

THE PROFESSIONAL FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR

MENTOR

JANUARY 2009



VOLUME 11 NUMBER 1



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position Report

The Question of Currency

Clear up your students' confusion before their checkride

During the last couple-dozen private pilot checkrides I've given, I've noticed an area of deficiency that keeps coming up. I can't say that any of the applicants I've worked with have truly been clear on what it means to be "current" to fly an aircraft by Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) standards.

In most cases, the applicants are confused by FAA requirements, local fixed base operator (FBO) requirements, and insurance-company requirements. Each of these requirements may be different—and they're all important—but when I ask this question, I want to be sure that the applicant understands what it takes to be legal to fly a particular aircraft based on the regulations.

In general terms, to fly an aircraft a pilot must first meet the requirements of Federal Aviation Regulation (FAR) 61.56, a flight review, and meeting this requirement ensures she can fly an aircraft by herself, though not necessarily with passengers. For that, there are additional requirements, and in this case, FAR 61.57 is the specific reference applicants should refer to. It says that to carry passengers, a pilot must conduct three takeoffs and landings in the aircraft category

and class to be flown within the preceding 90 days. If she wishes to fly with passengers at night, then she must have conducted those takeoffs and landings at night—and to a full stop.

The important area here, and the one that trips applicants up, is the "category and class of aircraft" concept. Category is the broad classification of aircraft—airplane, glider, rotorcraft, or lighter than air—and class defines those aircraft within a category with similar operating characteristics, such as single-engine, multiengine, land, sea, helicopter, or airship. Any combination of these two areas can become an area of currency. If your student is flying an airplane—say, single-engine, land—that becomes his currency area, and if he's flying a rotorcraft—specifically, a float-equipped helicopter—then that would be his currency area.

Specific make, model, or aircraft manufacturer are irrelevant, yet I see applicants who are confused by that. If they conduct their takeoffs and landings in a specific make and model of aircraft, they indicate they would have to conduct their takeoffs and landings in the second make and model of aircraft also, even

if that second aircraft falls into the same category and class. While this may be prudent, it's not required by the FAA for currency.

I can understand how this can be confusing for students who probably only flew one make and model throughout their entire training, and I can see that it's complicated by aircraft that require endorsements, such as high-performance, complex, or tailwheel types. Indeed, there are some quirks in the currency requirements. For that reason, you should ensure each is clear to students. The following are a few—but not all—of the quirks that you should note:

- If the pilot conducts his takeoffs and landings at night, this counts for his day currency, but not the other way around;

- If he does his takeoffs and landings in a tailwheel aircraft, they must be to a full stop, even if it's daytime; they will count for his tricycle-gear currency, but his tricycle-gear takeoffs and landings cannot count for his tailwheel currency;

- As long as he already has the endorsement for high-performance or complex aircraft, his currency does not have to be done in an aircraft that meets these conditions; and



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- While flying a multiengine aircraft may require the ability to manage a larger aircraft, or one with more systems, doing his takeoffs and landings in one does not provide currency for a single-engine aircraft—they fall under different class sections of the category.

Of course, we all understand that while these requirements will allow a new pilot to fly under FAA guidelines, they do not indicate any level of proficiency in any type of aircraft or flight condition—that's the role that FBO requirements and insurance requirements fulfill. Still, it's imperative to your students' checkride success that they know the actual FAA requirements for remaining "current" for flight based on category and class of aircraft. Without that knowledge, their examiners are left wondering if the students can determine if they are "legal" to fly an aircraft based on their experience. ■