

Operations at Charlottesville, VA

The purpose of this handout is twofold. First, it provides a primer for understanding how to operate (taxi) at an airfield with an operating control tower. Charlottesville is the example, but the principles apply to any Class D airport. Second, communications are obviously different and this handout provides some insights into how and when to talk to the tower/ground.

Ground Operations

Whenever you are operating at an unfamiliar airport, a complex airport (multiple runways and taxiways) or at a tower controlled airport, the first unbreakable rule is to have a copy of the airport diagram in front of you. The diagrams contain the “street map” for the airport layout and include HOT SPOTS or areas where there is an increased risk during taxi. Remember that when you are taxiing the aircraft, you should not be doing ANYTHING else. You should NOT be completing a checklist, talking with passengers (announce sterile cockpit), programming the GPS, or any other task that diverts your attention from the task of taxiing along the appointed route to the runway of intended departure.

Airport diagrams are contained in two locations:

- The back of the Airport Facilities Director (simpler and often uncontrolled diagrams are usually collocated with the airport description listed by state.
- The instrument approach plates contain some airport diagrams in the same section as the airport’s approaches, normally as the last page following all approaches.
- iPads are especially helpful, as a subscription contains both documents and folders allow you to select and load documents to an easily accessible page. The iPad also allows emits an alert whenever you are in proximity of a hot spot.

When on the ground at a Class D airport, have the airport diagram out and ready. After advising ground control that you have the ATIS and are ready to taxi, expect them to provide taxi instructions. Once you have **copied the instructions and read them back to the controller**, have a look at your taxi diagram. You should be able to trace your route from your location to the runway from which you expect to depart. Use of an iPad can be very helpful in tracking your exact position on the ground as you taxi along your appointed route. If you are uncertain of your location or the route you are to follow, ask! You should know that it is a best practice to read back ALL taxi instructions. Some instructions are mandatory, such as hold short instructions, line up and wait instructions, and cleared for departure.

In the event you absolutely do not understand the complex taxi instruction or are not sure you can correctly navigate to the runway, you can advise ground control “**request progressive taxi.**” This means you are asking the tower to assist you with your taxi. Controllers would much rather issue progressive taxi instructions than write a violation because you were somewhere you weren’t supposed to be.

One last important point is to be sure that when you are ready to depart that you **on located on the correct runway.** Each year there are multiple aircraft that depart from a runway other than the one that

was identified as the runway to be used. This happens during operations under limited visibility, at unfamiliar airports, when runways are close to one another or when correct taxi procedures are not followed. Always verify the take-off runway with magnetic compass prior to actually departing.

Arriving at such an airport follows the same procedure. Before arrival, be sure to have the airport diagram ready to use and have a clear understanding of where you want to go. After landing and crossing hold short line, bring the aircraft to a stop, complete the after landing check list and then proceed to your destination on the ground. Controllers will often issue simple instructions before you have come to a stop. For example, the controller at Manassas might say, "taxi to the ramp via A, monitor ground." More complex instructions may require the same procedures as departure when you copy the clearance, read it back, then confirm your taxi route on the airport diagram.

One last item to relate is to emphasize that it is important that you **know and understand airport signs and markings**. This task was partially covered during Stage I. Keep your deck of flashcards handy and review them during your preflight preparation. Whenever you see a sign or marking you do not understand, find out what it is and what it means to you as a pilot. For study purposes, there is a King Tape available for use at the school, ASF has an airport signs and markings video and the FAA publishes a lot of material on this subject (most notably in the FAR/AIM). Even as a student pilot, there is no excuse for not knowing.

Communications

To obtain a private license, a student must complete at least 3 take-offs and landings at an airport with an operating control tower. To accomplish then and when approaching Charlottesville from the east (like from the Gordonsville VOR), you should contact the tower as follows:

When over or just prior to the GVE VOR, obtain the ATIS at Charlottesville. Note the letter designating the current ATIS broadcast and the wind direction, as this will give you an idea of which runway to expect to land on. Let's assume that information Alpha is current. When you are about 12-15 NM out, call Charlottesville Tower and say:

Charlottesville Tower, this is N67495. Wait for the tower to call you back. This is to make sure they are ready for the next transmission. ATC will say *N67495, Charlottesville Tower, say request.* This particular tower does have a radar screen, so the controller may already know where you are and be expecting your call. If you need to write it down the first few times, do so, then just read the script. You then say:

Charlottesville Tower, N67495 is a C-152 vicinity of the Gordonsville VOR, inbound for landing with information Alpha, student pilot.

Let's assume winds favor landing on Runway 3, which they normally do in the winter months. The tower might then instruct you as follows:

N67495, report a 2 mile right base for Runway 3. You would respond: *495, report a two mile right base for Runway 3.* Where is this? From the threshold to runway 3, go back on final about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile, then imaging a two mile base leg. Fly to that point and descent so as to arrive there at pattern altitude.

When you arrive, tell ATC what you want. Let's assume you want to do your 3 take offs and landings. Because the runway is 6,000 feet long, you want to do stop and go's. When you arrive at the two mile right base, you would say.

Charlottesville Tower, 495 reports a two mile right base, request stop and go, closed traffic.

The tower should then clear by saying, *495, cleared for the option*, or ATC might say *495, cleared stop and go, left traffic*. The option means that you can execute any kind of landing or go-around, you just need to let the tower know. Closed traffic means you want to stay in the pattern for another landing.

Acknowledge by saying, *495 is cleared for the option*, or *495 is cleared stop and go*.

You complete the stop and go, which means you landed, came to a complete stop on the runway, reconfigured the aircraft for take-off (you've been cleared for both the stop and the go, so no need for permission to take-off) and departed. You turn crosswind (no need to call the tower here) and downwind. At mid field downwind, you call the tower again.

Charlottesville Tower, 495 is left downwind for Runway 3, request stop and go, closed traffic.

On your last trip around the pattern, amend you downwind call as follows:

Charlottesville Tower, 495 is left downwind for Runway 3, request stop and go, VFR departure east.

After departing on your last take off, turn RIGHT crosswind, the climb and proceed east. Once you are clear of the Class D airspace, ATC may say *495, frequency change approved*. That's the tower's way of saying good-bye.