

# How a Flight Training Student Gets Pilot Certification

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This is the prize that every [flight training student](#) wants to win. A pilot certificate issued by the FAA is what it's all about. Pilot certification in the United States is required for an individual to act as a pilot of an aircraft. It is regulated by the FAA. An FAA issued pilot certificate is evidence that an individual is duly authorized to exercise piloting privileges.

## General Structure of Certification

There are several types of certifications: Student Pilot, Sport Pilot, Recreational Pilot, Private Pilot and Commercial Pilot. Commercial Pilot is the category we will be discussing.

To obtain a certificate or add a rating, a pilot has to undergo a course of training with a certificated instructor, accumulate and log specific aeronautical experience, and pass a three-part examination: a knowledge test (a computerized multiple-choice test, typically called the "written test"), an oral test and a practical test carried out by either an FAA inspector or examiner.

Pilot certificates other than student pilot certificates do not expire, although they may be suspended or revoked by the FAA. However, a pilot must maintain currency — recent flight experience that is relevant to the flight being undertaken. To remain current, all pilots have to undergo a flight review with an instructor every 24 calendar months unless he gains a new pilot certificate or rating in that time. For most types of certificates, he must also undergo a medical examination.

## Pilot Training

Most pilots in the U.S. undergo flight training as private individuals with a [flight instructor](#), who may be employed by a [flight school](#). Those who have decided on aviation as a career often begin with an undergraduate aviation-based education.

## Knowledge Tests

Most pilot certificates and ratings require the applicant to pass a knowledge test, also called the "written test". The knowledge test results are valid for a period of 2 years, and are usually a prerequisite for practical tests. Resources available to prepare for the knowledge test may be obtained from pilot supply stores or vendors.

In order to take knowledge tests for all pilot certificates and ratings, the applicant must have a sign-off from a ground or flight instructor. These are usually given by an instructor who has taught a ground school course, provided ground

instruction or reviewed the applicant's self-study preparations.

## Practical Tests

All pilot certificates and ratings require a practical test. This is called a "check ride". For each practical test, the FAA has published a Practical Test Standards document that is expected to be used by the applicant, the [flight instructor](#) and the examiner. The check-ride is divided into two parts: the oral exam followed by a flight test in the aircraft. Upon successful completion of the practical test, the examiner will issue a temporary airman certificate with the new license or rating.

In order to take a practical test, the applicant must have proper logbook endorsements from their flight instructor.

## Commercial Pilot Certificate

The FAA offers a progression of pilot certificates, each with its own set of privileges and limitations. Here are the commercial pilot requirements below:

### Commercial Pilot

A commercial pilot may be compensated for flying. Training for the certificate focuses on a better understanding of aircraft systems and a higher standard of airmanship. The commercial certificate itself does not allow a pilot to fly in instrument meteorological conditions. For aircraft categories where an instrument rating is available, commercial pilots without an instrument rating are restricted to daytime flight within 50 nautical miles (93 km) when flying for hire.

A [commercial airplane pilot](#) must be able to operate a complex airplane, as a specific number of hours of complex (or turbine-powered) aircraft time are among the prerequisites, and at least a portion of the practical examination is performed in a complex aircraft. The requirements are:

- Be at least 18 years of age
- Hold a private pilot certificate
- Be able to read, speak, write, and understand the English language
- Accumulate and log a specified amount of training and experience; the following are part of the airplane single-engine land class rating requirements:
  - At least 250 hours of piloting time including 20 hours of training with an instructor and 10 hours of solo flight, and other requirements including several "cross-country" flights, i.e. more than 50 nautical miles (93 km) from the departure airport (which include Day VFR and Night VFR 100nm between points, with a time of at least 2hrs; also one cross country which is done solo 250nm one way, 300nm total distance with landings at 3 airports) and both solo and instructor-accompanied night flights
- Pass a 100-question aeronautical knowledge test
- Pass an oral test and flight test administered by an FAA inspector, FAA-designated examiner, or authorized check instructor.

By itself, this certificate does not permit the pilot to set up an operation that carries members of the public for hire; such

operations are governed by other regulations. Otherwise, a commercial pilot can be paid for certain types of operation, such as banner towing, agricultural applications, and photography, and can be paid for instructing if he holds a flight instructor certificate. To fly for hire, the pilot must hold a second-class medical certificate, which is valid for 12 months.

Often, the commercial certificate will reduce the pilot's insurance premiums, as it is evidence of training to a higher safety standard.

As you can see, there is a lot to accomplish before a flight student can be issued a pilot certification. There is also a medical certification that we will discuss at another time.