

HOW TO BECOME AN AIRLINE PILOT

USA VERSION



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.

Along the way, there is help, guidance, and encouragement. ISA+21 would like to be there with you each step of the way as you achieve milestones and eventually reach your goal of getting that airline job.

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ISA+21 Recommendations

Whatever route you choose, realize there are many other highly qualified pilots 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.



Get your college degree: It may look better if it is in an aviation-related field. However, many pilots get hired with other degrees. Having any four-year college degree puts you ahead of other candidates without one.



Build good flight hours: 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 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.



Be a good citizen: Volunteer your time to worthy organizations or non-aviation related organizations



Become and stay informed: Join organizations that can help you stay informed of the aviation community. There is no charge for **ISA+21's ASPIRING MEMBERSHIP**. Other organizations such as the Ninety Nines, Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), Women in Aviation, Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA), and the Civil Air Patrol provide programs for pilots just starting out. Read aviation magazines, blogs, forums, and follow aviation groups on social media. There is a wealth of information on aviation at your fingertips.



Continue your education: Attend seminars on aviation related topics or take courses to enhance your aviation knowledge. Talk to others in aviation, especially those who have the job which you aspire.



Keep an accurate, neat logbook: Your logbook is your record of all your flying experience. It will be reviewed before all checkrides and prospective employers. You will make a better impression if it is organized.

Military

- If you are considering a military career, the best thing to do is to speak with a military pilot to get the most current and accurate information.
 - If you do not know any military pilots, reach out to a recruiter for more information or to submit a package.
- All branches of the military offer some type of flying, so do research on which branch best suits you.
 - Earning your wings in the military usually incurs little to no financial cost to you.
- Most military pilots are required to have a college degree and pass a comprehensive health exam. A physical fitness test is also required.
- You will get excellent flight and leadership experience as a military pilot. This is highly desirable on applications for major airlines.
- Active Duty vs. Reserves
 - If you are interested in an active duty flying position, investigate ROTC programs at universities, enrollment into one of the military academies, or submit an application to attend Officer Training School in order to earn your commission. You will have a full-time commitment for up to ten years. Keep this in consideration when seniority is everything at airlines, if it will set you back from being able to apply to that airline job. Expect to relocate, possibly around the world, in order to go where needed.
 - Recommendation: Consider joining the Reserves or the Air National Guard. Apply directly at each unit. Enlist for experience while you get your college degree or apply after you have on. Flight Training is the same as Active Duty, however you will only incur a part-time commitment and will have the benefit of choosing your aircraft and base, possibly close to home. You can continue your civilian flying and continue working your way to your dream job at an airline while being a military pilot.
- There is usually a minimum commitment period, and may be as long as ten years.

Civilian

→ Intro to Flying

- Go to your local airport and take an introductory flight at a flight school.
- Book an appointment with an Aviation Medical Examiner to get your flight medical. Average price is around \$100

→ Compare your options.

- It's ok to look at more than one flight school.
- Ask about costs for each course and the cost to get all the way through their program
- Ask about their training timeline
- Talk with students at the school about the quality of instruction
- Different Courses: **Part 61 & Part 141**
 - You may hear these terms used to describe which federal regulations the flight school has the authority to train pilots. There are different minimum requirements for pilot training and certification. With either course, the same information must be covered.
 - **Part 61** is where you fly with an instructor in a flexible training environment allowing the instructor to modify their program to meet the students needs. It is often better for part-time students training because it is less structured training.
 - **Part 141** is a more structured training environment, better for full-time, career-oriented students. Since the curriculum has been approved by the FAA, you may be able to complete your certificates in fewer hours. It may be more fast-paced and may not be available at every airport.
 - **Just to note:** *In order to get your Airline Transport Pilot Certificate, it requires 1500 hours flight time. If you complete all of your training **Part 141**, many regional airlines will hire you at 1250 hours (Restricted ATP) because of your training experience. **Part 141** flight schools may cost a little more, but consideration must be given that you can get hired at a with lower number of flight hours to a regional airline.*

- Where to get your flight training: College or Home Study
 - **College** Aviation degrees can prepare you for a career at an airline. If you take flight training during college, you may be eligible for student loans. It will also take you two or four years depending on which type of degree you decide to pursue. Many aviation programs that are associated with universities operate under FAA **Part 141**.
 - **Home Study** Maybe college isn't for you or you have already been to college and you are trying out a second career. You can take lessons at a local flight school, under **Part 61** or **Part 141** in order to be trained for the certificates required.
 - **Cadet Programs** Several major airlines have partnered with flight schools around the country to provide an accelerated program to get students all of their certificates and ratings in a short amount of time and prepare cadets for airline operations. They provide a pathway feeding into their regional carriers and eventually to the major airline. Some of these programs offer airline-paid tuition reimbursement and other financing options. Check with each airline to see the details of the program they offer.

Certificates Required – Offered in Part 61 or Part 141 depending on the flight school

- **Private Pilot Certificate** Carry passengers but not compensated
 - Must be 17 years old
 - Possess an FAA Third Class Medical
 - Minimum 40 hours
 - Successful complete written exam
 - Flight exam in the airplane with an FAA Examiner
- **Commercial Pilot Certificate** Fly for hire
 - Must be 18 years old
 - Possess an FAA Second Class Medical
 - Minimum 250 hours (200 hours Part 141)
 - Successful complete written exam
 - Flight exam in the airplane with an FAA Examiner

- **Airline Transport Pilot Certificate (ATP)** Pilot-in-Command duties of airline and other transport operations
 - Must be 23 years old
 - High school graduate or equivalent
 - Possess an FAA First Class Medical
 - Minimum 1500 hours
 - Successful complete written exam
 - Flight exam with an FAA Examiner

In order to be hired as an airline pilot, you must possess an Airline Transport Pilot Certificate. Most regional airlines will hire you without it, and then include it as part of the training. Passing your final checkout in the simulator will often be the exam for the ATP Certificate. Some airlines may require you to have it before being interviewed.

Additional Ratings Needed

- **Instrument Rating** To be able to fly in the clouds
 - 125 total hours
 - 40 hours of instrument training
 - 50 hours Pilot-in-Command cross country time
 - Successful complete written exam
 - Flight exam in the airplane with an FAA Examiner
- **Multi-Engine Rating** To fly airplanes with more than one engine
 - Around 10 hours multiengine training
 - Flight exam in the airplane with an FAA Examiner
- **Type Ratings** Required for all jets and large turbine aircraft
 - Specialized training in one specific aircraft
 - Training mostly conducted in the simulator
 - Flight exam with an FAA Examiner
 - *(Most regional airlines will pay for this as part of your training)*

Instructor Certificates *(optional)*

- **Certified Flight Instructor (CFI)** to instruct private/commercial students
 - Must hold a Commercial Certificate and Instrument Rating
 - Successful complete two written exams
 - Flight exam in the airplane with an FAA Examiner
- **Certified Flight Instructor-Instrument (CFII)** to instruct instrument students
 - Must hold a CFI Certificate
 - Successful complete written exam
 - Flight exam in the airplane with an FAA Examiner
- **Multi-Engine Flight Instructor** to instruct students in twin engine airplane
 - Must hold a CFI Certificate
 - Flight exam in the airplane with an FAA Examiner

→ Build Flight Time:

- On Your Own
 - Build hours by owning or renting an airplane and flying it on your own.
 - Purchase flight time and split the price with someone else in order to keep the cost down to you
- Your first flying job!
 - As soon as you get your Commercial Certificate, you will be legally allowed to make money to fly!
- Job Progression Options – the path to 1500 hours:

Flight Instruction

If you choose to flight instruct, it will be an excellent way to build flight time, but the pay is usually low. You will get a better foundation on knowledge of airplane systems, regulations, weather, aerodynamics, etc. Most instructing will be single engine to primary students until you earn a multi-engine flight instructor certificate.

Charter

At several flight schools, you may be able to fly for their charter department, if they have one. A charter department rents out various aircraft to individuals or companies and supplies the pilots. You can gain valuable experience in different types of aircraft. Charter departments vary in the types of aircraft they fly, compensation, and working conditions, so do your homework. Ask pilots who work for them currently about being an employee.

Corporate

Many businesses own aircraft to fly their personnel around. They fly anything from small single-engine aircraft to large jets. You should research each business flight department before choosing this route if your goal is to build your flight time. Some departments are large with several jets and scheduled flying, but some own only one airplane and may not fly it often.

Other

There are many jobs available to new commercial pilots such as aerial surveying, banner towing, flying parachute jumpers, crop dusting, aircraft delivery and ferrying, air ambulance flying, flight instruction, and more!

→ Is this the lifestyle you want?

- Airline pilots are typically away from home more than other careers
- Depending on what schedule your seniority can hold, and what type of trips the airline you work for offers, you could be away from home for 3 or 4 days, or up to two weeks at a time.
- You may have to work holidays
- Fly various hours day and night and through multiple time zones which may be hard to establish a regular sleep routine
- Airline pilots are usually based (domiciled) in major cities. This is where each trip will start and end. They vary by airline. You may not be able to choose which city initially. If you choose to live where there is no domicile, you will need to commute several times a month, adding to your time away from home. Most airlines offer the flightdeck jumpseat to pilots.
- Finding a balance between being an airline pilot and having a family, may be challenging, but possible
- Staying healthy (diet, exercise, etc.) while on the road is important considering odd work hours.
- Be able to get an FAA First Class Aviation Medical and maintain it with yearly exams to check your health.

→ How much is this going to cost?

- Expect to pay around \$100,000 for your certificates and ratings
- Additional costs will be incurred to time-build to get your hours. Even more important to get a starter flying job after getting your commercial certificate so that you can have someone pay you to fly instead of the other way around!
- Loans may be available for standard flight training. Student Aid may be offered for training associated with a college education.
- There are many **scholarship** opportunities available for the different phases of training.

→ Organizations and Associations

- Aircraft Owners and Pilot's Association – AOPA
www.aopa.org
- Alpha Eta Rho – Coed International Aviation Fraternity
www.alphaetarho.org
- Civil Air Patrol – CAP
www.gocivilairpatrol.com
- Experimental Aircraft Association – EAA
www.eaa.org
- Federal Aviation Administration – FAA
www.faa.gov
- **International Society of Women Airline Pilots – ISA+21**
www.isa21.org
- Ninety-Nines – International Organization of Women Pilots
www.ninety-nines.org
- Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals
www.obap.org
- Women in Aviation, International – WAI
www.wai.org
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→ Final Thoughts

- There is much work involved in becoming an airline pilot. We cannot 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.
- Ask anyone sitting in that seat now if it was worth it and you will most likely get a resounding Yes!

→ More resources available at www.isa21.org