

Taking the FAA Practical Exam (Check Ride)

Taking a check ride is one of the most stressful times in the training of a pilot. Almost everyone at this time is at a heightened state of anxiety due to, what to them is, the unknown and the fear that they may not pass. As an examiner we have taken many practical tests and are sensitive to the human factors associated with testing. We have been there; we know how you feel; we may have even failed a check ride or two ourselves. So what can you do to mitigate the stress of the check ride. I have learned and observed some things in the 55+ years of flying and taking check rides and the 30+ years of conducting Practical Exams.

To begin with you are going to be nervous. Deal with it.

If you are on a career track to the Airlines you are going to be taking lots of check rides so get used to it. Keep in mind the whole purpose is safety and to make sure the applicant pilot meets the FAA standards. The examiner is only there to make sure you meet the standards. No examiner wants to fail someone. We are there to pass you not to fail you. However, we are also there to make sure you meet the standards. We have a responsibility to the public as a last check that this pilot is safe and can operate in the U.S. and World airspace without posing a risk to others. Having done this for a while I have to admit that the system works pretty well. The Examiner verifies the Flight Instructors work and the FAA verifies the effectiveness of the Examiner. More on this later.

So what can you do to give a good ride?

- 1) Get a good night sleep. This may not be easy but do the best you can. If you are tired you simply will not do as well. Try not to fly the day of the check ride. This will only tire you out. My observation over the years is that those who try to cram at the last minute are only more tired.
- 2) Over prepare. Most people doing this like to fly but it helps to have a passion for it. A willingness to know as much as possible. The examiner doesn't like to have to do extensive questioning to determine knowledge. If it takes too long to get answers we won't continue.
- 3) **Read the Airman Certification Standards or Practical Test Standards cover to cover. You must know something about everything in this book, that relates to the oral portion, and do the maneuvers as outlined. If it's in the book know something about it. If you don't understand something ask your CFI.**
- 4) Relax it's only a test not the end of the world. The worst thing that can happen is that you don't make it. Other than the inconvenience it really doesn't mean much. Look at it from the standpoint that if your not ready maybe you should not be there. Most times we can finish the test with the exception of the item or items which were unsatisfactory. (This only applies to the flight portion).
- 5) "Attitude is everything" I rarely see what I would consider a poor attitude but it does happen. There is no place in aviation for arrogance.
- 6) Know where to find the info. You aren't expected to know everything but you should know where to find things. Be familiar with the AIM, FARs, **POH and the AFD**.
- 7) Look at the check ride as a challenge and a learning experience. Always think professionalism and safety don't try to cut corners or take short cuts. You'll learn that soon enough
- 8) Do what you have been taught. If the instructor did not think you were ready they would not have signed you off. Once you are signed off try not to worry about. It will only make things worse. What will be will be.
- 9) Try to have fun. We're here because we enjoy flying. It's serious business but we can still have fun even today's complex world.

As much as the FAA has tried to standardize practical tests there is still a certain amount of subjectivity. Years ago we used a small booklet called the Flight Test Guide. Although this gave some guidance to the examiner it really left the door open to each persons interpretation. Today we have the ACS & PTS, which is essentially regulatory. It is not an Advisory Circular. Its 8000 series number makes it regulatory. I might point out that other training manuals, which also have an 8000 number, are also regulatory. In other words this is how an airplane is to be flown in the U.S. We are required to select certain items and each one of those must be covered for the license or rating being tested. We don't have a choice. Any failed item could constitute a failure of the test. Perfection is not the goal, although, the items in the flight portion should be held to the published PTS/ACS standards. Much of what we test on was learned the hard way and is written in some ones blood

Also we are not allowed to do any teaching during the check ride. With some exceptions we are not allowed to ask maneuvers to be repeated. We are also required to have a written plan of action from which we conduct the test.

How does the FAA know we are doing all of this? Well for one thing they must sit in on one of our practical tests each year. Also we are required, without exception, to attend a recurrency meeting each year. Additionally we are on a computer tracking system, DMS, that tells our POI at the FAA what our pass fail rate is and if any of our applicants have had any accidents. This info is also tracked on the CFI's now. Another way the FAA was tracking how we were doing is sending out question sheets Or calling to selected new pilots to get their input. Of interest concerning the pass fail rate we do not have a quota, however, if we have a 100% pass rate their going to want to know why.

So how do I feel about all this surveillance? I don't worry about it. I'm here to do a job and I take pride in doing it right. I don't have a problem with what they are doing and besides it's the law.

Lastly, why do people fail Practical Tests? I think it can be any number of reasons. I have heard some people say the instructor ought to be the one to get the notice of disapproval. In a few cases this may be true, however, many times the applicant is so tense they just can't think effectively. Sometimes the instructor doesn't spend enough time with the applicant and they are not prepared. Sometimes, heaven forbid, the examiner could be having a bad day. The point is, get over it, keep trying and you will succeed. The most disappointing thing is when someone just gives up. To me that is a double failure.