



Teaching Tip - Actually *Do* It

By Larry Bothe, MCFI & DPE

Often it isn't good enough to just *tell* a student about a procedure. You must have them actually *do* it in order for them to fully understand the procedure and be able to do it on their own when you're not in the cockpit with them. Three tasks where I have found that this really applies are in filing a flight plan, contacting ATC if you're lost, and contacting Flight Watch to get enroute weather.

I know that Private and Sport pilots aren't going to be filing VFR flight plans every day. But the PTS for both Sport and Private require that the applicant "simulates filing a flight plan." I find that the applicants who have actually done it, live, with a flight service specialist, are much better at this task. Even though there is no specific requirement in aeronautical experience for Sport or Private Pilot, I suggest that instructors have their students go through the entire flight plan procedure of filing, opening in flight, and closing at the destination. Then they will understand, and be more likely to do it on their own.

During the oral portion of the checkride I put my finger on the chart somewhere along the preplanned cross-country route and ask a question like "if you were about here and the weather started to get bad, maybe some light rain, what would you do?" I'm of course looking for the applicant to tell me that he or she would contact Flight Watch on frequency 122.0 and get an updated weather briefing. If I get the correct answer (not something vague, like "contact Flight Service", or useless, like "listen to a nearby AWOS") then I ask, "OK, what will you say into the microphone?" At that point they are generally at a loss for words. Some tell me that they first have to climb to 5000 feet because Flight Watch doesn't work until you are up that high. Most don't know that you must give your approximate position when calling Flight Watch. If they had actually done it, just once, all these things would be cleared up in their mind. You should have every one of your students contact Flight Watch during a dual cross-country lesson.

Nobody likes the "L" word, Lost. It is synonymous with "I screwed up", or "I failed". We don't like to admit that. You know what; you don't ever have to use the word "lost." I tell my students that if they don't know where they are, and for that reason can't find the airport they are trying to get to, then call ATC and tell them something like "I'm having a little trouble finding the XYZ Airport; can you help me?" The controller then goes through the radar ID procedure, tells them their present position and gives them a vector to XYZ. Very easy, and not as embarrassing as being "lost." Again, I have each of my students actually do that during a dual cross-country lesson. They pick an approach control frequency out of the white box on the chart, call the controller and get a vector. Once they see how easy it is and how well it works they won't hesitate to do it on their own if they need to. And when the examiner tests it during the checkride they won't stumble around.



There are of course many other tasks that require *doing* to fully understand them, but these 3 stand out to me as ones that don't actually have to be done to complete the required training, and yet cry out for actual application. A couple of years ago we had two instances where a teenage student got lost, ran out of fuel and crashed at night. Neither had attempted to call ATC for assistance. Both had been told they could, but had never done it. Miraculously, both walked away from their accidents. One completed his training and I did his checkride; the other never flew again. Since you have to teach flight plans, enroute weather and contacting ATC anyway you might as well integrate doing those things into a cross-country lesson. You'll be helping your student pass the checkride, and, more importantly, enabling them to do these tasks on their own when it really counts.

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