

## You Want to Pass the Private Pilot Written Test?

Getting your private pilot's license isn't an easy thing to do. It takes time, and money. Moreover, it requires dedication and hard work. If you are willing to do those things the end result is the joy of flying. There are few greater thrills and the piloting road can lead you to many places in life. Airline pilot, cargo pilot, crop duster, banner towing pilot, law enforcement pilot, military pilot, naval aviator, and astronaut are just a few of the many futures available to those who took the first step and got their private pilot wings.

If you are going to begin down these paths, you have your first hurdle at the very outset. That first challenge is understanding what you must do before you actually take the private pilot flying test, which the Federal Aviation Administration calls the Private Pilot Practical Exam. That practical exam consists of an oral exam followed by the demonstration of your skills, knowledge, and judgment while flying the airplane. However, to get there you must take and pass the Private Pilot Knowledge Exam along the way. This is a computer-based test of 100 random questions from taken from the approximately 1000 questions that the FAA has in their question bank.

"How do I prepare for the test" is a question asked by every student at the outset. That search leads to a second question, "which test preparation materials are best to prepare me for that test?" This happens because there are so many options. Frankly, there are too many for you to explore and evaluate before purchase and your certificated flight instructor is unlikely to have experience in all the options available even after years of flight instruction. So, what do you do?

You pick one or several information sources and go to work! As the saying goes, "all roads lead to Rome." As long as your process does these things you will do fine.

- 1) You need study materials that will keep you engaged. If you don't have any prior experience in the worlds of aerodynamics, weather, risk management, federal regulations, aircraft design and operation you will have to learn it all. This is a lot of material. Your first yardstick should be "what will best support my learning style?" For some people, that is a video course. For others, it is an engaging and well-written text book. Others have been successful by repeatedly plowing through the books written by the FAA. These texts are from where they draw the questions on the test and if you have the discipline to read it, then it will well prepare you for the questions on the test.
- 2) You need to decide whether you are best served with paper copy or an electronic presentation of the information. Some people are quite comfortable viewing text, pictures and graphs on a computer or tablet screen. Others, like me, get the most benefit from a paperback textbook that can be highlighted and annotated.
- 3) When and where are you going to be studying? Are you going to be doing it sitting at a desk or in a comfortable chair at home, or while you are taking the commuter bus to work? The desk circumstance allows more flexibility than the bus. On the bus, your

study source might have to be your smart phone screen. It certainly won't be a 17-inch computer screen.

- 4) What can you afford? Options range from using the free, online texts written by the FAA to far more expensive hard bound textbooks and videos. You will find preparation materials that are studio quality movie productions, glossy color, muted color or black and white. You don't need to make the mistake of saying "more expensive is better." It isn't at its core level! Realize the knowledge required is the same in every case, and people have been successful in passing the test using any of the options available. I had a student who only read the FAA free stuff and used the Gleim online test prep bank and he scored a 96%, well above the "passing" grade of 70%
- 5) You need to learn concepts and gain actual knowledge. "Oh, please, all I have to do is know the answers to the questions on the test" is what some might say in response to my statement about gaining actual knowledge. Unfortunately, that isn't the right perspective and it might be dangerous for you. Flying has been described as "hours of joy interspersed by moments of sheer terror." Every veteran aviator has stories of things that have gone wrong. Some of those stories start like this, "I was on my initial solo..." or "I was solo cross-country when...." In these situations, rote knowledge and good judgment is what you have to get you back on the ground safely, especially early in your flying career. There is a reason the FAA mandates a pre-solo quiz before you can fly an airplane by yourself. You have to be well studied enough to know what is happening in your airplane and how you deal with the problem. Something you learned in one question from the test prep material might be the key you need.
- 6) You probably need a variety of reference materials. Inevitably you will find some subjects that you find difficult. In these situations, the various explanations presented by different authors may be very helpful in furthering your knowledge and as importantly your understanding. The information gained from a video lesson supported by the explanations from several written sources and a discussion with your flight instructor may be exactly what you need to make an obscure point much clearer in your mind.
- 7) You need a question bank of past FAA questions. You need to memorize the answers for the questions on the FAA Knowledge exam that are difficult to reason out. The FAA test is like any other as there are easy questions and hard questions. Some of the hard questions delve deeply into some finer points of knowledge. Most pilots find it helpful to memorize these answers. The most dog-eared books I have ever owned are the test preparation books for the various FAA knowledge tests. I spent hours reading the questions and answers and the explanations of why one answer was more correct than the others. Before actually taking the exam I typically whittled the questions I was reviewing down to those I had the least chance to pick the right answer using my noggin.
- 8) You need a question bank that is updated with the latest questions. Given the ever-changing world of technology and aviation procedures and practices, the FAA is always updating or changing questions. The ADF questions are now gone...and GPS questions have been added. Questions dealing with "glass cockpits" have supplemented those dealing with the possible errors of mechanical devices. Flight plans have changed from

the FAA domestic flight plan to the ICAO flight plan...and you can be sure that the test questions followed the change in expected pilot practice. It behooves you make sure you have a current question bank and that it is updated with new study questions in a timely manner. Make sure you check for updated questions and answers before you take the test.

If you apply what I just addressed, you will go a long way toward finding the study solution that best fits your needs. If you want another perspective, I highly recommend you read, "How I Aced the FAA Private Pilot Written Exam Before I Soloed," which can be found at this web address, <http://inspire.eaa.org/2019/01/10/how-i-aced-the-faa-private-pilot-written-exam-before-i-soloed/>. If you look at the picture of materials that Sara studied at the beginning of article and note the reference sources she addresses in the article, you will find the exact books and resources I would recommend too. I possess every one of these items and am reading many of them time and again as a flight instructor looking for a way to better explain something. That said, remember that I said "all roads lead to Rome" and that truism applies here. Pick what is best for you by making sure it meets my 8 recommendations and you'll do fine on your FAA knowledge exam.