

# Ask the CFI

## ***Can you practice right-hand traffic patterns at an airport that has a left-hand pattern?***

*Assuming that I watch for traffic, announce my intention and positions, and do it on a slow airport day, is it permitted? Is it even legal? I don't remember seeing or hearing of any rule that would prohibit it.*

As most pilots are aware, left-hand traffic patterns are more common and it is rare to find an airport with right traffic, which is why we don't get to practice those very often.

Airport owners and operators develop traffic patterns in coordination with the FAA and in some cases obstacles, terrain and noise sensitive areas will dictate right traffic. Right-hand traffic patterns are indicated on the VFR sectional with an "RP" and the applicable runways. If you use ForeFlight you will see "Right Traffic" in red font on the Runways tab in the Airport information section. The Chart Supplement also indicates when the traffic pattern is to the right and you will see "Rgt tfc" next to any applicable runways.

Left traffic as the standard pattern is actually specified in 14 CFR 91.126 (b)(1), which states *"each pilot of an airplane must make all turns of that airplane to the left unless the airport displays approved light signals or visual markings indicating that turns should be made to the right, in which case the pilot must make all turns to the right..."* So this tells us legally we must stick with a left traffic pattern even on a slow airport day.

If you pay close attention to the wording of the left traffic regulation you will notice that it specifically refers to "aircraft." Rotorcraft (helicopters) on the other hand are required to "avoid the flow of fixed-wing traffic" when approaching to land at a point other than the runway and may in some circumstances fly a pattern on the opposite side of the runway to the fixed-wing traffic.

So how do you get to practice right turns when you are based at an airport such as Galt? Well we have a couple of options. First Burlington Municipal (KBUU) is located a mere 18 nautical miles to the north and has right traffic on runway 29 (paved) and runway 19 (grass) so you can always go there to practice. Another option would be to fly to any local class D airport and ask the tower controller to practice right traffic patterns.

If you are wondering why it is necessary for all traffic to flow in the same direction it is required so that we have an orderly and predictable flow of traffic to the runway at uncontrolled airports. Bear in mind that both radio-equipped and non-radio aircraft operate in the same airspace in the vicinity of non-towered airports and the standard pattern helps pilots know where to look for other traffic and avoid potential conflicts.

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