

# Flight Training for Women

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Women make up half the population but only 6% of all pilots are female and only 3.5% of these are commercial pilots. This figure will increase significantly in the upcoming years with female veterans returning from the armed services and with the barriers of discrimination against women in aviation coming down. Most flight training schools today encourage women to be students and some schools are actively seeking women to enroll. But 6% is still a disturbing number. Why aren't there more female commercial pilots?

## History

Aviation has always been a traditionally male occupation in the United States. Due to Commerce Department restrictions, a pilot was required to fly in the military, and until the 1970's the U.S. military barred women from flying. This prevented women from becoming commercial pilots.

Women began to enter U.S. aviation industry in the 1970's and 1980's. In 1973, the first female pilot flew for a major U.S. airline. In 1986, the first female was a captain at a major US airline. In the 1970's women were finally given permission to fly in the United States Armed Forces, beginning with the Army and Navy in 1974, and then the Air Force in 1976. But still – even after all these years, the commercial aviation industry has dragged their feet. In 2006, just over 6% of certified civilian pilots in the U.S. were women.

## Beverly Lynn Burns

Captain Beverly Lynn Burns was one of the pioneers of female commercial aviation and she was the first woman to captain a Boeing 747 jumbo jet. In 1984, Burns made her maiden voyage as a captain on a People Express flight from Newark to Los Angeles. In a prearranged effort, this honor was shared with another female People Express captain, Lynn Rippelmeyer, who flew from Newark to London that same day.

Beverly Burns didn't get her flight training in the military. She attended flight school from 1971 to 1978 while she worked as stewardess for American Airlines.

By the time she retired in 2008, Ms. Burns had been a captain with the airlines for twenty-seven years and clocked over twenty-five thousand hours of flight time. She captained Boeing 737's, Boeing 727's and Boeing

747's. She added DC-9's, DC-10's, Boeing 757's and Boeing 767's to the list and in 2001, Burns became captain of one of the most technologically sophisticated airliners of that time, the Boeing 777.

Captain Burns, along with other famous female aviators like Lynn Rippelmeyer, Karen Kahn and – of course – the legendary Amelia Earhart, are bold pioneers in an occupation where women are few and far between.

## **Flight Schools Today**

Most flight training schools are co-educational today and there are many female flight students in training now. If you are a woman and you want to become a commercial pilot, now is a good time to get your training. But do your homework first and pick a flight school where you will be comfortable. Make sure the flight training school is accredited and qualified. Check the fleet condition and the campus environment. Does the school have any females in the faculty? What are the living conditions like? Some flight schools have private bedrooms and baths and this is something you may want to consider.

Times are changing slowly for the commercial aviation industry but they are changing, nevertheless. There is still discrimination and that stubborn stereotype that only men can fly planes still hangs in the air. But the determined female flight student will overcome these obstacles. She will excel in flight training school and join the ranks of one of the most exciting and satisfying careers in the world.

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