in your flight school structure, your business can stay profitable, provide excellent service, and offer your customers plenty of extra value for the money they're spending with you.



## OTHER GUIDES IN THIS SERIES

**Field Guide to Flight Training**

[Flight Instructors](#)

**Field Guide to Flight Training**

[Flight Students](#)

WORKSHEET

# SETTING SCHOOL GOALS

FROM WHERE YOU'VE BEEN TO WHERE YOU'RE GOING

*To start off, it's important to think about the current state of your flight school, and create a vision for the future.*

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In an ideal world, what would your flight school experience be? What impression would you like to impart to your students? How would you like your instructors to regard their experiences? Write these motivations below.

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Next, consider the concrete outcomes that you would like to work towards. Would you like to increase student retention? Purchase new aircraft? Expand your business?

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Now that you've examined some of your aspirations and ideal outcomes, take the time to set concrete goals. Keep these goals in mind as you work through the tools and worksheets in the following sections. Be sure to revisit this sheet periodically to see how you're progressing towards each goal.

Immediate goal: .....

Six month goal: .....

Twelve Month goal: .....





Manufacturer: CESSNA Aircraft Co. Inc.  
Type: Cessna 441 Conquest II  
Model: 441  
Year: 2000  
Serial No.: 44100000000000000000  
Weight: 1400 lbs  
Max Altitude: 10000 ft  
Max Speed: 160 mph  
Max Fuel Capacity: 40 gal  
Max Ramp Load: 1000 lbs

# FOUNDATIONS FOR FLIGHT SUCCESS

As you move towards your flight school goals, it is helpful to focus on the areas of flight training that have the most impact on the student experience, retention, and satisfaction.

## **FACILITATE THE INSTRUCTOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP**

Establish resources, milestones and feedback opportunities that facilitate the bond between student and instructor.

## **PROVIDE STRUCTURES & SET EXPECTATION**

Offer tools and incentives for an efficient, well-structured flight training program.

## **FOCUS ON THE STUDENT RELATIONSHIP**

Bring a customer-service approach to your flight school by offering high quality instruction, safe aircraft, and relevant services.

## **BUILD COMMUNITY**

Create a community structure that invites participation from pilots, instructors and students, as well as pilot friends and family.

# FACILITATE THE INSTRUCTOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

TECHNICAL TRAINING WITH A PERSONAL TOUCH

Once they begin flight training, students spend the majority of their time with a single person: their flight instructor. This one relationship plays an important role in the student's experience, their happiness, and even the likelihood of continuing with their training.

As a flight school operator, you can establish the foundation for a healthy student-instructor relationship by encouraging personalized instruction and guidance, and establishing progressive milestones that help students visualize their progress towards their goals.

Use the tools in this section to assess your current approach to instructor guidance, examine flight training milestones, and identify areas that you'd like your business to focus on.

WORKSHEET

# ENCOURAGING PERSONALIZED INSTRUCTION

*What does it mean to encourage personalized instruction? Use the worksheet below to explore different ways that you can enable strong instructor-student relationships at your flight school.*

---

## IDENTIFY YOUR STYLE

What is the ideal student-instructor relationship at your school?: .....

.....

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## KNOW YOUR INSTRUCTORS

Personalized instruction begins with student-instructor compatibility. Start by understanding your instructors, and then try to match students according to each instructor’s personality and attributes.

Use the template on the following page as a guide to review each of your instructors’ teaching styles and attributes. Keep this on hand, and refer to it each time you match a student-instructor pair.

## MAKE YOUR STUDENTS COMFORTABLE

Think of ways you can help students feel comfortable and encouraged throughout their flight training experience. Mark the methods already in place at your school, and the ones you're interested in adding.

### ALREADY DOING / WANT TO TRY

- /  Encourage flight students to speak with, or fly with, different flight instructors before deciding who they should train with. A good personality match will go a long way to ensure student retention.
- /  Keep your student phone numbers and email addresses on file. Follow up with students periodically to get feedback on their flight training experience.
- /  When a new student begins flight training, invite their family and friends to come to the flight school, ask questions, and understand the mechanics of earning a pilot certificate.

## ADDITIONAL IDEAS

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## INSTRUCTOR ATTRIBUTES

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**INSTRUCTOR NAME** .....

Experience .....

Skill set .....

Unique attributes .....

**INSTRUCTOR NAME** .....

Experience .....

Skill set .....

Unique attributes .....

**INSTRUCTOR NAME** .....

Experience .....

Skill set .....

Unique attributes .....

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**INSTRUCTOR NAME** .....

Experience .....

Skill set .....

Unique attributes .....

**INSTRUCTOR NAME** .....

Experience .....

Skill set .....

Unique attributes .....

## CHECKLIST

# SETTING INSTRUCTOR PRIORITIES

*Our research shows that the factors below contribute to a good flight training experience. Which of these matter most to you? Mark the areas you'd like to focus on, and then provide your instructors with the support and tools to help them put these ideas into practice.*

---

## WHICH OF THESE AREAS WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR INSTRUCTORS TO FOCUS ON?

- Create a well-organized training syllabus so that students aren't rushed, and to ensure that their flight training time and money are well spent. Include personalized lesson plans based on each student's learning style. [The AOPA Flight Training Advantage \(AFTA\)](#) app is an easy way to do this!
- Check in, personally, with your students from time to time. Ask how they feel their training is progressing.
- Set aside a time, on a regular basis, to check in with your instructors. Are they facing any difficult challenges with any of their students?
- When appropriate, allow students to ride in the back seat for free during other students' flight lessons, to expand their learning.
- Demonstrate a commitment to student success at each stage of training by acknowledging milestones and giving the student a clear sense of progress towards their larger goals.
- Emphasize the "real world" skills that students will acquire during flight training, in addition to learning how to fly a plane.
- Check to make sure that students understand the content and skills in each lesson.
- Vary flight routes and destination airports during lessons to keep students inspired and prepare them for a variety of flying scenarios.
- Conduct appropriate pre-flight and post-flight debriefs.

- Keep scheduling commitments to students, and make sure to call or email them well in advance if anything changes with their training schedule.
- Include the student's friends and family in the process of flight training. Invite them to ride along on a flight, encouraging them to celebrate milestones, or sharing progress with them periodically.

CHECKLIST

# SETTING STUDENT MILESTONES

FROM SMALL ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO BIG PICTURE SUCCESS

*Flight training can feel like a long process, so it helps to provide students with frequent feedback as they progress towards their pilot certification. As a school, it's important to recognize the standard training milestones, while also creating school-specific and student-specific accomplishments and modes of recognition.*

---

## SET YOUR MARKS

Begin by considering the flight training milestones listed below, and then add your own school-specific benchmarks to the list.

- First flight
- First crosswind landing
- Taking friends or family up on a training flight
- Student pilot certificate
- Solo flight
- Mountain flying checkout
- First night flight
- Landing on a new runway or at another airport
- Landing at a Class C airport
- First time flying in Class B airspace
- FAA knowledge test
- Solo cross-country flight
- Practical test
- .....
- .....

## ENCOURAGE INDIVIDUALIZATION

Every flight student has different aptitudes, obstacles, and passions. Encourage your flight instructors to spend time with their students at the beginning of the training journey to discuss personal aspirations and establish meaningful milestones.

Think about ways that you can build individualized milestones into your school structure. Can you schedule meetings to check in on student progress each month, ask instructors to email you with student milestones and accomplishments, or schedule intermediate progress reports?

Below, explore some strategies to encourage individualization.

- .....
- .....
- .....

## **CELEBRATE SUCCESSES**

Think of unique ways your school can acknowledge student accomplishments and celebrate success. There are so many opportunities here! First lesson, first solo, first night flight, first solo cross country, passing the knowledge test, passing the checkride. The list is endless and perfect for social media blasts!

Maybe you post your student’s photo on the flight school bulletin board. Perhaps you create flight school patches commemorating some of those “firsts.” Or maybe you simply spread the word about student progress and encourage everyone at your school to offer their casual congratulations.

Whatever traditions you implement, make sure they reflect your school’s personality and philosophy. It’s good for morale, and it’s great for business! Add to the list of possible flight school traditions below.

## **IN-PERSON TRADITIONS**

- Host open houses and events to recognize student milestones.
- Create flight school patches and present them to students after they’ve completed their first night flight.
- Provide students with a T-shirt and “cut the tail” after their first solo flight.  
.....  
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## **DIGITAL TIE-INS**

- Post photos and announce student milestones on Facebook and through other social media networks.
- Announce student progress on your flight school website or newsletter their first night flight.
- Create a digital forum where students can share stories with one another.

“Every generation has the obligation to free men’s minds for a look at new worlds, to look out from a higher plateau than the last generation. Your vision is not limited by what your eye can see, but by what your mind can imagine.”

-ELLISON ONIZUKA, ASTRONAUT

# PROVIDE STRUCTURE & SET EXPECTATIONS

BUILD THE FOUNDATION OF THE FLIGHT TRAINING EXPERIENCE

As a flight school operator, it is important to consider the needs and expectations of two distinct groups: flight students and flight instructors.

For instructors, this means providing them with tools that enable organization, facilitate scheduling, and standardize your school's approach to flight training.

For students, this means setting the expectation of what's to come, providing an estimate of what flight training may cost, and helping them understand ways that they can make aviation a part of their daily routine.

Together, these methods of support will help set a standard of service and instruction at your school, and ultimately benefit the overall flight training experience. Use the tools on the following pages to identify ways you can provide structure and set expectations at your school.

# CREATING INSTRUCTOR TOOLS

*When it comes to training techniques and milestones, it helps to get all of your instructors on the same page so you can create a standard quality of instruction at your school.*

*Check off the areas below that you're already addressing or that you'd like to focus on. Then add additional strategies below.*

---

## ALREADY DOING / WANT TO TRY

- /  Provide a scheduling system so instructors can schedule flight training lessons in advance, to ease student planning.
- /  Encourage students to schedule flight lessons at the same time every week. Students who make their lessons a part of their standard schedule are more likely to stick with flight training in the long term.
- /  At the conclusion of each lesson, make sure the student has the next lesson scheduled and knows what to expect. [The AOPA Flight Training Advantage \(AFTA\)](#) makes it easy to keep up.
- /  Offer flexible scheduling options that fit your student's needs and time constraints.
- /  Make it a standard practice for instructors to call or email students prior to each lesson with a reminder of what the student can expect the following day. The [AOPA Flight Training Advantage \(AFTA\)](#) makes this a snap!
- /  Encourage your flight instructors to follow up with students who have not come in for a flight lesson for more than two weeks.
- /  Follow up with students who have not come in for three or four weeks. If they lapse in training, ask why they chose not to return. Keep a record of these reasons, and think of ways to evolve your training approach around this feedback.

## ADDITIONAL IDEAS

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## PROVIDE STRUCTURE & SET EXPECTATIONS

### CONSIDER THE SYLLABUS

A standardized syllabus can go a long way towards providing an efficient and effective flight training experience. It can help keep instructors and schools on the same page, set student expectations, and manage the quality of the flight training experience at your school.

Additionally, in the event a student chooses to change instructors, having a shared syllabus will allow them to transition smoothly from one instructor to the next.

To help you and your instructor keep track of where your students are in the training process, consider using the [AOPA Flight Training Advantage](#) platform. It's fully customizable to suit the needs of your students.



**AOPA FLIGHT TRAINING ADVANTAGE**  
Transparent training, consistent instruction,  
and business insights for your school.  
**NEW!** Get \$ incentives by using AFTA!

LEARN MORE

The banner features a stylized airplane icon on the left, a laptop displaying a software interface in the center, and a blue button with the text 'LEARN MORE' on the right. The background is a gradient of blue and orange with a network-like pattern.

# SETTING STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

*For students, it is helpful to provide clear information and set expectations for their training experience. Explore the following methods for setting student expectations and mark the areas you'd like to focus on.*

---

ALREADY DOING / WANT TO TRY

- /  Share information about the qualifications, personality, and teaching style of all of your instructors, so students can select an instructor that is right for them.
  
- /  Provide students with a realistic estimate of flight training timing and costs. Be sure to include a list of additional costs a student can expect (insurance, ground school, etc.), so they are able to budget accordingly. Examples include:
  - Typical duration of flight training at your school .....
  - Price range .....
  - Additional expenses .....
  
- /  Give students a clear sense of how instructors calculate “billable hours.” Many students don’t realize they might be paying for flight instruction when they’re not actually flying the plane, so it’s best to be clear about costs up front.
  
- /  Share statistics about the success rates of flight students at your school.
  
- /  Number of students who began training last year.....
  
- /  Number of students who completed their pilot certificate last year.....
  
- /  First-time pass rate of your students’ check rides.
  
- /  Schedule check-ins with each student to discuss their training experience. Consider these findings as you evolve flight training and instruction methods at your school.

CHECKLIST

# STUDENT TOOLS

*By providing students with guides and information sheets, you can set realistic expectations and help organize and simplify the training experience.*

---

ALREADY DOING / WANT TO TRY

- /  Provide AME (Airman Medical Examiner) lists and guidance to help students obtain their medical certificates.
  
- /  Give students the opportunity to meet with a Designated Pilot Examiner at some point during their training. This will alleviate stress during the actual checkride.
  
- /  Provide students with “stick with it” tools, such as:
  - Calendars or schedules*
  - A milestone overview they can post at home*
  - A printout of helpful online resources, schedulers or planners students can engage with outside of their training.*

## ADDITIONAL IDEAS

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# FOCUS ON THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

BRING A CUSTOMER SERVICE APPROACH TO FLIGHT TRAINING

At its core, flight training is a customer service experience—and every student wants to feel that his or her time and money are well spent.

As a flight school, you can achieve a positive student experience by hiring knowledgeable instructors who share your attitude towards customer service, offering well-maintained equipment, and providing student services that are affordable as well as relevant to the students' goals.

The following section includes tips on providing quality instruction, building instructor incentives, focusing on affordability, and creating services relevant to your particular school. Remember a large part of customer service is the personal connection—so as you go through these checklists, jot down ways you can insert your own flight school personality into the training experience.



## **TIPS FOR QUALITY INSTRUCTION**

### **STAY COMPETITIVE**

Research local flight training costs in your area and work with your instructors to set rates accordingly.

### **GO FOR QUALITY**

Offer competitive compensation and instructor benefits to encourage good performance, as well as long-term engagement with your school.

### **ENCOURAGE IMPROVEMENT**

Encourage instructors to review each other's teaching styles and methods. Pair newer instructors with more experienced ones, and have them ride along during training flights.

### **TIDY UP**

Keep aircraft clean and well-maintained so they are available when needed.

### **OFFER VARIETY**

Offer students the opportunity to fly different types of aircraft with more advanced avionics.

## INSTRUCTOR INCENTIVES

You can help improve instructor morale by offering incentives and rewards when their students pass certain training milestones.

Whether you offer instructors a bonus, a gift certificate, or a free lunch, make sure they are motivated to see their students progress through flight training—rather than simply logging hours in the air.

### MILESTONE

### INCENTIVE

*Example:*

Student completes first solo flight

*Example:*

Instructor receives \$10 gift card to a local coffee shop

Student passes checkride on 1st attempt

Instructor receives cash bonus

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# AFFORDABILITY

*In addition to providing useful instruction and quality aircraft, you can improve the value of your flight school experience by offering students additional training benefits free or at low cost. These benefits can improve student satisfaction, reinforce student learning and build community—factors that ultimately increase the likelihood a student will complete his or her certification.*

---

## HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE VALUE OR INCREASE AFFORDABILITY AT YOUR SCHOOL?

### ALREADY DOING / WANT TO TRY

- /  Provide practice written tests at no additional cost, so students can reinforce their training outside of their flight hours. This can be as simple as providing a file cabinet full of practice tests in your pilot lounge, or giving students access to an online test-taking resource.
- /  Make sure that instructors plan each lesson carefully to make efficient use of the student's time and money. *Hint: [AFTA](#) can help here!*
- /  Ensure instructors avoid covering material in flight that could be covered less expensively on the ground.
- /  Offer and advertise affordable pricing on student simulator use. Incorporate simulators into your syllabus to help students gain familiarity with glass cockpits, GPS equipment, or other avionics in your training aircraft.
- /  Create opportunities for cost-effective group ground school sessions.
- /  Encourage new pilots to seek advanced ratings by offering discounts or additional engagement opportunities.

CHECKLIST

# UNIQUE SERVICES

*Think about the unique needs of your student population. Maybe you have a large number of busy professionals who would enjoy a VIP service experience. Maybe your students express an interest in community events. Or maybe you can build a partnership with a nearby airport.*

*Explore the suggestions below, and add your own customer service ideas.*

---

ALREADY DOING / WANT TO TRY

- /  Connect with local aviation volunteer networks and ask about ways your students can get involved (for example, Civil Air Patrol, youth outreach programs, and charitable flying organizations).
  
- /  Start a “Fly Out” group at your school.
  
- /  Create a VIP service that streamlines the flying process for busy students, without interfering with flight training skills.

ADDITIONAL IDEAS

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# **BUILD A COMMUNITY**

CONFIDENCE, CONNECTIONS, AND STUDENT SUPPORT

Community engagement is a powerful way to inspire your flight students, while also setting them up with a support network that will enrich their training experience.

Students who feel included in the community are likely to log more hours in the air, recommend your flight school to other students, and continue to rent your planes once they receive pilot certification.

In addition to all of these benefits, a robust flight school community can bring in members of the wider aviation community, attract better instructors, and contribute to your flight school's overall success.

# BUILDING COMMUNITY

*Use this worksheet to assess your own flight school community and identify areas for improvement.*

---

## CREATE AN INVITING ENVIRONMENT

Creating a welcoming school environment can help build community and contribute to a student's sense of belonging. Think about the ways you are already offering a positive environment, as well as areas for improvement.

### ALREADY DOING / WANT TO TRY

- /  Have a common area where students and instructors can spend time before or after lessons.
  
- /  Provide a refrigerator with drinks and snacks for purchase.
  
- /  Assign a member of your staff to “front desk duty,” or have an on-duty CFI sit at your front desk at all times, so each student has a personal interaction as soon as they enter your flight school.

## ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS

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## ENABLE CONNECTIONS

Think of ways you can build support systems and enable student relationships.

### ALREADY DOING / WANT TO TRY

- /  Encourage instructors to introduce their students to one another, in order to create community around the flight training experience.

- / ○ Create a “buddy” program, where students and pilots provide advice and moral support to students who are at an earlier stage in their flight training.
- / ○ Provide name badges for all members of your staff, and create a Staff Bio bulletin board in your pilot lounge or on your website.

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS**

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**CREATE TRADITIONS AND EVENTS**

Unique traditions and community events are a wonderful way to build connections among students, instructors, pilots, friends and family. List existing and aspirational traditions and events below.

**TRADITIONS**

Existing traditions.....

.....

New traditions you'd like to add.....

.....

**EVENTS**

Existing community events.....

.....

New events you'd like to create .....

.....

# ONWARD & UPWARD

Every member of the aviation community—from new pilots to old hands—started with a yearning to get up in the sky. With this guide we hope you will continue to enable new students to take flight, and remind instructors and pilots of the passion that inspired their own pilot journeys.

After all, flight schools play an invaluable role in aviation; they encourage students to explore a new interest, provide training in important skills, impart knowledge, and enable student-instructor connections. They set the stage for every student’s aviation experience, and provide the meeting ground for the local aviation community.

We encourage you to continue to revisit these thoughts, tools, tips and guidelines as you evolve your business, build your flight school, and contribute to the growth of general aviation.

Together, we can make it even better than it is today.



## STAY CONNECTED

AOPA works every day to make flying more fun, affordable, and safe. Visit our [website!](#) It's an excellent source of information for all pilots.

If you like online learning, the [Air Safety Institute](#) is an excellent source.

Our [Flight Training magazine](#) also contains helpful articles that do a great job of demystifying some of the things you may encounter during your training.

TO help you and your instructor, keep track of your training, try [AOPA's Flight Training Advantage \(AFTA\)](#). It's fully customizable to suit your needs.

Finally, if you have any aviation-related questions, our Pilot Information Center (PIC) is standing by to help. Just call 800.USA.AOPA (872.2672) or contact us [online](#).

### **AN IMPORTANT NOTE REGARDING YOUR STUDENTS' MEDICAL EXAM:**

Some health issues can be sensitive to discuss, but it is important to help your students understand the process. Medications for some conditions are acceptable to the FAA while others can cause automatic denials or deferrals. Your students should understand this BEFORE visiting the AME. AOPA has an excellent team in our Pilot Information Center that can help prospective pilots avoid the hassle and headaches that can result from denials and/or deferrals. You should encourage them to call AOPA if they are on any kind of medication or have any reason to believe they may not be able to pass a physical exam. 800.USA.AOPA (872.2672) or [Pilot Information Center](#)

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AOPA FOUNDATION

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