

HOW DO I BECOME A PILOT?

Obtaining a pilot license is a fun, challenging, and exciting way to expand your knowledge and see the world in a way few others can. The process for obtaining a license is outlined in this document. Each of the components are listed below and are expanded upon later in the document. We highly recommend meeting with an instructor who can answer questions and discuss any special circumstances before your training begins. It will be very helpful to read this document first and then contact us to set up a meeting with an instructor.

To obtain a Private Pilot license, a student must complete the following steps...

- Obtain a Medical Certificate
- Get a Student Pilot Certificate
- Complete Ground School
- Pass the FAA Knowledge Exam
- Train with an instructor in the air and on the ground
- Practice on your own in the air and on the ground
- Pass the Oral and Practical Exam

The Process

There are a series of FAA certifications available to the interested pilot: Private, Instrument, Commercial, Certified Flight Instructor, Multi-Engine and Airline Transport Pilot. The **Private Pilot Certificate** is the starting point for everyone. A **Private** license allows you to carry passengers for business or pleasure, but you cannot get paid to fly. The minimum age requirement for a Private Pilot license is 17 years old. The **Instrument** rating allows you to fly through clouds and in reduced visibility. A **Commercial** license allows you to fly for hire. A **Certified Flight Instructor** (CFI) can teach others how to fly. A **Multi-Engine** rating allows you to fly aircraft with more than one engine. And finally, an **Airline Transport Pilot** (ATP) will allow you to fly for a commercial airline. For those who wish to fly for the airlines, you will need to achieve Private, Instrument, Commercial, Multi Engine, and ATP certifications, and in most cases have a minimum of 1500 flight hours. While there are a few more

certifications than those mentioned here, these are the most common certificates our students acquire through our FAA Part 61 programs.

The certificates listed above are issued in different categories of aircraft including airplanes, seaplanes, gyroplanes, helicopters, gliders, balloons, or airships. Northwest Flight Service instructs only in the airplane category, specifically 'Single-Engine Land' aircraft. NWFS does not train pilots for Tailwheel, Seaplane, Multi-Engine, Recreational Pilot, Light Sport Pilot, or Helicopter.

Note: The items discussed below do not have to be accomplished in the order they are presented, and most can be done concurrently.

FAA Medical Certificate

- A. A medical certificate is not required to start flight training but is required before you can solo an airplane. A person cannot act as the pilot-in-command of an aircraft without a valid FAA medical certificate. We highly recommend you get a medical certificate before you begin training in case there is some unknown health issue that would prevent you from obtaining a medical certificate.
- B. A medical certificate can only be issued by an Aviation Medical Examiner (AME).
 - A. A list of local AMEs can be found on our [website](#), or by visiting the FAA's [database of AMEs](#).
- C. There are 3 classes of FAA medical certificates: First, Second and Third class. Each one has a different purpose. A private pilot who will fly for pleasure or business only needs a Third class medical. If your goal is to fly as a career, you will need a First class medical. We suggest obtaining a First class medical initially to ensure you can get one. AMEs are usually booked out 2-4 weeks so plan ahead if time is critical.
- D. Prior to your doctor visit you must fill out some required forms online. The forms are on the [MedXPress website](#). Once you set up an account, this website will prompt you for information, and then it will generate the forms your doctor will need to approve your application for a medical certificate. If you wear glasses, bring them with you to your appointment.
- E. Upon successfully passing your FAA medical exam your doctor will issue you a medical certificate.

- F. BasicMed is an alternative way for pilots to fly without holding an FAA medical certificate. However, Basic Med is only available to people who have held a First, Second, or Third Class medical certificate after July 14, 2006. Additional information about the BasicMed program can be found on the [FAA website](#).

Student Pilot Certificate

- A. A Student Pilot Certificate is required before you can solo an airplane.
- B. To obtain a student pilot certificate you will need to set up an account on [IACRA.FAA.GOV](#) (we recommend using Chrome as your internet browser)
- a. In the login box (upper right corner of the IACRA website) click on "Register" to set up a new account. This is free and you can do this on your own.
- C. The TSA requires that we verify U.S. citizenship prior to conducting flight training. For this reason, you will be required to have photo identification AND either a valid US Passport or birth certificate. If you are not a US citizen [click here](#).
- D. To complete the final step in the process, you will need to meet with a flight instructor. We ask that you give us a call to set up a meeting. The process normally takes 15-30 minutes. Together, you will log on to your new IACRA account and fill out the required information. A temporary student pilot certificate will be immediately available for you to print online, and a plastic student pilot license will be mailed from the FAA. It normally takes around 3 weeks to receive it in the mail.
- E. Before you meet with our flight instructor we ask that you print and fill out the [NWFS Client Information Form](#). Bring this completed form with you to your meeting so we may enter your information in our system.

Ground School

The purpose of ground school is to equip students with the knowledge required to pass the FAA written exam. Students can study for the FAA written exam on their own, or in a classroom setting at NWFS. It is important to note that ground school does not contain all the information you will need to pass the FAA oral exam and practical check ride. In addition to the things you learn in ground school, you will acquire additional knowledge and training from your flight instructor to prepare you for your check ride.

In-Person Ground School

Northwest Flight Service offers Private Pilot Ground School in a classroom setting. Our ground school is split into three stages and each stage lasts approximately one month. There is a quiz at the end of each stage, and two cumulative final quizzes at the end of the course. Each quiz requires an 80% to pass. Students that do not pass the quiz can simply retake the quiz after additional study. Once all quizzes are passed with an 80% or better, the ground instructor will give you a written endorsement to take the FAA Knowledge Exam. More information, including dates and times, for our ground school is available on our website.

- a. Students enrolled in our ground school can also purchase a Private Pilot kit which contains all the books and materials needed for the class.
- b. Note: You are not required to complete ground school or pass the FAA written exam prior to starting flight lessons. Many of our student begin flight training while they are in ground school. If you begin ground school a few weeks ahead of flight lessons, it will make the flight training more efficient because you already have some basic knowledge and understanding.
- c. Several other useful FAA documents are listed below. During your training, our instructors will likely reference these books. All are free to [download](#) or they can be purchased online.
 - Pilots Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge FAA-H-8083-25
 - Airplane Flying Handbook FAA-H-8083-3
 - Aviation Weather AC 00-6
 - Aviation Weather Services AC 00-45
 - Weight and Balance Handbook FAA-H-8083-1
 - Aeronautical Chart Users Guide

Online Ground School

Students may choose to study on their own using commercially available material on the internet, in print, or on DVD. Online course material usually contains practice tests that students can use in preparation for the FAA exam. Once you have completed the online course material and pass the practice tests, an endorsement will be generated by the publisher. The endorsement is required to take the actual FAA Knowledge Exam.

FAA Knowledge Exam

The FAA exam is also referred to as “the written”. Once you are prepared for the exam and have an endorsement from an instructor, you can make a test reservation by visiting <https://faa.psiexams.com/faa/login>. The FAA exam requires a score of 70% to pass and is valid for two years. If you have not passed the FAA Oral and Practical exams within two years of passing the knowledge test you will have to retake the FAA exam. Upon successfully passing the exam you will receive an embossed test report that you will want to keep in a safe place because the FAA examiner will ask to see it during your oral exam.

Train with an Instructor

When you begin flight training, we will assign you one instructor that will be your primary instructor. He/she is the one you will fly with most and will monitor your progress. If your primary instructor is unavailable, we have several other instructors you can fly with to avoid delays in your training.

- A. The FAA has set requirements for the number of hours you must train with an instructor prior to your check ride. During this time, you will gain practical knowledge about safely operating an aircraft in the national airspace system. Your instructor will discuss these requirements with you in detail. The FAA’s minimum flight time requirements is 40 hours however, the national average is between 60-80 hours for an average student pilot to get their license. Many factors affect the number of flight hours you acquire during training including your availability, motivation, prior knowledge and experience, complexity of the aircraft, weather, simulator use, etc. You can see [estimated training costs](#) on our website where we use an average of 65 hours.
- B. Before you are assigned to an instructor, you will select the airplane you wish to train in (Cirrus or Cessna). We are a Platinum Cirrus Authorized Training Center so training in the Cirrus is our bread and butter and there are a lot of great advantages to learning in the Cirrus. However, we understand that the Cirrus may not be for everyone, so we also have Cessna 172s available for primary and advanced training. Information about our

fleet is available on our [website](#). We are happy to show you the differences between the airplanes and help you make a well-informed decision.

- C. Each lesson includes a pre-flight briefing, preflight inspection of the airplane, a 1-to-2-hour flight, and a post-flight briefing. Expect every flight lesson to be 3-4 hours from start to finish.
- D. We have several flight instructors on staff with different backgrounds, expertise, and availability. Our [website](#) has a list of our flight instructors. All of our instructors utilize a [training syllabus](#) that keeps students on track in a logical sequence.
- E. We utilize an online scheduling and billing system called [Flight Schedule Pro](#). Upon enrollment in our program, we will give you access to FSP which will allow you to view aircraft and instructor availability and to make reservations online.

Train On Your Own

You will reach a point in your training when your instructor decides it is time for you to "solo". This means the instructor will send you up in the airplane all by yourself! The FAA has set requirements on the number of hours you must fly without an instructor prior to taking your check ride. Your instructor will discuss these requirements with you in detail. Once you are flying the airplane alone you will have LOTS OF FUN and will practice all the things your instructor has taught you. Your instructor will give you a lot of guidance on when and where you can fly to ensure you are safe and comfortable. You won't do anything on your own that you haven't already done with an instructor.

NOTE: NWFS has a \$1 million per occurrence insurance policy. If you are renting or flying solo in our airplane, you may be responsible for the deductible and any other damages caused due to negligence or intent. We recommend personal renters insurance for all rental or solo flights. Visit AOPA for up to date information on aviation [insurance for renters](#).

FAA Oral and Practical Exam (aka Check Ride)

The oral and practical exam is the culmination of your training. Once you and your instructor have agreed that you have fulfilled all the training requirements and are ready to get your license, a date will be set for your "check ride". The activities in a check ride are outlined in a document called the Private Pilot Airmen Certification Standards (ACS). This book contains everything you must know and do during the check ride. Your instructor will go through the ACS with you in detail during your training. The ACS is basically a cheat sheet for your oral exam and check ride so every student should read through the ACS at least once or twice.

The check ride will be conducted by an FAA Designated Pilot Examiner (DPE) and can be done here at our facility. On the specified date, you will meet the DPE and show him/her what you know.

- A. The check ride is composed of two parts: the Oral and the Practical.
 - a. The oral must be completed first and involves the DPE asking questions and putting together scenarios to test your knowledge. This usually takes between 2-3 hours.
 - b. The practical test is when you get to fly. You and the DPE will fly together, and he/she will ask you to perform take offs and flight maneuvers, test your handling of simulated emergencies, grade your landings, and assess your overall ability to be the pilot-in-command. You will be expected to perform these maneuvers to the standards outlined in the ACS. The flight is usually between 2-3 hours.
 - c. Upon successfully passing the check ride, you and the DPE will complete the appropriate forms and you will receive a temporary pilot certificate right then and there. Your plastic pilot license will arrive in the mail in a few weeks. You are officially a pilot!!

Additional Information

There are a large variety of resources on the internet and in bookstores to help you learn about the specific airplane you fly. All airplanes have a Pilots Operating Handbook (POH) and Airplane Flight Manual (AFM) that is approved by the FAA and is specific to each airplane. The POH/AFM for our fleet is available [online](#) which you can download for free. You can also purchase a paper copy for your own personal use.

Newer airplanes such as the Cirrus have a lot of standardized training resources for pilots.

Cirrus Aircraft

Cirrus Aircraft makes the best-selling airplane in its class. We fly the Cirrus SR20-G6 for initial, transition, and advanced training (Private thru CFII). Our Cirrus has Garmin Perspective+ avionics (“glass cockpit”), air conditioning, air bags, and of course the Cirrus Airframe Parachute System (CAPS). Along with an amazing airplane comes superior training products and support straight from the manufacturer. As a Platinum Cirrus Training Center and Authorized Service Center, we offer world-class training and maintenance for all makes and models of Cirrus. www.cirrusaircraft.com

Cirrus Approach

Cirrus Approach is the hub for Cirrus training. It contains multiple online training courses and resources for each model aircraft. Your instructor will follow these standardized resources through the duration of your training.

www.cirrusapproach.com

Cirrus’ Interactive Flight Operations Manual (iFOM)

This interactive standardized training manual teaches the pilot exactly how to fly the plane in every conceivable scenario. It also offers guidance on private, instrument, and commercial maneuvers as well as emergency procedures. It can be purchased directly through iBooks and is designed to operate on any Apple device.

Cirrus Owners and Pilots Association (COPA)

COPA is a group of owners and operators whose mission is to promote safety within the Cirrus pilot community. COPA has created an amazing online community for assistance with everything Cirrus. www.cirruspilots.org

Cessna Aircraft

In addition to Cirrus, we also have Cessna 172s that we use for training (Private thru CFII). Resources for learning the Cessna 172 are available online and copies of the POH are available on our website. Our 172s have been upgraded over the years and

include Garmin G5 electronic flight instruments, Garmin 430W GPS/Nav/Comm, and upgraded interiors.

RATES

Flight & Ground Instruction

Rates vary based on the experience and qualifications of the instructor. Billing is calculated from 'handshake to handshake' meaning from the time you walk in and greet the instructor until the time you leave. Instructor rates are listed as hourly but are billed to the 1/10th of an hour. There is no rate difference between flight or ground instruction. In other words, you are paying the same rate for their time whether in the airplane or on the ground. Example, if you arrive at 9:00 am and work with an instructor until 12:30 pm the charge will be 3.5 times the instructor's hourly rate. It does not matter if you fly, work in the simulator, or have a private ground lesson.

Airplanes

Airplane rates are listed as hourly but are billed to the 1/10th of an hour. Aircraft charges accumulate only when the engine is running. A hobbs meter installed in the airplane keeps track of your time. Example, if the plane is running for 1.3 hours, the charge is 1.3 times the hourly aircraft rate.

Simulators

We have two flight simulators. A [FlyThisSim TouchTrainer](#) BATD (Basic Aviation Training Device) and a Cirrus simulator by [Noble Flight Simulation](#) AATD (Advanced Aviation Training Device). Spending time in a simulator is one of the best, yet most underutilized, tools we have. A considerable amount of time and money can be saved by using the simulators. We strongly suggest that you work in the simulator for several hours to develop your understanding of the avionics and systems prior to flying the real plane. It is also a tremendous asset for the instrument student when practicing approach procedures and learning avionics programming. Our simulators are rented by the hour, or you can purchase a block rate for unlimited use for 12 months. The simulator is scheduled online just like an airplane. Any time you use the sim with an instructor you would still need to pay for the instructor's time. The sims

also include PilotEdge communications software to allow realistic communications with a live controller in a simulated environment. Read more about PilotEdge at www.pilotedge.net.

Frequent Flyer Club

We offer membership in our Frequent Flyer Club which gives discounts on aircraft, instructors, simulators, and ground school. To join the club, there is a \$100 registration fee, and you can choose between a \$75 month-to-month membership, or an annual membership for \$750. While we do not offer refunds for any of our services, the month-to-month membership can be cancelled at any time without penalty. If you are a regular student or renter who flies more than 2 hours per month, this program will save you money.

Technology in the Cockpit

Tablets

While not a requirement, tablets (i.e. Apple iPad) have become an excellent resource for pilots. A well-trained user can use tablet apps to efficiently search and reference data thus replacing all paper charts and books and increase safety and situational awareness while flying. A poorly trained user, however, will find these tablets to be a distraction. We encourage our students to spend time at home learning how to use the app before taking it in the air. The app websites have great tutorial videos for instruction. [ForeFlight](#) and [Garmin Pilot](#) are the most widely used tablet apps for pilots and stand above the rest for everyday use in the cockpit.

To make the most of your tablet, be sure it has a GPS (Global Positioning System) antenna. Typically, an iPad with cellular capability has an internal GPS antenna. The “WiFi only” devices do not have an internal GPS antenna and will not do what you want. Without a GPS antenna, the tablet cannot determine its position and will not georeference you on the aviation charts while flying. The tablet does not need to be connected to a cellular service/data plan. The aviation app and GPS receiver will work while the device is in airplane mode. If you already own a WiFi only iPad all is not lost – external GPS antennas are widely available and we can help you find the one that’s best for you.

Why Train at Northwest Flight Service?

At Northwest Flight Service we are committed to providing the highest quality flight instruction to produce safe and proficient pilots who meet and exceed FAA standards. Our experienced flight instructors are held to high standards, and they are here because they love to fly, and they love to teach. While our instructors follow a structured syllabus as their guide, as an FAA Part 61 school, we can customize each course to fit the individual needs of our students.

We are a Cirrus Aircraft Partner and have been designated as a Platinum Cirrus Training Center and Cirrus Authorized Service Center. We have been training people to fly for 10+ years and our current facility was built in 2021 with our student's needs in mind. Our 3 private briefing rooms, conference room, and classroom provide a distraction-free environment where you can focus on learning. Our state-of-the-art flight simulators are great money-saving tools and give us the ability to train in a variety of situations and environments.

Our fleet of Cirrus and Cessna aircraft are maintained by our own FAA certified and factory-trained mechanics. Having safe airplanes is always our #1 priority. We do not cut corners. In addition, we have line service staff that keep our airplanes clean and fuel them before/after every flight. If you're on a solo flight, we take care of all the details on the ground so you can focus on flying.

We are here for you and customer service is very important to us. We want you to feel like you are a part of something special....because you are! Our office is open Mon – Sat, 9am – 5pm but training happens 24/7/365.

Above all else, there is no substitute for high-quality, structured training by experienced professionals. In 2017 Northwest Flight Service was selected as the Cirrus Training Center of the Year. In 2018 and 2019 we received Cirrus Approach Safety Awards, and in 2022 our Chief Pilot was selected as the Cirrus Standardized Instructor Pilot of the Year. We love what we do, and we show that by offering you the very best.

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