



AVIATION CAREER

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Everything You Need to Know to Get Started



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Aviation Career: Frequently Asked Questions

I get asked these questions all the time by aspiring aviators. Here are my honest answers to help you navigate your journey into aviation.



GETTING STARTED

Q: How old do I have to be to start flying?

You can start flight training at any age, but you must be at least 16 years old to solo an airplane and 17 to earn your Private Pilot Certificate in the United States. In many other countries, similar minimums apply. However, you can take discovery flights and start ground school much earlier. I always say: the sooner you start learning, the better.

Q: How much does it cost to become a pilot?

A Private Pilot License (PPL) typically costs between \$10,000 and \$18,000 in the U.S., depending on location, aircraft type, and how quickly you progress. A full Commercial Pilot License (CPL) with all required ratings can range from \$50,000 to \$100,000+. It sounds like a lot, but there are hundreds of scholarships available. That is exactly why I put together the Scholarship Guide! Do not let cost be the reason you give up on your dream.

Q: Do I need a college degree to become a pilot?

No. A college degree is not required by the FAA to earn any pilot certificate, including the Airline Transport Pilot (ATP) certificate. However, some airlines prefer or require a four-year degree for hiring. Many successful pilots have degrees in non-aviation fields. What matters most is your flight training, certificates, and experience.

Q: Do I need perfect vision to be a pilot?

No! You do not need perfect uncorrected vision. The FAA allows corrective lenses (glasses or contacts) for all classes of medical certificates. You need to be able to see 20/20 with or without correction. Color vision is tested, but even some color vision deficiencies can be accommodated through alternative testing methods called OCVT or MFT. Do not rule yourself out without talking to an Aviation Medical Examiner (AME) first.

Q: What is an FAA Medical Certificate and do I need one?

Yes. To fly as a pilot you need a medical certificate issued by an FAA-designated Aviation Medical Examiner (AME). There are three classes: First Class (required for airline pilots), Second Class (for commercial pilots), and Third Class (for private pilots). BasicMed is also an option for some private flying. I recommend getting your medical BEFORE you spend money on flight training so you know there are no surprises.



PRO TIP: Get your FAA Medical Certificate FIRST before investing in flight training. This confirms you are medically eligible to fly.



FLIGHT TRAINING & CERTIFICATES

Q: What is the difference between Part 61 and Part 141 training?

Part 61 and Part 141 refer to different sections of the Federal Aviation Regulations that govern flight training. Part 61 is more flexible with scheduling and is common at smaller, independent flight schools. Part 141 programs follow a structured, FAA-approved syllabus and are common at universities and larger academies. Both lead to the same certificates and ratings. Part 141 may require fewer minimum hours for some ratings, but Part 61 offers more flexibility. Choose what fits your lifestyle and budget.

Q: How long does it take to get a Private Pilot License?

On average, most students earn their PPL in 3 to 6 months if flying 2-3 times per week. The FAA minimum is 40 hours of flight time (35 under Part 141), but the national average is about 60-75 hours. Consistency is key. Flying regularly (at least 2-3 times per week) will save you time and money because you retain skills between lessons.

Q: What ratings and certificates do I need to fly for an airline?

The typical pathway is: Private Pilot License (PPL), Instrument Rating (IR), Commercial Pilot License (CPL), Multi-Engine Rating (ME), Certified Flight Instructor (CFI) and CFII to build hours, then the Airline Transport Pilot (ATP) certificate, which requires 1,500 hours total time (1,000 for restricted ATP with qualifying education). You will also need a First Class Medical Certificate.

Q: Can I become a pilot if I am older? Is there an age limit?

There is no upper age limit to earn a Private Pilot License. For airline pilots in the U.S., the mandatory retirement age is 65. Many people start flight training in their 30s, 40s, and even 50s and go on to have fantastic careers. If you have the passion, do not let age hold you back.

Q: What about becoming a helicopter pilot?

Helicopter (rotorcraft) training follows a similar certificate structure: Private, Commercial, Instrument, CFI. Helicopter training tends to be more expensive per hour, but helicopter pilots are in high demand for EMS, utility, tours, offshore oil, firefighting, and law enforcement. Organizations like the Whirly-Girls, Vertical Aviation International (HAI), and WAI offer helicopter-specific scholarships.



CAREER PATHS & BEYOND

Q: What aviation careers exist besides being a pilot?

Aviation is a massive industry with dozens of career paths: Aircraft Maintenance Technician (A&P Mechanic), Avionics Technician, Air Traffic Controller, Aircraft Dispatcher, Airport Manager, Aerospace Engineer, Aviation Safety Inspector, Flight Attendant, Aviation Journalist, Drone/UAS Operator, Aviation Insurance, and many more. You do not have to sit in the cockpit to have an amazing aviation career.

Q: How do I become an A&P Mechanic?

To earn your Airframe and Powerplant (A&P) certificate, you need to attend an FAA Part 147 approved maintenance school (typically 18-24 months) or gain equivalent practical experience (30 months of experience on airframes and powerplants). After completing training, you must pass three exams: written, oral, and practical. A&P mechanics are in enormous demand right now with excellent salaries.

Q: How do I become an Air Traffic Controller?

In the U.S., the FAA hires controllers through periodic announcements on USAJobs.gov. You typically need U.S. citizenship, be under age 31 at time of hire (with some exceptions), pass an aptitude test (AT-SA), medical exam, and security clearance. You can also attend a CTI (Collegiate Training Initiative) program to strengthen your application. The Air Traffic Control Association (ATCA) offers scholarships.

Q: What is the job market like for aviation professionals right now?

Incredible! The industry is facing historic shortages across the board. Boeing projects the world will need over 600,000 new pilots, 600,000+ new maintenance technicians, and hundreds of thousands of cabin crew over the next 20 years. In the U.S., nearly half of all registered ATPs will hit the mandatory retirement age within the next decade. If there was ever a time to enter aviation, it is NOW.

Q: Should I join the military to become a pilot?

Military aviation is an outstanding path that provides world-class training at no cost to you. However, it requires a significant service commitment (typically 8-10+ years after pilot training). It is not the only path. Many airline pilots today trained through civilian routes. Both paths are valid. Choose the one that aligns with your life goals.



SCHOLARSHIPS & FUNDING

Q: Where do I find aviation scholarships?

Start with AviationStart.org, the largest centralized database with over \$20 million in scholarships. Then check AOPA, EAA, WAI, OBAP, LPA, NGPA, NBAA, and ATCA. Also see my Aviation Scholarships & Sponsorship Guide for a comprehensive list with direct links to apply.

<https://aaron.aero/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Scholarship-List-by-Aaron-Deliu-1.pdf>

Q: Do scholarships really go unclaimed?

Yes! Many aviation scholarships receive surprisingly few applications. Organizations that budget for 10-20 awards sometimes only get a handful of applicants. Your odds are much better than you think. The biggest reason people do not win scholarships is because they do not apply.

Q: Can I stack multiple scholarships?

Absolutely. There is generally no rule preventing you from receiving multiple scholarships from different organizations. Some students fund their entire training this way. Apply to every scholarship you qualify for.

Q: Do I need to be a member of organizations to apply?

Many scholarship programs do require membership. Organizations like AOPA, EAA, WAI, OBAP, LPA, and NGPA all offer student or reduced-rate memberships. I recommend joining well in advance, as some require 3+ months of active membership before you can apply.

Blue skies and tailwinds!

— Aaron Deliu

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