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Flight Student Q&A

Is there an age limit for obtaining a Recreational and/or Private Pilot Certificate?

The Federal Aviation Rules state that a person may acquire a Recreational or Private Pilot Certificate at 17 years of age and may solo at 16. There is no maximum age requirement. However, to fly an aircraft without an instructor, a person with a pilot's certificate, must pass at least a 3rd class medical and have completed a Flight Review.

What tests are required to obtain a Recreational and/or Private Pilot Certificate?

A person must pass an FAA written exam, the oral portion of the flight test, and the flight test itself.

What is the difference between a Part 141 and a Part 61 flight school?

Each type flight school is governed a little differently under the two parts of the Federal Regulations. For example, a Part 61 flight schools doesn't require a Chief Instructor and they have the flexibility to progress through their training syllabi as needed. A Part 141 school must have a Chief Instructor and a student syllabus, or a training course outline, called a TCO. They must also be approved by the local Flight Standards District Office of the FAA and are regularly inspected.

What is a Discovery Flight?

A Discovery Flight is a short introductory flight lasting approximately 30 minutes. It will familiarize the prospective student with the airplane, the airport, and with the flying environment. During the flight, the student sits in the left seat and the instructor allows the student to do most of the flying.

How can I stay safe while learning to fly?

The student pilot is always under the watchful eye of a flight instructor. The process of learning to fly is made up of a series of steps, each step must be mastered before the student is permitted to advance to the next step. The student cannot do anything by himself until he has demonstrated that he has the ability to handle that particular situation in a safe and responsible way. There are well defined goals that must be met before the student can go it alone. For example, before the student can solo the aircraft, he must show proficiency in a number of flight maneuvers and situations. At this stage, for the student to fly solo, even the limits of wind speed and direction of the wind to the runway are determined by the instructor. This type of supervision, makes for a safe and confident student pilot.

What happens if the engine quits?

The chance of an engine failure in a properly maintained aircraft is almost nonexistent. A rental aircraft is subject to a very strict maintenance code. The modern aircraft engine is designed with redundancy built in. For example, the aircraft engine has two spark plugs in each cylinder. It also has a dual ignition system. If the battery were to completely die, the aircraft engine will continue to generate power without it. Well what if it did fail? Then, the aircraft becomes a glider and it can glide a considerable distance if the engine malfunctioned. You have time to look for a suitable place to put down in such an emergency.

What's the record for aircraft mechanical reliability?

A factory-built aircraft must meet strict FAA design criteria and performance specifications. They are tested in every possible situation and stressed to a much greater extent than a pilot would in normal flight conditions. A properly maintained aircraft doesn't just come apart in the air. The leading causes of mechanical failure are due to a pilot either overstressing the aircraft in a steep pull-up or exceeding speed limitations. As a further precaution, all aircraft are required to have an annual engine and airframe inspection, by an FAA certified inspector, who must sign the aircraft's logbook stating that it is airworthy. If your instructional aircraft is a rental, it must undergo an inspection every 100 flight hours in addition to the annual.

What do I do if I have trouble in my training?

First of all discuss the difficulty with your instructor. If the problem can't be resolved that way, don't hesitate to take it up with either the Chief Instructor or an assistant. Realize that one of your goals is to receive the best flight education and experience possible. You are paying for good flight instruction. Certain personalities and instructional methods clash. Therefore, you have every right to choose another instructor if the two of you are incompatible for any reason.

Should I take ground school?

Before you take your FAA checkride with a designated pilot examiner, you must pass an FAA airman knowledge test at an approved testing site. How you attain this knowledge is up to you. There is no rule that says you must attend ground school. You can study on your own if you like. The advantages of a formal classroom ground school are many: it is structured, it is at the same time and place each week, there is give and take between instructor and students. Another alternative is self study. There are some good home study

courses that use DVDs in conjunction with a textbook and workbook. Possibly the best approach to a good foundation is to do both – purchase a good home study course, like *Sporty's Complete Flight Training Courses*, and attend a dependable ground school. It's a good idea to learn all you can so you become a safe and confident pilot.

What is the advantage of getting a Recreational Certificate first rather than the Private?

It gets you flying on your own sooner. The Recreational Pilot Certificate is one of the quickest, and least expensive certificates a person can earn in which the pilot may carry a passenger. It allows someone to fly within 50 miles of the pilot's airport on fair weather days. A person can begin training for this certificate at any age, and solo an aircraft as young as 16 years old. The Recreational Certificate is also a stepping stone in the path to earning a Private Pilot License.

What should I consider before choosing a flight school?

Why do you want to learn to fly – to make aviation your career, to fly for business, or for recreation? Check in your local phone book all the available flight schools in your area. Call and talk to all of them and ask questions. Also have them send you whatever literature they have regarding their program. Now, having narrowed your search, visit the few that you like and again ask a lot of questions. Try to talk to a few flight instructors and students. Ask for references. Ask for a written agreement regarding costs and payment schedule. Some questions to consider might include: How many flight instructors are on board? What kind of training curriculum do you provide? How many and what type of training aircraft do you have on line? Do you have a flexible training schedule for aircraft and flight instructor? How long have you been in this business and how many students achieve their rating each year? Do you have pilot supplies for sale? Is there any financial help? Don't be afraid to ask serious questions. Expect serious and complete answers.

Why are some instructors more expensive than others?

A seasoned, experienced flight instructor is an invaluable asset to your flying preparation. Because someone holds a flight instructor rating, doesn't necessarily mean he can teach. And teaching is what it's all about. On the other hand, because an instructor is young doesn't mean he is not interested in or capable of teaching. Just like in any profession, an individual with more experience and knowledge can demand a higher hourly wage – so too in aviation instruction. Does the instructor have advanced ratings, possibly an instrument or multiengine rating? It took more education and flight time to acquire these. The experienced instructor will have more knowledge to impart to you and can significantly decrease the time you need to achieve a particular skill.

Why do I need the Sporty's DVD training course?

Sporty's DVD training course is an important tool for your aviation education. It's the only aviation course that guarantees you will pass your written, oral, and flight test. Composed of exceptional graphics and information, the course is put together by professional pilots and addresses all pertinent aviation topics. It is a thorough and professional guide to help you pass the written, oral, and flight test. Sporty's is committed to having the most state-of-the-art courses available. Continually updated with the most recent FAA guidelines, you can buy our courses with the confidence that they will include the latest information.

Why is it taking so long to solo?

Everyone is different in their physical makeup. Some persons have a quicker reaction time to a situation than others. Some are more coordinated than others. Learning to land an aircraft is dependent, to a great extent, on your level of hand/eye coordination. A person's depth perception, and their ability to see a situation developing and properly react to it, differs in everyone. Therefore, it is difficult to say just how many hours it will take for an individual to solo. How often can you fly? The closer together your lessons, the more progress you will enjoy. Don't worry about how long it is taking you. When you demonstrate that you can takeoff and land safely, then, and only then, will your instructor solo you.

Can I bring a spouse or friend along on a flight?

On a training flight it is best not to have a friend or a spouse along for the ride. It can be distracting for the student and it could be uncomfortable for the guest due to the type of maneuvers the lesson requires. All-in-all, it's better to wait until you have your pilot certificate before you invite a companion along.

What is the average time it takes to acquire a pilot certificate?

The national average to acquire a Private Pilot Certificate is approximately 70 hours. The Recreational Pilot Certificate can be had for approximately half that time. The actual time will depend on your ability and how often you can fly. If you fly once a week, it will take longer than if you could do it twice a week.

What do you mean when you say an airplane stalls?

First of all, a stall in an airplane does **not** mean that the engine quits. A stall occurs when the flow of air over the wing is disrupted and the wing loses lift. This is usually caused by an intentional maneuver that causes the wing to block the air over itself. A stall is easily prevented. A stall is desirable when an airplane lands. When the airplane's wheels are close to the ground, the pilot stalls the airplane just inches above the ground. This causes the airplane to settle quietly onto the runway for a smooth landing.