

Checklist



“License” to Learn?

One of the most common sayings in aviation is that your pilot certificate is a license to learn, and your non-flying friends and family members will always think of that precious bit of plastic (or piece of paper) as your “pilot’s license.” You might have noticed, though, that the term “license” doesn’t appear in the regulations, advisory circulars, or other official documents. Instead, the FAA calls it a pilot “certificate.”

Does it matter? You can certainly argue, as Shakespeare did in *Romeo and Juliet*, that “a rose by any other name would smell as sweet,” and that your privileges as a pilot would be the same regardless of the term you apply to the document. That’s true enough. In aviation, though, precise (and correct) terminology is important. The FAA publishes an entire *Pilot/Controller Glossary* of terms to ensure that the meaning is identical on both ends of the microphone. It can be found at http://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/orders_notices/air_traffic_orders/. Also, one of the AOPA Air Safety Foundation’s most popular seminars these days—*Say It Right*—emphasizes the importance of correct radio terminology.

No one would suggest that the license-or-certificate question is a safety matter. Still, using, or at least knowing, the correct terms is part of the “right stuff” for being a professionally-minded pilot. So, let’s take a closer look at some of the terms and definitions associated with the authorization of pilot privileges.

Pilot Certificates

The basic document that the FAA issues to a pilot is a certificate. Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary defines a certificate as “a document certifying that one has fulfilled the requirements of, and may practice in, a field.” Since an individual must fulfill certain requirements to practice in the field of aviation, the term fits.

There are several different levels of pilot certification, depending on the extent of training and testing required. The first, of course, is the student pilot certificate, which is usually issued in connection with the individual’s first aviation medical certificate.

Medical certification isn’t necessary for a student glider or balloon pilot. The newest pilot certificate level is the sport pilot certificate, which was added in 2004. Another basic level is the recreational pilot certificate. As the titles suggest, these pilot certificate levels are designed to facilitate flying for sport or recreation. Since they require less training than FAA and International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards prescribe for a basic pilot certificate, the privileges conferred by the sport and recreational pilot certificates are more limited.

The basic document that the FAA issues to a pilot is a certificate.

For basic pilot privileges that do meet ICAO standards, the FAA issues a private pilot certificate, which has historically been the most common pilot certificate. For those who wish to fly for pay, or “for compensation or hire” as the official documents put it, a higher level of certificate is required. The training and testing standards required for this privilege are understandably more rigorous. The commercial pilot certificate and the airline transport pilot (ATP) certificate certify that the holder has successfully completed those requirements, and is qualified to exercise the more extensive privileges associated with that certificate level.

Instructor Certificates

Although we naturally tend to think of flight instructors as pilots, the certificate issued to a flight instructor is considered to be an instructor certificate, and not a pilot certificate. Possession of a commercial or ATP-level pilot certificate is generally required for issuance of a flight instructor certificate and, naturally enough, the holder of a flight instructor certificate may exercise its privileges only when the instructor certificate is used in combination with the appropriate pilot certificate. In contrast, the holder of a ground instructor certificate is not required to hold a pilot certificate.

Ratings

Except for student and sport pilot certificates, which we will address later, all pilot and instructor

certificates have associated ratings. According to its official definition, a rating is “a statement that, as part of a certificate, sets forth special conditions, privileges, or limitations.” In other words, ratings specify what, and/or how, the pilot is qualified to fly, and they come in several varieties. The

Take advantage of the great weather and exercise your license to learn!

most common form is the aircraft category and class rating. A typical rating on a private pilot certificate is “airplane single-engine land.” If you subsequently decide that you want to fly twin-engine airplanes, you need to complete the training and testing requirements for a multiengine rating. Your private pilot certificate will then have ratings for “airplane single and multiengine land.”

There are obviously many possible combinations of certificates and ratings for aircraft category and class. For example, you might have a commercial pilot certificate with an airplane single-engine land rating. If you train and test in a multiengine

airplane to the private pilot certificate level rather than the commercial level, you will still have a commercial pilot certificate with an airplane single-engine land rating, but it will note that you have a multiengine land rating with private pilot privileges.

For a pilot to legally act as pilot-in-command of any aircraft that is more than 12,500 pounds maximum gross takeoff weight or of any turbojet, an aircraft-specific type rating (e.g., B737) is required, in addition to the appropriate aircraft category and class rating.

Ratings are also added to a certificate when the pilot qualifies for a certain operating privilege, such as an instrument rating, in a specific aircraft category and class. For instance, let’s assume that the pilot has a private pilot certificate. The aircraft category and class rating is airplane single-engine land, and the pilot also has an instrument rating. To add a multiengine land rating, the pilot must complete the required instrument training and testing in the multiengine airplane to have instrument privileges for the new aircraft category and class.

H. Dean Chamberlain photo



Endorsements

An endorsement attests to the completion of ground and/or flight training required for specific operating privileges or for airman certification testing. Except for certain endorsements made in pen and ink on a student pilot certificate, endorsements are generally made in the pilot's logbook. The endorsements required by Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR) part 61 fall into several broad categories:

- **Student Pilots:** Because a student pilot certificate has no aircraft category and class ratings, operating privileges and limitations for solo flight are conveyed exclusively through instructor endorsements. Endorsements in this category are usually limited not just to aircraft category and class, but also to a specific make and model. Student pilot endorsements can also specify weather limitations.
- **Sport Pilots:** Like a student pilot certificate, a sport pilot certificate is issued without aircraft category and class ratings. Logbook endorsements specify the category, class, make, and model of aircraft that the sport pilot is authorized to fly as pilot in command.
- **Testing for Certificate or Rating:** To take a knowledge test or practical test for most pilot certificates and ratings, the applicant must have endorsements attesting to aeronautical knowledge and flight proficiency (including aeronautical experience and practical test preparation required in 14 CFR section 61.31(a)(6)). The flight instructor applicant endorsements for completing the fundamentals of instruction and spin training fall into this category as well.
- **Recurrent Training:** To maintain the operating privileges conferred by a pilot certificate or instrument rating, the pilot must have an endorsement for satisfactory completion of required recurrent training (e.g., flight review or instrument proficiency check).
- **Aircraft Characteristics:** The requirement for a type rating is limited to large (greater than 12,500 lbs maximum gross takeoff weight) and turbojet-powered aircraft. However, certain small and piston-powered aircraft have characteristics that require additional training for safe operation. For example, 14 CFR section 61.69 specifies training and experience required for towing a glider. Specific additional aircraft training requirements are outlined in 14 CFR section 61.31, and instructor endorsements that

attest to the satisfactory completion of this training are the mechanism used to confer the necessary operating privilege. Endorsements related to aircraft characteristics include those for complex, high performance, high altitude, tailwheel, and glider ground operations. In addition, 14 CFR section 61.31(h) provides for "additional aircraft type-specific training" in cases where the FAA has determined that such training is required.

Still a License to Learn

No matter the level of certificate or the number of ratings you hold, the beauty (and challenge) of aviation is that there is always some new combination to earn, which means something new and exciting to learn. The spring and summer season is a great time to embark on an aeronautical improvement project, so take advantage of the great weather and exercise your license to learn!

Susan Parson is a special assistant in the FAA's General Aviation and Commercial Division. She holds an ATP certificate with an airplane multiengine land rating, and commercial privileges for airplane single-engine land. She also holds advanced and instrument ground instructor certificates, and a flight instructor certificate with ratings for airplane single and multiengine land and instrument airplane.

Answers to Airport Sign Quiz (page 32)

- 1-C, The pilot would see this sign when on and lined up with the runway.
- 2-F, On taxiway—Provides direction to turn at next intersection to maneuver aircraft onto named taxiway. On runway—Provides direction to turn to exit runway onto named taxiway.
- 3-A, Towered airport—Hold when instructed by air traffic, clearance required to cross. Nontowered airport—Proceed when no traffic conflict exists.
- 4-D, Identifies paved areas where aircraft entry is prohibited.
- 5-B, Pilots exiting this area would use this sign as a guide to judge when the aircraft is clear of the ILS critical area.
- 6-E, Pilots exiting this area would use this sign as a guide to judge when the aircraft is clear of the protected area.