

## **What is the difference between currency and proficiency?**

To exercise the privileges of a pilot certificate pilots must meet the FAA standards for both currency and proficiency. Currency means recent flight experience and proficiency is the level of expertise.

FAA private pilot currency requirements are described in 14 CFR §61.57 Recent flight experience: Pilot in command. Three takeoffs and three landings in an aircraft of the same category and class within the last 90 days will satisfy this obligation. This rule only applies to taking passengers and does not specify how well the takeoffs and landings need to be performed. What the FAA describes is a minimum standard and the definition of minimum is “the least possible.”

Some pilots believe compliance with the bare minimum of 14 CFR §61.57 is adequate, but their passengers may not be so happy to hear the last time they flew was 89 days ago!

To supplement 14 CFR §61.57, the FAA issued Advisory Circular AC61-98D, which stresses the minimum recent flight experience requirements should be augmented to address factors such as overall experience, different operating environments, complexity of the equipment used and variations in makes and models of aircraft. Furthermore, it recommends that pilots develop a personal currency program with an emphasis on proficiency beyond the minimum currency requirements.

So how do pilots become and remain proficient? From the beginning of their private pilot training they are working towards a set of standards described in the Airman Certification Standards (ACS). The practical test (also known as a “check ride”) is an evaluation of a pilot’s ability to meet those standards. But it doesn’t end there. It is a pilot’s constant responsibility to make sure they continue to perform at least at the same level of excellence as the day they passed their check ride—but I’m betting their passengers would appreciate a commitment to a higher standard!

At least once every 24 calendar months pilots are required to have their knowledge and skills evaluated by an authorized instructor to ensure they are maintaining their proficiency and this is called a flight review. Like the currency regulation, the flight review rule also has a minimum standard. 14 CFR §61.56 Flight Review states that a minimum of one hour of ground instruction and one hour of flight training is all that is legally required to meet this requirement. But this rule has a caveat; it leaves it up to the CFI to determine what knowledge, maneuvers and procedures are necessary to be included.

In essence, a flight review is a training event in which proficiency is evaluated. All this means is that if the pilot does not demonstrate the required proficiency then more training is required until they do.

As a pilot gains experience their skills should (hopefully) improve beyond the level required to pass a private pilot exam. But whether they improve or deteriorate largely depends on how frequently they fly, what they practice, how much they read or study and how much additional training they participate in. Some pilots with sufficient experience, who fly regularly and are well prepared may be able to complete a flight review in the minimum time, but for most pilots that is not realistic.

Pilots should work with their flight instructors to develop a flight review plan that achieves (or preferably exceeds) the minimum regulatory proficiency levels. It should be tailored to fit their specific needs, skill level, the type of flying they typically do and the goals and standards they

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want to aspire to. Most importantly, it should always include training and practice for unexpected situations and emergencies such as engine or equipment failures, VFR into IMC weather, etc. Ultimately though, it is the CFI's responsibility to determine the total training time that will be necessary to complete both the ground and the flight portions of the flight review.

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