Teaching Safety

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Teach Your Students

About Logbooks

By Jason Blair

When we teach students, we aren't just teaching them the skills to meet practical test standards or a knowledge test. We are teaching them to be competent pilots. It means, as instructors, we are the first contact in many cases and the strongest influence that our students are going to have in their pilot career. Our example is what our students will follow.

Filling out logbooks is a place where we need to set an example, and we need to actually spend some time teaching our students to do it correctly. Last weekend I had an applicant come to me to take his private pilot checkride, but when I went to review his logbook, none of the columns on any of the pages had been totaled. This makes my job as an examiner, to ensure that all the requirements for a particular license or certificate have been completed, much harder.

Beyond training, pilots who are seeking a career in aviation will likely have their logbooks reviewed by potential employers during interview processes. Making sure a logbook is free of errors, easy to read, and correct as a whole will help make sure an interview isn't stopped for something that could have been avoided.

This may seem like a simple thing, and in many cases because it seems simple, good logbook etiquette gets overlooked in the training process. But students who have never flown before have probably never filled out a logbook, which means they don't know what they are doing. For most of us, as instructors, we learned over time, through mistakes, messy entries, and fumbling our way through our own logbooks. Help your students learn before they make some of the same mistakes.

Have Your Students Do It

I can't tell you how many times I have had applicants on checkrides tell me at the end of the flight that they don't know what they are supposed to fill in, that their instructor has done all their logbook entries. Sure, part of the job of an instructor is to make sure the student's logbook gets filled out, but it is something you should have them actually do. Walk them through entries, beginning with the first flight, so they learn to appropriately fill out their logbook beginning with their first flight experience.

Learning to write clearly is a key part of this. Messy logbooks make it hard to find things we are looking for and to make it clear to an examiner that the required operations have been completed. Teach your students to use their best handwriting to fill out their logbooks. In most cases, it means that they print. Not everyone has calligraphic handwriting, and it certainly isn't required to fill out a logbook clearly, but it does take some attention to detail when writing

in the book that is the permanent record of a pilot's flight time. An effort to make it legible is important. Numbers, airports visited, and notes regarding the flight should be easily discernable. It's also not a bad idea to keep the entries in a single color of pen, preferably blue or black, not in multiple or odd colors.

Don't Clutter Your Students' Books

As instructors, we write in our students' logbooks a significant amount. Not only do our students need to keep their logbooks in order, but we need to make sure we don't make a mess of them ourselves. Where we sign can block columns. If we don't write clearly, our endorsement information (such as our instructor number or date of expiration) may be unable to be determined if there is an audit of the student's logbook in the future. And if we forget to sign the logbook, a training flight may not be valid.

When you do endorsements in the back of the logbooks, you need to make sure to write them legibly and in a place that is appropriate.

Total the Pages

Logbooks contain columns that are to be totaled at the completion of each page. The total from that page is added to (if applicable) a total from the page before, and it makes a total to be forwarded to the next page. By this process, we accumulate pages over time and total times in each column we forward. Through this process we cross-check each page and make sure we don't develop errors that are carried forward for many pages in the future. Teach your students to go through this process every time they finish a page, carrying it forward to work toward future times. Teach your students to total all the columns, even if the time in them is zero. By doing this, your students will ensure that when forwarding columns, they are less likely to miss a column that might have time in it. It is a good idea to cross-reference these totals to a digital backup logbook if possible.

Mistakes Happen

Mistakes and errors will happen. Knowing how to fix them appropriately is important also. Generally, errors in logbooks should be corrected by lining out the error, initialing next to the correction, and making an adjusting entry. If you have ever had an accounting lesson, an adjusting entry in accounting is pretty much how such an entry in a logbook should also go. This is appropriate to do even pages after an error is found. Make an adjusting entry with the positive or negative impacts in appropriate columns with a description in the notes section of the entry line. White-out is not a good option for correcting errors.

If for no other reason than to save your students the embarrassment of a messy, incorrect, or complicated-to-understand logbook in front of the examiner or a future potential employer, take the time to teach your students to fill out their logbooks in a competent manner. Their logbook is something that is going to follow them through their training and career. A clean, clear, professionally filled out logbook will say something about them and about you as their instructor, to anyone who reviews it in the future.

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Logging Requirements

The logging of flight time is only required for training and currency purposes. In reality, for general pilot activity it is not even required that a pilot log all of his or her flight time, only those items required for currency or training requirements.

It is advisable that pilots log all flight time in which they are serving as pilot in command or as a required crew member. This allows the pilot not only to have the greatest amount of flight time in their logbook, but also to demonstrate their recency of pilot activity for additional insurance requirements and demonstration of overall proficiency.

When instructors log flight time with a student, it is required that they endorse the student's flight with their signature, CFI number, and expiration date. For training logbook entries to be valid, this must be included.

Did you know your logbook is considered a federal document? Accurate entries are important. Falsification of entries may be considered falsification of a federal document!

Solo flight time is the time that a pilot is the only person in the aircraft. Many pilots only log solo flight time during their student pilot training, but it would be accurate to continue logging solo time after the gaining of a pilot certificate.

Logging of cross-country flight time can be confusing. Depending on the certificate or rating it is applicable toward, the definition may change. For sport, recreational, and private pilot training it is typically considered flight from one airport to another greater than 50 nautical miles with a landing at that airport. Toward an ATP certificate, 50 miles "point-in-space" away from the original airport without a landing may be applicable. Make sure that when logging cross-country flight time it is done appropriately toward the rating or certificate the student is working toward.