



## Tap yourself into a rhythmic scan

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Something told me that all was not well. You know, that intuition thing. It kind of nips at your inner ear and you want to swat it away but, no, it won't go away. Annoying.

I was firmly seated in a Cessna 172 with my instructor who was 20 years my junior. He was half in dreamland and the other half fighting the urge to keep his heavy eyelids from crashing down into oblivion.

It was overcast and we were in it. The clouds were thick as molasses and it felt as if the Cessna was having difficulty separating the clouds to move through them. The steam gauge dials were rocking direction-less and in that pitching moment I became aware of the loneliness that surrounds you in moments such as those.

“Hey, I need help!” It barely escaped my lips. It was barely a whisper. My ego had a clamp on my mouth and I dared not wake this young punk from his slumber so he could berate the hell out of me. Finally I tugged at his sleeve and he got up with a startle. “What? What!” and his hands jutted straight head for the yoke. “What the hell?” Seeing the full-fledged panic on his face was not what I wanted to see. I could screw up but I had this mastermind next to me who would, with one gesture, right the ship and we would be sailing in calm waters. But, no. That did not happen. I learnt then that calmness in the face of adversity is a greater strength than panic at any level. Soon we were, with nature's help, in between layers with the Cessna woefully banked at 45 degrees in a nose up attitude. Of course it was easy to right the ship. Or was it? Turns out the cloud layers can be sloped to their cloud-dynamics' desire and one has to stay rooted to a fully functional attitude indicator even though it seems a counter-intuitive thing to do.

So I learnt from that 'safe' flight that my scan had gone to pasture, my 'unseasoned' instructor had let his youthful emotions cloud his scan, and if nature had not separated the dark gray sea of clouds for our benefit the outcome could have been in doubt.

So now when I sit in the right seat, I watch 'fixation' on a single dial and start tapping the boom on my headset. Tap-tap-tap in a rhythmic tone, to indicate to the student that scanning is required to keep us both safe. I advise them of this beforehand so they understand, when they hear the tapping, it is meant to annoy their sense of comfort. The old steam gauges are still employed in a large number of aircraft and require mastery. There are only six instruments that matter the most in keeping the aircraft straight and level. The glass cockpits of today do not afford any better safety records and a pilot previously trained in the "steam gauges" has to retrain himself or herself with the flat panels of today. Attitude, VSI, turn coordinator, airspeed, and altimeter data should be scanned constantly from the display. Mental fatigue is synonymous with difficulty in



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multitasking. Pilots must remain ever vigilant to incipient fatigue in Instrument conditions.

So give it up for those calm pilot souls that scan, verify, and quantify the risks and then mitigate them with careful comprehension of the information presented and keep themselves and their passengers safe. Here is a small note of thanks to the ‘auto-pilot’ for doing an excellent job in all aspects of verification, monitoring and execution. Wish we could all fly like mechanical auto-pilots. Tap-tap-tap.

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