

# Learning to fly a full-scale airplane

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The author's lucky shirt helped him through his first solo flight. He is shown here after he parked the airplane.

**Y**ou will have to indulge me a little this month because I want to discuss my recent experience with learning to fly full-scale aircraft.

Have you ever wondered if you could fly a full-scale airplane or helicopter using only the knowledge you have gained from flying RC? The short answer is yes, you probably could fly a full-scale aircraft. As I found out throughout the course of 2017, however, flying an airplane is the easiest part of the whole general aviation experience.

As a complete outsider to the general aviation world, it was a challenge to figure out what I needed to accomplish to get my private pilot's license. I know that there are pilots reading this who are likely thinking, "It's all right there, and it's very straightforward," but to a new person, it is a little overwhelming

and confusing. Book titles, regulations, practical test standards, and a lot of reference material are dispensed to you in a short amount of time. Knowing where to start can be tough to figure out. After talking with some friends who are pilots, I was able to break it down.

The first thing I had to do was to get an FAA medical certificate. They come in three classes, depending on what you want to do with your license. I needed a Third-Class Airman Medical Certificate. I visited an FAA medical examiner and had what was basically a physical, with maybe a little more emphasis on checking my eyesight. Don't worry; you can fly with glasses if you wear them.

With that completed, the next step was to get my student pilot certificate. I had to apply for this through an FAA website known as IACRA, or

the Integrated Airman Certificate and Rating Application. This was my first indication of how much the FAA likes its acronyms. The application must be completed with a flight instructor so he or she can sign off on it.

When you've found a flight instructor and an airplane or helicopter that you are happy with, you start logging hours.

For an airplane private pilot's license, you are required to do at least 40 hours of training, with various criteria that need to be met for each stage. You start by flying with your instructor, and eventually, after you are taking off and landing without any input from your instructor, he or she will get out of the airplane and tell you to do a few more laps around the airport by yourself. This is the day of your first solo flight—it is an absolute rush!

Now the hard part begins. You will have begun this already, but you are now learning about all of the regulations that apply to you, what you can and can't do, navigation, weather, and talking on the radio. All of this prepares you for the required written test that you will have to complete.

I chose to use an online training course from Sporty's Pilot Shop, which gave me video training, quizzes to ensure I retained the information along the way, and mock written exams with which to practice. It was a great course, and after weeks of practicing with the mock exams, I completed my actual written test. While I was studying this material, I was continuing to build my flying skills with cross-country flights, night flying, simulated instrument



Chris spent approximately 50 hours in this cockpit and others that served as his "classroom" in 2017.



This photo was taken on the day that the author passed his check ride. "While I was ecstatic on the inside, as well as a frozen popsicle, my instructor, Ryan (L), was ecstatic on the outside," he stated.

flying, and solo flights to different airports.

Toward the end of my training, I flew more often by myself, building time and getting experience. I knew I wanted to try to get my license before the year's end, but there was still a critical step: the check ride.

The check ride is performed with an FAA examiner and there are two parts to it. There is a ground-based "oral" exam, where the examiner quizzes you about all of the knowledge you have learned. During this time, he or she also tests your chart knowledge and quizzes you on the signs and symbols of a sectional chart.

After that part is complete, you take the examiner on a flight, where he or she asks you to perform certain maneuvers and safety procedures. If everything goes well, you will land as a private pilot!

You don't have to get everything perfectly right during the check ride—nobody does—which is why there is a debrief after the check ride to go over things you might have missed or were unsure about. Obviously, if there is anything major that you get wrong, you will not pass your check ride. By the time you reach this stage, however, you should be knowledgeable enough to get through it.

I did my check ride on December

31—talk about squeezing it in before the end of the year! It was a cold day, but I made the most of it. My instructor and good friend, Ryan Smith, thoroughly drilled me the day before my check ride, and I went into it feeling nervous with self-induced pressure. As it turned out, we had a good time, my examiner was great, and my flight went smoothly. I completed my check ride and accomplished a lifelong goal at the same time.

Did my RC experience help me? I'm sure it did to the extent of understanding the fundamentals of how an airplane flies and what the controls do. There was a lot more that I learned along the way, and I will continue to learn for many years to come. I'm looking forward to this new adventure

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in general aviation and sharing it any time I can with family and friends.

If you have ever toyed with the idea of learning how to fly full-scale airplanes or helicopters, my advice is to not wait and to go for it!

**New Heli Podcast**

I am going to take a moment and discuss RC helicopters! There is a new podcast available called *TellARotor RC Podcast*. The men behind the podcast—Robert Montee, Mike Dipalo, and Mike Parker—are knowledgeable, with a wealth of experience among them.

Based in the Fredericksburg, Virginia, area, the three usually attend all of the major fun-flies up and down the East Coast, as well as the International Radio Controlled Helicopter Association (IRCHA) Jamboree in Muncie, Indiana. They are fun to hang out with at the field and enjoyable to listen to on the podcast. Check them out at the link listed in "Sources," as well as on their Facebook page.

SOURCES:

IRCHA  
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