

How do flight instructors stay current?

Believe it or not, it can be rather challenging for flight instructors to maintain all aspects of their pilot currency even when they are teaching every day. Beyond the beginning lessons for a private pilot certificate and the occasional introductory/discovery flight we don't spend much time actually hands-on flying an airplane.

Takeoffs and landings

It is not uncommon for CFI's to go several months without an opportunity to personally land an airplane. When a student is the sole manipulator of the controls, the CFI may not log the takeoffs and landings, which makes it difficult to achieve the 3 takeoffs and landings in the preceding 90 days required for carrying passengers, per 14 CFR §61.57.

However, because the FAA does not view students as "passengers" CFI's may continue to fly with their students without meeting this particular requirement for day or night. Occasionally a situation may crop up that necessitates a CFI to take the obligatory three trips around the pattern, such as when a student brings a friend who wants to observe the lesson from the back seat.

Instrument currency

To teach students in actual IMC, flight instructors must have performed six instrument approaches, holding procedures and tasks and intercepting and tracking courses using electronic navigational systems within the 6 calendar months preceding the month of the flight. These are the same requirements as for every other instrument pilot.

However, most instrument instruction is performed in VMC weather with the student wearing a view limiting device. The instrument instructor may continue to teach instrument flight in VMC without meeting the instrument currency requirement. The one caveat to this is that they still must meet the requirements to act as a safety pilot (see 14 CFR §91.109).

It might surprise you to learn there is no FAA requirement for instrument pilots or instrument instructors to have any flight experience or maintain currency/proficiency in actual IMC weather, either during or after their training. In fact, many CFII's have zero experience these conditions.

Flight reviews

For the most part CFI's are required to meet the requirements of 14 CFR §61.56 every 24 calendar months in order to fly, especially for primary (private pilot) instruction. However, there are a few circumstances in which CFIs can continue to provide instruction when their flight review has expired. If the student pilot meets all the requirements to act as pilot-in-command, then the CFI can still instruct without a current flight review (or medical for that matter). For example, the regulations allow a

CFI with an expired flight review to conduct a flight review for a certificated pilot *before* that pilot's current flight review expires, so long as the pilot is rated for the airplane and has a current medical (i.e. they are legal to act as pilot-in-command).

Flight instructor certificate recent experience

At the time of writing this article flight instructor certificates have a limited duration of 24 calendar months, after which they expire unless they are renewed by conducting certain activities. 14 CFR §61.197 describes the various options instructors have to maintain their instructional proficiency.

After December 1st, 2024, FAA flight instructor certificates will not include an expiry date, but the existing renewal activities (with a few changes) will continue to be required as "recency of experience."

Under the new rule, if the recency of experience requirements are not completed before the 24-calendar month end date, the instructor will lose their instructional privileges. They will then have 3-calendar months to complete a flight instructor refresher course (FIRC) to reinstate their instructor privileges. Beyond 3 months, a practical test will be required to have their instructional privileges reinstated.

Strategies for maintaining currency

Flight instructors should make an effort to practice and maintain currency and proficiency in the maneuvers they are teaching. One way to do this is to insist on demonstrating takeoffs and landings every once in a while. This is not always easy because students are generally reluctant to relinquish the controls. CFIs should take advantage of the opportunity whenever they are teaching a new technique such as short field landing or a slip to land.

As for the flight review, if a flight instructor meets the requirements for their recent instructional experience they need only fly with another CFI for a minimum of one hour (or until they are judged to be proficient) to receive a flight review endorsement.

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