



Tips on Becoming an Airline Pilot

**Based on an original idea by Jean Haley Harper
Current edition written by Gail Redden-Jones
Updated by Nanc-elisha Briot**

Congratulations!

You have decided to pursue a challenging and rewarding career field. As with any worthwhile goal, the road to becoming an airline pilot may have its ups, its downs, and a few detours. But along the way, there is help, guidance, and encouragement. We would like to assist you on your journey. We apologize to those of you who are not receiving your flight training in the United States, as these tips may not apply to you.

Getting Started

Most airlines are looking for qualified individuals with a college education and an extensive flying background. Specific qualifications vary among airlines and are influenced by the supply of pilots and the positions available.

Things to Consider First

Before deciding to pursue a career as an airline pilot, there are several things you should consider first. You must decide if this is the lifestyle you want. Airline pilots are typically away from home more than other careers. You may do three, four, or even up to 12-day trips. Expect to work holidays, fly at all hours of the day and night and through multiple time zones. This type of lifestyle can be fun and exciting, but may be hard on family life and children. Also, you have to look objectively at your physical health. Airlines want individuals in good physical condition.

You must be able to keep a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) First Class Aviation Medical throughout your airline career. You may want to check with an FAA designated Aviation Medical Examiner (AME) if you want to make sure you are medically qualified to fly as an Airline Transport Pilot (ATP). Some medical conditions could make you ineligible. You can locate an AME from the Yellow Pages under Physicians, Aviation, or contact a local flight school. Eyesight may be a factor in hiring. Check with the individual airlines or organizations such as Air, Inc. for minimum requirements.

Airline pilots are usually based (domiciled) in major cities and you may not be able to choose which city initially. If you prefer to live where there is no domicile, you will need to commute several times a month. Most airlines offer the cockpit jumpseat to airline pilots, which helps in the commute.

Military vs. Civilian - Which way to go?

Now, you must decide how you want to obtain the necessary training and experience. Some things to consider are your finances. Can you afford a specialized four-year college or would you rather train at a local aviation flight school? Or are you thinking of getting your training through the military, where all your training is paid for?

MILITARY

If you are considering a military career, talk to a recruiter. Or better still; talk to an active military pilot to get the most current and correct information. Most flying jobs in the military require 20/20 vision and a college degree, although there are a few exceptions. All branches of the military offer

some type of flying. There is usually a minimum commitment period, many as long as seven years. You may want to investigate an ROTC program at your school, or consider joining a military reserve group or the Air National Guard.

CIVILIAN

If you are thinking of choosing a civilian career, first go out to your local airport and take an introductory flight with a flight school. Check the Yellow Pages for a flight (or aviation) school nearest you. If you decide to train at this school, be sure to ask about costs and talk with other students about the quality of instruction before deciding.

You need to decide if you want to go to an FAA approved school or go the home study route. There are several two and four-year colleges offering degrees in aviation related fields that will also train you for a pilot career. One advantage to this route is you may be eligible for student loans. Another route is to go to a flight school that doesn't offer a college degree, but will train you for the necessary certificates.

There currently are two governing FAA regulations for flight schools. FAR Part 141 is what most colleges and more structured schools are governed under. FAR Part 61 usually is a less structured curriculum and allows the flight instructor more discretion in his or her training. This is also referred to as the home study route, since you will be doing most of your studying on your own. However, in both schools the same information must be covered. Most people are unaware there are various levels of pilot certificates and training required to become an airline pilot. They are:

- 1) Private Pilot Certificate: Must be 17 years old, have an FAA third class medical, a minimum of either 40 flight hours, of which 20 hours must be solo (FAR Part 61) or 35 hours ground school plus 35 hours flight training with 20 dual and 15 solo hours (FAR Part 141). You must successfully complete a written test before you can take a flight test with an FAA examiner. Now you can carry passengers, but may not be compensated.
- 2) Commercial Pilot Certificate: Must be 18 years old, have a second class medical, a minimum of either 190 hours (FAR Part 141) or 250 hours (FAR Part 61) of flight time, of which you must have 10 hours in a high performance aircraft, 100 hours solo, and 40 hours cross country. You must successfully complete a written exam and an FAA flight test. Now you may fly for hire. However, you will have restricted privileges if you do not have an instrument rating.
- 3) Airline Transport Pilot Certificate (ATP): Must be 23 years old, a high school graduate or equivalent, possess a commercial certificate, first class medical (if your eyesight is worse than 20/200, you must obtain a waiver), 1500 PIC hours, pass a written exam and an FAA flight test. Now you may perform Pilot-in-Command (PIC) duties in airline and other transport operations

ADDITIONS TO PILOT CERTIFICATES:

Instrument Rating - 125 total hours required, including 40 hours instrument training of which 15 hours must be with an instrument instructor in an airplane, 50 hours Pilot-In-Command cross country time, written test and an FAA flight test. Now you can fly in the clouds (IFR).

Multiengine Rating - Usually around 10 hours multiengine training and an FAA flight test. Now you can fly smaller aircraft with more than one engine.

Type Ratings - Usually specialized training in one specific aircraft. Required for all jets and large propeller aircraft.

- 4) **Certified Flight Instructor Certificate:** Must hold a Commercial Certificate and an instrument rating, pass two written exams, and an FAA flight test. Now you may instruct private or commercial students.

ADDITIONS TO THE CERTIFIED FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR CERTIFICATE:

Instrument Instructor

Multiengine Instructor

The only certificate necessary to fly for the airlines is the Commercial Certificate with instrument rating. However, most airlines will not hire you until you have at least 2000 flight hours, consisting of at least 500 hours instrument (flying in instrument weather conditions), 1000 hours cross-country, 500 hours Pilot-in-Command, 500 hours multiengine experience, and an ATP certificate.

Now that I have my Certificates, where do I go from here?

As previously stated, most airlines will not hire you straight out of flight school. Many military pilots also find they need more experience before they can get hired, especially those who chose to fly helicopters while in the service. So your next step is to gain that necessary experience.

1. **Instructing:** This will probably be your next step in the process to achieve that elusive airline position. Instructing is an excellent way to build up time, but the pay is usually low. At first you will probably teach private pilots and build up only single engine time. However, as your career progresses, you can train instrument students and multiengine students if you have the necessary instructing certificates.
2. **Building time on your own:** You may choose to build up your flying hours by owning or renting an airplane and flying it on your own. Several people can go in together to purchase a single engine aircraft to build up flight time or an advanced aircraft to build up multiengine and/or instrument time.

The Next Step

Once you have achieved the desired minimum flight hours, you are ready for the next phase. Here is where you build up the necessary flight hours in order to apply to the airlines. It is impossible to state what hours are the desired amounts for these positions, because the minimum required hours varies greatly from one position to the next. Expect to have at least a minimum of 500-1500 flight hours with some multiengine and Pilot-in-Command experience. There are several avenues open to you. You have to choose which one will work for you. It may take more than one route to get to the airlines.

1. **Charter.** This may be the next logical step up from instructing. Several flight schools also have charter departments that rent out various aircraft to individuals or companies and usually supply the pilots as well. You can gain valuable experience in several different types of aircraft. Charter departments vary greatly in the types of aircraft flown, compensation and working conditions for their pilots, so do your homework. Ask pilots who work for them currently about

the department. At several flight schools, once you have instructed for a set period, you may become eligible to move over to the charter department.

2. *Commuter and Regional Airlines:* Hopefully, during your instructing, you built up enough time to be able to fly for a commuter or regional airline. They usually require a minimum of 1000 hours, but are not as restrictive as the major airlines on the type of hours you have, e.g., instrument, PIC, cross country, or multiengine flying. Most commuters fly larger and more complex aircraft, and this will help you build up your overall flying time as well as experience in larger aircraft. You can also build up your PIC time if you are able to become a captain and fly from the left seat.
3. *Corporate:* Several corporations and businesses own aircraft to fly their personnel around. They fly anything from a small single engine aircraft to large jets. This is another way to build up your time. However, you should research each business flight department before choosing this route. Many departments are large with several jets and scheduled flying. But just as many own only one small airplane and may not fly it often. If your goal is to build up your time to get that job with the airlines, some corporate departments may not be the way to go.
4. *Other Flying:* There are several smaller avenues to building up your flying hours. They can be crop dusting, air ambulances, helicopter flying, or aircraft delivery and ferrying for aircraft manufacturers. However, there is not as much of a demand for these services. Therefore, there aren't as many jobs available.

Recommendations

Whatever route you choose, you must realize that there are many other very qualified individuals who also want that airline job. You are attempting to get into a highly competitive field, so you need to make yourself as desirable a candidate as possible to the airlines.

1. *Get your college degree:* It may look better if it is in an aviation-related field. However, many individuals get hired with other degrees. Having any four-year college degree puts you ahead of other candidates without one.
2. *Build up good flight hours:* By this we mean get as much experience as possible in more than single engine aircraft. Work on multiengine, cross-country, instrument, and night flying. Build up time in high performance aircraft, such as turbo props and jets. Build up your Pilot-in-Command time, especially in larger and more complex aircraft. Get a type rating in a complex aircraft or jet. These will all go a long way in making you stand out from the other candidates.
3. *Be a good citizen:* Volunteer your time to worthy organizations such as Flying Samaritans, EAA Young Eagles Program, and non-aviation related organizations, such as helping Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts with their Aviation badges.
4. *Become and stay informed:* Join organizations that can help you stay abreast of the aviation community, such as the Ninety Nines, Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), Women in Aviation, Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA), and the Civil Air Patrol. Read up on topics of interest. Subscribe to related magazines and periodicals such as Flying Careers Magazine. If you are computer literate, there is a wealth of information on aviation at your fingertips. You can go Aviation or go AVSIG on CompuServe, go to Aviation Forum on America Online, or search the internet for websites related to aviation.

5. *Continue your education:* Attend FAA or other seminars on aviation related topics or take courses to enhance your aviation knowledge. Attend conventions; such as Women in Aviation, EAA Fly-ins such as Oshkosh, and local fly-ins. Talk to others in the aviation field, especially those individuals who have the positions to which you aspire.
6. *Keep an accurate, neat logbook:* Your logbook will be reviewed by many individuals including prospective employers and the FAA before all checkrides. It is your record of all your flying experience. You will make a much better impression if it is well organized.
7. *Wear hearing protection when flying:* Airplanes can be very noisy and prolonged exposure could permanently damage your hearing. You may be rejected by the airlines if your hearing doesn't meet certain requirements.

A Final Word

In this handout, we have tried to help you get started on your career in aviation. As you can see, there is much work involved in becoming an airline pilot. We can not give you that magical formula to guarantee you achieve your goals. You have to make your own decisions on where you want to go from here. No matter which road you choose, expect to put in years of hard work and dedication to your goal. But ask anyone sitting in that seat now if it was worth it and you will most likely get a resounding Yes!

Further Reading

Magazines:

- Airline Pilot Magazine* Airline Pilot Association (ALPA) Union Publication (703) 481-4468
www.alpa.org
- Airline Pilot Career Magazine* (800) JET-JOB www.jet-jobs.com
- Airliners Magazine* (800) 875-6711
- Aviation Week and Space Technology Magazine* (800) 525-5003
- Flying Careers Magazine* (800) 492-1881
- Flight Training Magazine* - National Assoc. of Flight Instructors, (816) 741-5151
www.aopaflighttraining.org
- 99NEWS Magazine* International Organization of Women Pilots' Publication (800) 994-1929
www.ninety-nines.org
- Professional Pilot Magazine* (800) 222-3212 www.propilotmag.com
- Woman Pilot Magazine* P O Box 485, Arlington Heights, IL 60006 (800) 300-7343
www.womanpilot.com

Books and Videos

Available at your local flight school or by ordering through Sporty's Pilot Shop at 800-LIFT-OFF or www.amazon.com or as listed.

Airline Pilot Starter Kit From AIR, Inc. (800) JET-JOBS

Airline Pilot Career Development Systems: From AIR, Inc. (800) JET-JOBS

Airman's Information Manual (AIM). FAA

Becoming A Professional Pilot. Robert Mark

Checklist for Success: A Pilot's Guide to the Successful Airline Interview. Cheryl Cage. (888) 899-CAGE

Collegiate Aviation Scholarship Listing University Aviation Assoc. (UAA)

Collegiate Aviation Guide University Aviation Assoc. (344)844-2432

Flight Training Handbook. FAA

Flying the Big Birds - On Becoming an Airline Pilot. Sylvia Otypka.

Flight Plan to the Flight Deck: Strategies for a Pilot Career. Judy A. Tarver

Flight Guide for Success, Tips and Tactics for the Aspiring Airline Pilot. Karen Kahn (805) 687-9493

How to Become a Pilot: The Step by Step Guide to Flying. FAA, N. Wexler

Job Hunting for Pilots-Networking Your Way to a Flying Job. G.N. Brown

Videos—Sporty's Pilot Shop "Get Started" Series: Learning to Fly, Choosing the Right Flight School and Finding the Best Flight Instruction.

Organizations and Associations

Aerospace Education Foundation's Defender Squadron - An Aviator Mentor Program.
www.aef.org/defender/parent/htm

Aircraft Owners and Pilot's Association (AOPA) -421 Aviation Way, Frederick, MD, 21701.
(800) USA-PILOT www.aopa.org

Alpha Eta Rho - A Coed International Aviation Fraternity. Executive Director, 1615 Gamble Lane,
Escondido, CA, 92029

Aviation Exploring - Division of Boy Scouts of America. National Director, PO Box 152079, Irving,
TX, 75015-2079. (214) 580-2000. www.bsa.scouting.org/programs/02-504.htm

Civil Air Patrol - Aerospace Education Division, 105 South Hansell St., Maxwell AFB, AL, 36112-6332. (800) FLY-2338. www.cap.af.mil

Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) - Education Office, PO Box 3065, Oshkosh, WI, 54903. (800) 564-6322. www.eaa.org/education.html

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) - Director of Education, DOT-FAA, 800 Independence Ave., SW, Washington DC, 20590. (202) 366-4000 www.faa.gov/education/index.htm

International Society of Women Airline Pilots (ISA+21) - 2250 E. Tropicana Ave., Suite 19-395, Las Vegas, NV, 89119-6594. www.iswap.org

Ninety-Nine's - International Organization of Women Pilots. Box 965, 7100 Terminal Drive, Oklahoma City, OK, 73159. (800) 994-1929 www.ninety-nines.org

Organization of Black Airline Pilots (OBAP) - 2740 Greenbriar Pkwy, Suite A3128, Atlanta, GA 30331 (800) JET-OBAP. www.obap.org

University Aviation Association - 3410 Skyway Drive, Auburn, AL, 36830. (334) 844-2434. <http://uaa.auburn.edu>

Women in Aviation, International - Morningstar Airport, 3647 S.R.5035, West Alexandria, OH 45381 (937) 839-4647 www.wiai.org

Related Services

Air, Inc - Aviation Information Resource Company
3800 Camp Creek Parkway, Suite 18-100, Atlanta, GA, 30331.
(800) JET-JOBS
www.jet-jobs.com

Aviation Career Counseling - Pilot Career Guidance and Interview Counseling
933 Cheltenham Road, Santa Barbara, CA, 93105.
(805) 687-9493
76147.135@compuserve.com

Cage Consulting - Aviation Career Guidance and Information Books
13275 E. Fremont Place, Suite 315, Englewood, CO 80112
(888) 899-CAGE.
www.cageconsulting.com

Universal Pilot Application Service (UPAS) - National Pilot Resume Database.
751 Miller Drive, Suite D2, Leesburg, VA, 20175
(800) PILOT AP
www.upas.com

Glossary

Air Transport Pilot - Pilot authorized to act as Pilot-in-Command of aircraft weighing more than 12,500 lb. or jet powered.

Complex Aircraft - Any aircraft having more than 200 horsepower or retractable landing gear, flaps, and a controllable pitch propeller.

Cross Country - Any flight from one airport to another of 50 nautical miles distance or more.

FARs - Federal Aviation Regulations governing flying and flight training.

Federal Aviation Administration - The branch of the federal government which has jurisdiction over all air transportation.

Dual - All flight time while receiving instruction from a certified flight instructor.

Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) - Rules governing the operation of aircraft flying in less than VMC or on an IFR flight plan.

Solo - All flight time acquired while flying alone, not with an instructor.

Type Rating - Pilot aircraft rating required to act as Pilot-in-Command on aircraft weighing over 12,500 lb., or with jet engines.

Visual Flight Rules (VFR) - Rules governing the operation of aircraft flying in VMC.

Visual Meteorological Conditions (VMC) - Visibility must be greater than three miles and ceiling higher than 1,000 feet above ground level.