



Making the Most of the Flight Review (Part I – Ground)

By Elaine Kauh

The instructor who conducted my first Flight Review gave me a written quiz to complete in advance of our scheduled session. It wasn't lengthy or complicated; it asked basic questions about preflight planning, traffic patterns, collision avoidance, and the like.

Because it was my first review - two years into my career as a Private Pilot - I assumed every instructor did something similar to provide a framework for the pilot to prepare for the ground portion. In subsequent reviews with different instructors, however, I found out that this wasn't the case. While a Flight Review is not a pass/fail test and does not require a formal exam, I always liked the idea of an advance 'quiz' or 'test' to provide some structure.

Now, in my own work as a flight instructor, I make it a practice to e-mail written tests upon scheduling Flight Reviews. (If your client is test-shy, explain what you're doing and call it a 'refresher prep.')

It's open-book, requiring a FAR/AIM, a POH for the aircraft to be used in the flight portion, and other references. It is not meant to be a pass/fail exam, but a learning exercise that achieves several objectives for the instructor and the pilot. First, it's a great way for the pilot to brush up on knowledge topics. A number of pilots have told me they had to do some digging through the FAR/AIM to find the answers, and found it enlightening! To see a pilot learning on her own and showing you the results is rewarding for everyone involved. Second, a take-home test saves time on rehashing the basics during your ground session, leaving more opportunities to discuss these subjects in depth. Third, the test can reveal strengths and weaknesses in the pilot's knowledge, helping the instructor do his job. The pilot will often leave some questions blank because she could not find the answers. This is the perfect time to provide a good refresher lesson as part of the Flight Review. This test also provides an additional written record of the review and the topics covered. Each test is reviewed and corrected with the pilot.

Keep in mind that this at-home prep is more than a fill-in-the-blank quiz. It incorporates scenarios, cross-country planning and Aeronautical Decision Making – a few of the areas the FAA highly recommends reviewing during the ground portion (see the FAA publication [Conducting an Effective Flight Review](#)).

It's also a good idea to tailor these tests for individual pilots – those with an instrument rating, for instance – and keep them updated for pilots you're familiar with or have conducted reviews for previously. Generally, the questions will be categorized into appropriate knowledge topics, including Federal Aviation Regulations, airspace, charts and flight planning, and specific aircraft systems and equipment.



Some examples:

Regulations

-You're planning a day VFR flight in your aircraft. What is the minimum required equipment? What would also be required for a night VFR flight, and when would this be required?

-What recent experience is required for you to carry passengers at night?

Aeronautical Decision Making

- Describe your current Personal Minimums for a local VFR flight. Do you use a Personal Minimums Checklist?

- Your preassigned cross-country plan will be discussed during the ground portion of the Flight Review, using real-time weather.

Airspace

-Can you legally fly pattern work at your airport at _____ feet MSL with visibility of 1 SM? Why or why not?

Cross-country/ADM

- You're halfway through your cross-country between ___ and ___ at 6500 feet when your engine begins running roughly. You're VFR above an overcast layer. You are not on Flight Following. What do you do?

I also leave some blank lines at the end, asking the pilot to list ground and flight topics he would like to cover during the Flight Review and beyond as part of a personal proficiency plan. This gives the pilot an opportunity to think about his strengths, weaknesses, and the next steps in his flying career, such as pursuing an instrument rating or a tailwheel endorsement. Instructors will learn not only how to make the next Flight Review fun and challenging for their clients; they will get a chance to discuss future training opportunities – and, hopefully, improve pilots' knowledge and skills for the long term.

Sources:

Federal Aviation Administration, Conducting an Effective Flight Review, 2006.

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