

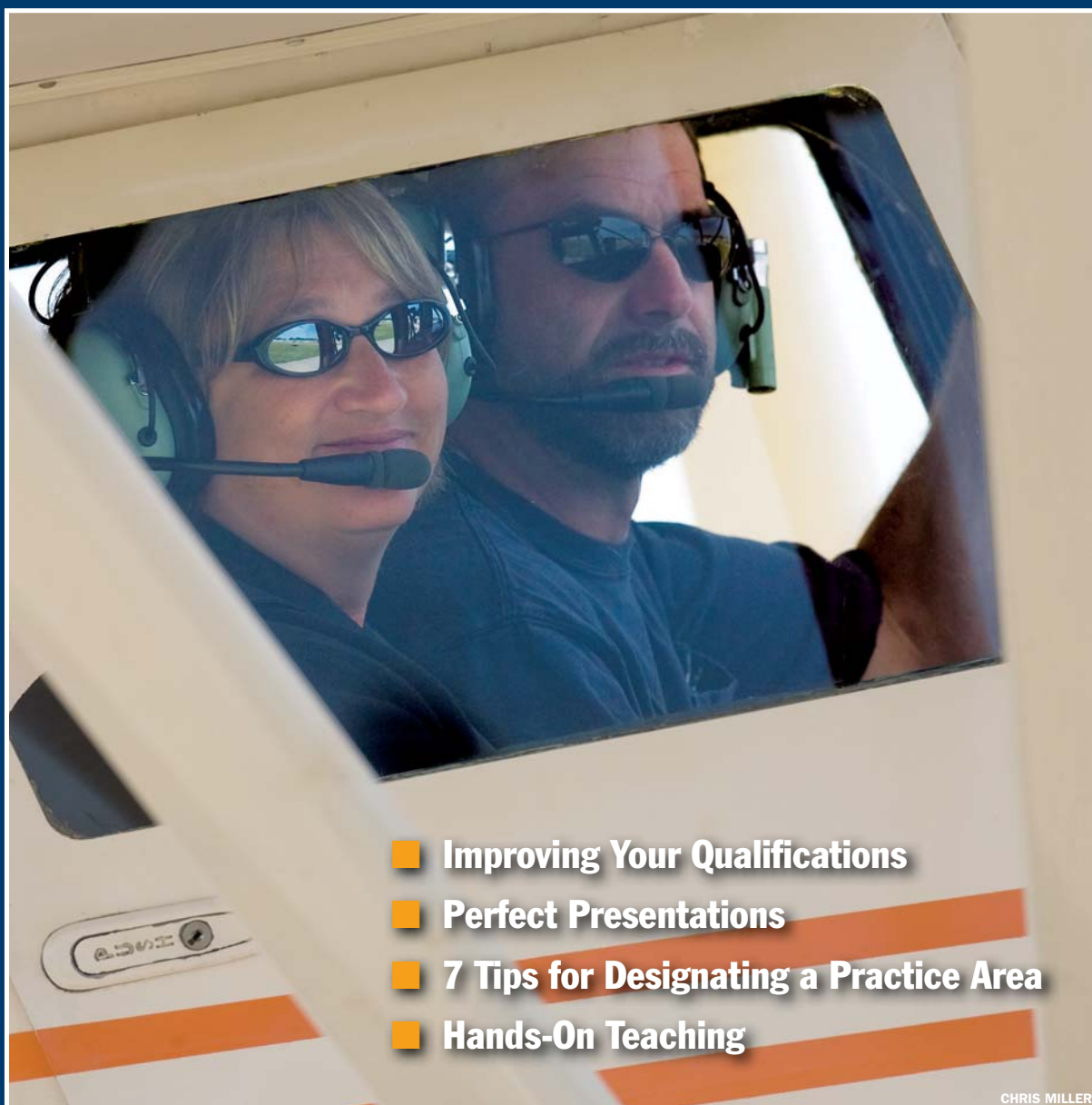
# THE PROFESSIONAL FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR

# MENTOR

SEPTEMBER 2009



VOLUME 11 NUMBER 9



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## position Report

# Leading by Example

Your habits can travel faster than you

I was giving a checkride the other day when I noticed something interesting. The student rolled forward and checked his brakes, first with the left and then with the right.

He checked them separately, even though this isn't something I've ever seen on a checklist. I asked him where he had learned to do it this way, and he said his instructor had taught him, to make sure both brakes worked independently. He said it made sense, because if he just pushed them both down, he might not notice if one brake was weak.

I had to follow up, because that's how I do it. I was curious to find out how someone else would acquire this quirky habit.

After the checkride, I asked the applicant's instructor where he'd learned his brake-check technique, and his response threw me for a loop. He said an instructor-friend of his, whom he flew with periodically, had showed it to him. That friend was a former student of mine. He'd seen me complete my pre-taxi checks this way, learned the trick, and passed it along.

My own personal habit had passed inadvertently from me to my student, and then on to his. Three pilots have made my technique part of their normal routine preflight check.

But this isn't the first time I've seen this happen.

I relate a story to many of my students about a pilot who used his hand to check the prop for nicks and cuts. One day, he caught his hand on one of those nicks and cut himself. The moral to the parable is that, by using a rag, a pilot avoids that risk while still making a good check of the propeller.

You guessed it; I flew with an applicant who used a rag instead of his hand. Again, the habit traveled three levels deep—the applicant learned it from an instructor who trained with a former student of mine.

There's no other way to say this: Students watch very closely how you fly as an instructor.

In fact, the longer you instruct within a given aviation community, the more your instructional habits, and even your personal flying habits, will be picked up

by fellow pilots. It isn't just your well-meaning tips and or even your good habits that can be passed along to fellow pilots and students, either. On another occasion, an instructor said he'd witnessed me skipping a preflight on my aircraft after giving a checkride. He expressed his disappointment that an *examiner* would skip such an important task on his own aircraft. But had it really happened? No. I always do a preflight.

In this case, though, I'd done it before the instructor could have seen it—as the student was securing the aircraft after our checkride—and once I'd finished, I went inside to complete the paperwork from the checkride. The instructor saw only that I'd left the building after the paperwork was complete, jumped into my aircraft, and departed. His perception was that I had not completed the inspection. In this case, at least, his perception was also his reality.

It makes the point that, as instructors and examiners, we aren't just teaching when we're in direct contact with a student. We also teach by example.



Jason Blair, MCFI  
Executive Director

**My own personal habit had passed inadvertently from me to my student, and then on to his. Three pilots have made my technique part of their normal routine preflight check.**

We serve as role models to our community, and like it or not, we're watched even when we're "off the clock"—and often carefully. We need to live up to that role and not only teach safe operations, but also model them through our own flying.

When we become instructors and examiners, we're no longer "ordinary" pilots, and the example we set is one that other pilots will follow. Make sure the example you set is one that you'd want to represent your habits as an instructor and as a pilot.

After all, what goes around usually comes around, too. ■