

PRIVATE PILOT GROUND SCHOOL

MODULE 1-3 — STUDENT PILOT CERTIFICATE AND PERSONAL LIMITS

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MNEMONICS

IMSAFE — Illness, Medication, Stress, Alcohol, Fatigue, Emotion (or Eating)

The personal preflight checklist — the deep look at the P in PAVE. Run it before every flight, not only when feeling sick. Any letter that fails is a no-go about the pilot, no matter how good the airplane and the weather are.

Two of the letters carry hard regulatory numbers. Alcohol (14 CFR 91.17): no acting as a crewmember within 8 hours of consuming any alcohol, while under the influence, or with a blood or breath alcohol concentration of 0.04 or greater — and a hangover is impairment even when the clock and the number both pass. Medication (14 CFR 61.53): flying is prohibited while taking any medication or treatment that leaves you unable to meet your medical certificate's requirements. For over-the-counter drugs the FAA's guidance is concrete: if the label warns about drowsiness or operating machinery, wait at least five maximal dosing intervals after the last dose — and when in doubt, ask an AME. The other letters — Illness, Stress, Fatigue, Emotion — have no numbers, which is exactly why they demand the most honesty.

FACTS TO REMEMBER

KNOW THESE COLD

- A student pilot certificate for airplanes requires being at least 16 years old and able to read, speak, write, and understand English.

Source: 14 CFR 61.83

- A private pilot certificate (airplane) requires being at least 17 years old.

Source: 14 CFR 61.103(a)

- Student pilot certificates issued today carry no expiration date; they remain valid unless surrendered, suspended, or revoked.

Source: 14 CFR 61.19(a)

- The private certificate requires at least 40 hours of flight time, including at least 20 hours of flight training and 10 hours of solo flight in the required areas of operation.

Source: 14 CFR 61.109(a)

- Becoming a private pilot also requires passing the FAA knowledge test and the practical test, each after an instructor endorsement.

Source: 14 CFR 61.103(d)–(h)

- Medical certificates come in three classes — first (airline transport privileges), second (commercial), third (private, recreational, student).

Source: 14 CFR 61.23(a); PHAK ch. 17

- Private and student pilot privileges require at least a third-class medical — or a qualifying alternative such as BasicMed.

Source: 14 CFR 61.23(a)(3), (c)

- For a pilot under 40 on the exam date, a third-class medical lasts through the end of the 60th month after the month of the exam.

Source: 14 CFR 61.23(d)

- For a pilot 40 or older on the exam date, a third-class medical lasts through the end of the 24th month after the month of the exam.

Source: 14 CFR 61.23(d)

- A pilot may not fly during any known medical deficiency: whoever knows, or has reason to know, of a condition that would make them unable to operate safely is grounded by rule, whatever their medical certificate says.

Source: 14 CFR 61.53(a)

- Temporary disqualifications include everyday things: a head cold that blocks the ears, a new medication, an ongoing dental anesthetic, acute stress or fatigue — the IMSAFE letters made regulatory.

Source: 14 CFR 61.53; AIM 8-1-1

- BasicMed qualification: have held any FAA medical after July 14, 2006, hold a valid U.S. driver's license, complete the online medical course every 24 calendar months, and get the CMEC physician exam every 48 months.

Source: 14 CFR 61.23(c)(3); 14 CFR 68.3, 68.5

- BasicMed aircraft limits: authorized to carry not more than 7 occupants, maximum takeoff weight 12,500 lb or less, and no more than 6 passengers on board.

Source: 14 CFR 61.113(i)(1)

- BasicMed flight limits: at or below 18,000 ft MSL, indicated airspeed not over 250 knots, and inside the United States unless the other country authorizes it.

Source: 14 CFR 61.113(i)(2)

- To exercise pilot privileges you must have your pilot certificate in physical possession or readily accessible in the aircraft.

Source: 14 CFR 61.3(a)(1)

- You must also carry a photo ID (driver's license, government or military ID, passport, or other form the Administrator accepts) and, when one is required, your medical certificate — same carriage standard.

Source: 14 CFR 61.3(a)(2), (c)

- Certificate, medical, and photo ID must be presented on request to the FAA, the NTSB, any federal, state, or local law enforcement officer, or the TSA.

Source: 14 CFR 61.3(l)

- A student pilot must carry the logbook and student pilot certificate in the aircraft on all solo cross-country flights, as evidence of the required clearances and endorsements.

Source: 14 CFR 61.51(i)(2)

- A flight review is required within the preceding 24 calendar months to act as PIC, and its minimum is 1 hour of flight training plus 1 hour of ground training.

Source: 14 CFR 61.56(a), (c)

- To carry other people, a pilot needs three takeoffs and landings within the preceding 90 days as sole manipulator, in the same category, class, and type (if required).

Source: 14 CFR 61.57(a)

- In a tailwheel airplane, the three 90-day landings must be to a full stop.

Source: 14 CFR 61.57(a)(1)

- Night currency requires three takeoffs and three landings to a full stop, made 1 hour after sunset to 1 hour before sunrise, within the preceding 90 days.

Source: 14 CFR 61.57(b)

- A permanent address change must be reported to the FAA Airman Certification Branch in writing within 30 days, or the certificate cannot be exercised.

Source: 14 CFR 61.60

- A private pilot may not act as PIC for compensation or hire, and may not pay less than a pro rata share of fuel, oil, airport expenditures, or rental fees when sharing costs with passengers.

Source: 14 CFR 61.113(a), (c)

- Currency is the legal minimum; proficiency is actual skill — they are different measurements, and the rules only check the first.

Source: AC 61-98E; PHAK ch. 2

- Meeting 61.57 currency does not by itself make a pilot safe for a given flight — the personal minimums check carries that decision.

Source: AC 61-98E; PHAK ch. 2

- Before flying an unfamiliar make and model, get a checkout that covers its POH numbers, systems, and handling differences — regulations require no endorsement for most transitions, so the discipline is on the pilot.

Source: AC 90-109A; FAA-H-8083-3

GOING DEEPER

- Medical duration is counted in calendar months, so the certificate dies at month-end: an exam on September 23 expires September 30 of the target year, not September 23.

Source: 14 CFR 61.23(d)

- A first- or second-class medical does not go blank when its higher privileges lapse — it keeps working as a third-class for the third-class duration.

Source: 14 CFR 61.23(d)

- The 61.53 self-grounding duty also applies to operations that do not require a medical certificate at all — under BasicMed it IS the medical standard between physician exams.

Source: 14 CFR 61.53(b)

- Under BasicMed the most recently issued medical may be expired — but it cannot have been suspended or revoked, and the most recent application cannot have been completed and denied.

Source: 14 CFR 61.23(c)(3)

- BasicMed paperwork (the completed CMEC and the course certificate) lives in the pilot's logbook — it is not carried in the airplane.

Source: 14 CFR 61.113(i)(3)

- A private pilot practical test may be taken while operating under BasicMed conditions and limitations.

Source: 14 CFR 61.23(a)(3)(iii)

- A student pilot may exercise student privileges without a Part 67 medical by holding a valid U.S. driver's license and meeting the BasicMed conditions.

Source: 14 CFR 61.89(d)

- The logbook is different: it must be presented for inspection on a reasonable request from the FAA, an NTSB representative, or law enforcement — but a certificated private pilot is not required to carry it in flight.

Source: 14 CFR 61.51(i)(1)

- The flight review window runs from the beginning of the 24th calendar month before the month of the flight

— end-of-month math, like the medical.

Source: 14 CFR 61.56(c)

– A passed practical test (any checkride) substitutes for the flight review; so does completing one or more phases of the FAA WINGS program.

Source: 14 CFR 61.56(d), (e); AC 61-91K

– Since December 2024 the currency rule says carrying "persons," not "passengers" — Part 61 now defines a passenger, and instructors and checkride examiners fall outside the definition.

Source: 14 CFR 61.57(a), (b); 14 CFR 61.1

– A non-current pilot can legally regain day or night currency with an authorized instructor on board (sole occupants), and the currency rules do not apply to the examiner or applicant during a practical test.

Source: 14 CFR 61.57(e)(5), (6)

– Logging PIC and acting as PIC are two separate ledgers: a pilot logs PIC as sole manipulator of an aircraft they are rated for, even when someone else is acting PIC.

Source: 14 CFR 61.51(e); Chief Counsel (Speranza, 2009)

– "Rated" for logging means category and class ratings, not endorsements: complex or high-performance endorsements are needed to act as PIC, not to log PIC.

Source: 14 CFR 61.51(e); 14 CFR 61.31

– Compensation does not require money or profit: logged flight time and expected goodwill count as compensation.

Source: AC 61-142 para 8.1

– The common purpose test for cost sharing: the pilot must have their own independent reason to make the flight — a pilot who would not have flown but for splitting the cost is sharing illegally.

Source: AC 61-142 para 9.2

– Cost-sharing reimbursement may come only from the people on board — never from a third party such as an employer.

Source: 14 CFR 61.113(c); Chief Counsel (Mangiamele, 2009)

– 61.113 carries several narrow exceptions besides cost sharing — business-incidental flights, charitable events under 91.146 (which require 500 hours), search and location, glider towing, aircraft sales demos at 200 hours.

Source: 14 CFR 61.113(b)–(h); 14 CFR 91.146(b)(9)

– Advertising flights to the public — including on social media — is "holding out," which requires a commercial operation; sharing is legal only within a defined group you already know.

Source: AC 61-142 para 10.2

– Loss of control in flight was the number one cause of fatal GA accidents from 2012 through 2021, which is why the FAA pushes proficiency training beyond the legal minimums.

Source: AC 61-98E ch. 2

– The flight review is a training event in which proficiency is evaluated, not a test — the instructor tailors it and signs it when proficiency is shown.

Source: AC 61-98E ch. 4; 14 CFR 61.56(a)

– No endorsement is required to move between round-dial and glass-cockpit versions of the same airplane, and the NTSB found glass-cockpit light aircraft had lower total but HIGHER fatal accident rates — transition training fills the gap the rules leave open.

Source: NTSB SS-10/01; AC 90-109A

– Three different clocks define "night": position lights on sunset-to-sunrise, logging night from end of evening civil twilight, and night currency landings 1 hour after sunset to 1 hour before sunrise.

Source: 14 CFR 91.209(a); 14 CFR 1.1; 14 CFR 61.57(b)

THE REGULATIONS BEHIND THIS MODULE

14 CFR 61.53 – Prohibition on operations during medical deficiency

A pilot must not act as pilot in command with a known medical condition that fails the standard for the medical certificate. Knowing, or having reason to know, is the test. Where no medical is required, the standard is the ability to operate the aircraft safely. The rule applies whatever certificate the pilot holds.

Where it goes deeper: This module. Module 1-1 introduced it as the I, M and S of IMSAFE.

14 CFR 61.23 – Medical certificates: requirement and duration

A private or student pilot needs at least a third-class medical, unless flying under BasicMed. For a pilot under 40 on the exam date it lasts to the end of the 60th month after the month of the exam. For a pilot 40 or older, the 24th month.

Where it goes deeper: This module.

14 CFR 61.57 – Recent flight experience: pilot in command

To carry persons, a pilot needs three takeoffs and landings in the preceding 90 days as sole manipulator, in the same category, class and type. In a tailwheel airplane they must be to a full stop. For night, they must be to a full stop between one hour after sunset and one hour before sunrise.

Where it goes deeper: This module. Module 2-6 (night operations) works the night rule in the airplane.

14 CFR 61.113 – Private pilot privileges and limitations

A private pilot must not act as pilot in command for compensation or hire. When sharing a flight with passengers, the pilot must pay at least a pro rata share of fuel, oil, airport expenditures, or rental fees.

Where it goes deeper: This module. Module 4-1 rehearses it as ACS Task A.