



HOW TO BECOME A PILOT

Aarron's Step-by-Step Guide to the Cockpit



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Air Dance Battle Champion - Japan (1st) 2025
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Aarron's Guide: How to Become a Pilot

Flying changed my life. From the moment I first took the controls, I knew this was what I was meant to do. Whether you dream of flying airliners, aerobatics, helicopters, corporate jets, or bush planes, the path starts with the same first steps. Here is my honest, no-nonsense guide to getting your wings.



STEP 1: DECIDE & COMMIT

Make the Decision

This is the most important step. Decide that you are going to become a pilot, and commit to making it happen. Not "someday" or "maybe." Now. Write it down. Tell people. The moment I made that commitment, everything changed. Aviation rewards the persistent. There will be setbacks, weather cancellations, failed checkrides, and financial challenges. Commit to pushing through all of it.

Take a Discovery Flight

Go to your local airport and book a discovery flight (also called an introductory flight). These typically cost \$100-\$250 and give you about 30-60 minutes in the airplane with an instructor. You will actually fly the airplane. This is the single best way to confirm that flying is for you. Most flight schools offer them—just search "discovery flight near me" or visit your nearest FBO or flight school.



PRO TIP: A discovery flight is the best \$150 you will ever spend. It turns a dream into a plan.



STEP 2: GET YOUR MEDICAL CERTIFICATE

Before you spend a single dollar on flight training, go get your FAA Medical Certificate. This is a physical exam performed by an Aviation Medical Examiner (AME). It confirms you are medically fit to fly. The reason I say do this first: if there is a medical issue, you want to know before you have invested thousands in training.

Find an AME near you: [FAA Designee Locator](#)

For private flying, you need at least a Third Class Medical. For a career in aviation, get a First Class Medical right away so you know your status for airline-level requirements. The exam covers vision, hearing, cardiovascular health, and general fitness.




STEP 3: STUDY FOR & PASS THE WRITTEN EXAM

The FAA Private Pilot Knowledge Test ("written exam") is a 60-question, multiple-choice test that you can take at any PSI testing center. You need a score of 70% or higher to pass. I recommend studying

and passing this exam early in your training for two reasons: (1) it gets the ground knowledge into your head before you fly, making your flight training more efficient, and (2) many scholarships require a passing score before you can even apply!

Recommended Study Resources

Sporty's Learn to Fly Course (excellent video course), King Schools (classic and thorough), AOPA Flight Training Scholarship Clinic (free!), Gleim Aviation (great test prep), ASA Prepware (practice tests), and the FAA Pilot's Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge (free PDF from faa.gov).

 **PRO TIP:** Passing your written exam early unlocks scholarship eligibility AND accelerates your flight training. Do not put this off!



STEP 4: CHOOSE A FLIGHT SCHOOL

Visit multiple flight schools before committing. Here is what to look for: well-maintained aircraft, experienced and enthusiastic instructors, a structured syllabus, schedule flexibility, transparent pricing, and a good safety culture. Ask about their completion rate—how many students actually finish their certificates?

Part 61 vs. Part 141

Part 61 schools offer flexible scheduling and are great for people with jobs or other commitments. Part 141 schools follow a structured, FAA-approved curriculum and may qualify for reduced hour minimums. University programs are usually Part 141. Neither is "better"—it depends on your situation. If you can fly full-time, a structured Part 141 program may get you done faster. If you need flexibility, Part 61 is your friend.

Aaron's Biggest Advice on Flight Schools

Your instructor matters more than the school. A great instructor at a modest school will teach you better than a mediocre instructor at a fancy academy. Ask to meet potential instructors. Do they care about teaching? Are they patient? Do they communicate well? This relationship will define your training experience.



STEP 5: START FLYING!

Now comes the fun part! Your flight training will generally follow this progression:

The Training Journey

Pre-Solo Phase (10-20 hours)

You will learn basic maneuvers, takeoffs, landings, stalls, slow flight, ground reference maneuvers, and emergency procedures. Your instructor will be with you the entire time building your confidence and skills.

First Solo (~15-25 hours)


One of the most unforgettable moments of your life. Your instructor gets out of the airplane, and you fly it alone for the first time. Three takeoffs and landings. You will never forget this day.

Cross-Country Phase

You will fly to airports you have never been to, navigating by charts, GPS, and radio. You will build confidence in flight planning, weather decision-making, and real-world aviation. You will complete solo cross-country flights of increasing distance.

Checkride Prep & Practical Test

Your instructor will prepare you for the practical test ("checkride"), which consists of an oral exam and a flight test with an FAA Designated Pilot Examiner (DPE). When you pass, you are officially a Private Pilot!

 **PRO TIP:** Fly consistently! 2-3 times per week minimum. Flying once a week means you spend the first 15 minutes of every lesson re-learning what you forgot. Consistency saves time and money.

STEP 6: ADVANCE YOUR RATINGS

If you want to fly professionally, your PPL is just the beginning. Here is the typical career pathway:

Instrument Rating (IR)

Teaches you to fly solely by reference to instruments in clouds and low visibility. This is arguably the most important rating you will earn for safety and career progression. Typically 40-50 additional hours.

Commercial Pilot License (CPL)

Allows you to be paid to fly. Requires 250 total hours (190 under Part 141). You will learn advanced maneuvers and refine your skills to a professional standard.

Multi-Engine Rating (ME)

Qualifies you to fly aircraft with two or more engines. Critical for airline and corporate careers. Usually 10-15 hours of training.

Certified Flight Instructor (CFI / CFII / MEI)

The most common way to build hours toward the airlines. You teach others to fly while logging flight time yourself. Most instructors reach 1,500 hours in 1-2 years of full-time instructing.

Airline Transport Pilot (ATP)

The highest pilot certificate. Required to serve as Captain at an airline. Requires 1,500 total hours (1,000 with a restricted ATP from qualifying programs). This is the golden ticket to the airline flight deck.

STEP 7: FUND YOUR TRAINING

Do not let money be the reason you quit. Here are the ways to fund your aviation training:

- Scholarships (see my Aviation Scholarships Guide and AviationStart.org for \$20M+ in opportunities)
- GI Bill and military benefits (covers flight training at approved schools)
- Student loans through aviation-specific lenders (AOPA Finance, Stratus Financial, We Fly Finance)
- Part-time work at the airport (line service, dispatch, front desk) — many FBOs offer flight training discounts to employees
- Pay-as-you-go: budget a set amount per month and fly consistently
- Airline cadet programs (United Aviate, Delta Propel, JetBlue Gateway) may offer tuition support

AARRON'S FINAL WORDS

Becoming a pilot is one of the hardest and most rewarding things you will ever do. There will be days when the weather does not cooperate, the money is tight, and the checkride feels impossible. Push through. Every pilot who has ever flown has felt exactly what you are feeling.

I started with nothing but a dream and a scholarship. Today I compete in airshows and air races around the world. If I can do it, you can too. The only thing standing between you and your wings is the decision to start.

Go fly.

Blue skies and tailwinds!

— Aarron Deliu

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