

## Surviving New-Hire Training

It's been your dream of a lifetime—flying for an airline—and now it's finally within your grasp. You've passed the interview, the sim ride, and the physical exam, and you've finally received the call or the letter inviting you to join the next new-hire pilot class at your favorite airline.

With a new life ahead of you, you're eager to get started. You've got a whole new set of hurdles to clear, however, before you can relax and turn on the autopilot, so speak. This is no time to let your guard down; your work has just begun. But I should let you in on a little secret—there's no real end in sight. There's always one more simulator ride, one more line check, another physical exam—right up until the very end of the line at age 60. So, get used to it. Like death and taxes, you've got lots of “you-bet-your-job” events to look forward to during your airline career. Consider each one a challenge to be reckoned with, prepared for, properly executed, learned from, and, finally, put behind you until it's time to start the whole process over again for your next inevitable training session.

### **Preparation for the challenge ahead**

Preparation entails a lot of work on your part, both mental and physical. Study and headwork are required, but your physical well-being is also an important part of succeeding at your new profession.



On previous pages I've discussed the importance of cleaning up any personal loose ends so you can devote yourself to what has been likened to "drinking from a fire hose," that is, successfully completing new-hire ground school. From mortgage payments to medical exams, be sure you've completed all those time-consuming tasks that can rob you of precious study time. Believe me, you'll need every minute you've got (and be looking for more) before you can breathe the sigh of relief that comes after you've been signed off for line flying.

Ground school, with its volumes of material to be learned, is usually preceded by several days of company indoctrination, which covers the inevitable paperwork (a never-ending chore); company policies, procedures, and benefits; FAA regulations; and safety and security data. Finally, when you think the stack of manuals can grow no higher, you'll be given the one you've been waiting for—the Airplane Flight Manual (AFM) and its associated limitations; normal, abnormal, and emergency procedures; systems descriptions; and those all-important checklists.

### **Some tips for surviving ground school**

One difficulty in surviving training is that you often won't know what to study or in what order. Because the information will come with machine-gun rapidity, your job is to preview the material so you have some inkling of what's about to be discussed.

All airline flight manuals are set up in basically the same order, but you can get an overview by starting with the Limitations. You'll probably be required to memorize these numbers, but for now, get an idea of what the "limits" are so your reading of the data will make some sense. Next, read the descriptive chapter that explains the system in detail. Then, read through Normal Procedures and learn how this system is used in everyday operations. Follow up with a look at Abnormal Procedures and then check out the Emergency

Procedures. Once you have a good foundation in how the system is used, review any handouts or study guides and finish up with the MEL (Minimum Equipment List) to determine what's required if a component is inoperative.

The above sounds like a lot of preview work—and it is—but it's well worth the effort. You'll find the class presentation and discussion much more meaningful and easy to digest. When you know what's important to line flying (from your review the night before), you can concentrate on crucial information and ask questions in class based on your preparatory reading. You'll also find an amazing amount of important material hidden in places you never suspected.

Many limitations aren't found in the Limitations section but rather in the Normal Procedures or the MEL. Knowing where to look for information you need is half the battle won and will greatly ease your anxiety as you wade through the mountain of ground-school study material.

Successful completion of ground school is crucial to your advancement through the training mill. Many airlines require a minimum passing grade of 80% or better. Pilots scoring 79 or less are quietly shown the door, leaving their empty chairs as a grim reminder of what making the grade is all about. Although ground school may resemble a pressure cooker, it's nothing compared to what will follow with the CPT (cockpit procedures trainer) and simulator. Now, you not only have to draw quickly on the material you learned in ground school, but also apply it.

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### **Becoming familiar with the cockpit**

Your first exposure to the "cockpit" can range from a simulator that's not turned on, to a non-motion simulator, to a



mock-up of the cockpit, to colored photos of the real thing hung on the wall to resemble your future office. Here, you'll practice "flows," or the sequence in which you'll operate various switches for each phase of flight. Learning these flow patterns in advance is extremely important. You have to quickly and accurately find the correct switch or gauge, analyze its position or reading, perform any necessary manipulation, and move on to the next item in the sequence.

When you first enter a cockpit to perform a preflight check, you'll use a specific flow pattern, just as you will before every checklist or normal procedure. Everything from checking the battery status—an all-important item for large airplanes—to providing heating or cooling has a very specific step-by-step process whose flow pattern you must learn. When you study these flows, recite each action as you physically move your hand to the specific switch and move it to the required position. The process must become second nature and something you can accomplish quickly and accurately while watching for any abnormalities.

During my new-hire training to be a Boeing 727 flight engineer or second officer, we were required to obtain 25 hours of observation time in the cockpit prior to beginning our simulator sessions. The instructors admitted that they had no time to teach normal operating procedures and that we were expected to learn them during these ACM (additional crew member) rides. So, I did lots of observing, asked questions, and became comfortable with my new environment before I had to do battle with it in the simulator.

### **The simulator and checkride hurdles**

As you move on to simulator training, the same rules that helped you through ground school and CPT will apply to your new virtual airplane. You'll be faced with huge volumes of material to study and review before each session and will be required to know the flows associated with each procedure. As pressure mounts, keep in mind the most

important rule of all: don't dwell on your mistakes! Learn from each of your errors and move on—quickly absorbing what you've done wrong and clearing your mental slate for what's to come.

Take notes during each debriefing, so you can refer to the information during your post-sim study session. Everyone makes mistakes; use them like mental locks or rights of passage that can move you on to the next level of learning. Don't let them become roadblocks that detour your concentration and plunge your performance into a downward spiral. Two pilots in my new-hire pilot class were shown the door when they failed to successfully complete their sim training. I suspect that they helped do each other in by feeding off of one another's failures.

Just when you're sure you can absorb no more, your checkride or proficiency check will loom as that last apparent hurdle. Remember, throughout your training you've been demonstrating that the company did, indeed, make a good choice when it hired you. You told them during your interview that you could successfully deal with the challenges of airline training—and now you get to prove it.

This whole procedure is quite different from the buy-a-type rating programs in which the school's job is to get you through the course. You must show you can do the job you've been hired to do. And so you will, by maintaining a positive attitude and using the knowledge you've gained through concentrated, systematic study, training, and practice.