

YOKOTA FLIGHT TRAINING

For many flying is a lifetime adventure. It's a multidimensional activity that you can enjoy on as many levels as suits your fancy from sightseeing to aircraft appreciation to aerobatics to travel to technical flying to history to earning a living and is not only fun but can lead to interesting career and travel opportunities. You meet some great people and learn a bit about yourself along the way.

And best of all, you can do it!

Here is the basic scoop on becoming a pilot, in plain English.

Medical

To become a pilot, you don't have to be in great shape or have superior hand-eye coordination. For private pilot privileges, you will have to, at some point, pass an FAA medical exam, but for most this is little problem if you don't have a known heart condition and your vision is reasonably good or can be corrected (with glasses or contacts) to be good (not necessarily perfect). If you have concerns, see a flight doctor first.

Which Certificate?

The goal for most people is a Private Pilot Certificate, which comes in several flavors, depending on which type of aircraft you train in. For most people, this means airplanes, though others become private pilots in helicopters, gliders, balloons, and so forth.

With a private pilot certificate, you can fly in good weather and see some neat stuff. As your experience grows, when you go on holiday, for example, you can rent airplanes and take friends or family to see the sights in a whole new way. If you so choose, you can then train on bigger and faster aircraft. Who knows--you might even consider buying a plane.

Experience a feeling of freedom, and accomplishment. Learning to fly will transform your life. It immerses you in new sensations and allows you to conquer exciting challenges. It changes how you perceive yourself and what you know you can accomplish. Become a pilot and transform yourself.

Please note, if you're looking for a "Recreational Pilot" or "Sport Pilot" certificate, these two certificate or licenses are not authorized in Japan.

Aircraft?

The training airplane is where you practice in the air what you've learned on the ground. High wing or low, it doesn't make much difference. The aircraft (airplanes) that you fly as a student pilot is typically 2 and 4 seat Cessna 152 /172 or Piper PA-28 Cherokee.



When properly maintained (as the vast majority of active training aircraft are), flying in them is safe and fun. As you gain experience, you gradually move into faster and more exotic aircraft.

Here at Yokota we have four 4-seat 180HP Cessna 172 Skyhawk "Technically Advanced Aircraft" (TAA) which means aircraft that are equipped with new-generation avionics that combine computers and modern navigational aids for both system redundancy and to improve pilot situational awareness. Pilots often refer to the panel as a "glass cockpit."

Two Categories of Flight Training Organizations

Flight schools come in two flavors, Part 61 and Part 141, which refer to the parts of the Federal Aviation Regulations (FARs) under which they operate. The most common and least important distinction between them is the minimum flight time required for the private pilot certificate (sometimes called a pilot license)—40 hours under Part 61, and 35 hours under Part 141. What differentiates the two is structure and accountability. Part 141 schools are periodically audited by the FAA and must have detailed, FAA-approved course outlines and meet student pilot performance rates. Part 61 schools don't have the same paperwork and accountability requirements.

Learning under Part 61 rules can often give students the flexibility to rearrange flying lesson content and sequence to meet their needs, which can be of benefit to part-time students. Many Part 141 schools also train students under Part 61 rules. Under "Part 61", which the Yokota Flight Training Center trains under, you will not see a difference in training due to having to follow the same guidelines as a Part 141 school. Which type of flight school is best for you depends on your needs, available time, and other factors, such as veteran's benefit eligibility (only Part 141 schools can qualify for VA-reimbursed training) and location. When it comes to the FAA checkride, which is the same for all, it doesn't matter where you learned to fly, only how well—including your understanding of aviation academic material.

Although flight schools fall into two basic categories, Part 61 or Part 141, there is a third category that bears serious consideration by prospective pilots, particularly those planning a professional piloting career: nationally accredited pilot training institutions. Accredited flight schools must meet rigid standards of accountability for virtually every area of operation and must apply to an accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

Aviation college degree programs also play a large part in today's pilot training marketplace. If you are planning a professional flying career, an aviation degree may make you more competitive. A plus in seeking a degree is that in many cases you are eligible for financial aid and scholarships that will assist you, not only in your academic endeavors, but in flight training as well.

Find a Good Instructor

Your local airport most likely has one or more training outlets. These can be a flight school (part 141 or not), FBO ("fixed based operator"), or maybe just some independent instructors. The best thing you can do before you start your training is to canvass maybe a handful of potential schools to find a good fit. Ideally, you'd be flying with a single instructor for the bulk of your training, so you'd like to find one that you feel comfortable with. Experience counts, yes, but this doesn't mean that you should discount an enthusiastic fresh instructor.

Minimum Flight Hours

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requires a minimum of forty flight hours to obtain a private pilot's license. However, in reality the national average flight time as a student pilot is approximately 71 hours.

The fact of the matter is that today's pilot needs to know and be able to do many things that it's nearly impossible to finish in the minimum, though a conscientious student that works hard independently and trains relatively frequently (2-3 times a week) can certainly keep his/her costs down. Our experience shows that the average student needs about six months and 55 to 65 flight hours to complete training and earn their private pilot certificate.

Costs

There are a lot of variables that affect the cost of learning to fly, including the frequency of flight lessons, weather conditions, the kind of aircraft in which you are training and its availability for scheduling, and individual aptitude. A rough estimate would range between \$7,000 and \$11,000, depending on the certificate being sought.

We have students that fly a couple times a month and some that fly a couple times a week. In a perfect world, you should have at least one lesson per day, five days a week to maintain proficiency. We understand this isn't realistic or affordable for most people. We do recommend you try for at least two lessons per week.

There are many factors that you can control that will greatly influence your training: how often you fly, how much you study and the time you can devote to preparing for each lesson, and personal skill level. Is it a lot of money? Yes. Is it worth it? I think you know our answer!

Introductory Flight

Most or all flight training organizations will gladly offer you a demo flight for an introductory flight price. A demo flight can be a half an hour of just going up, getting a sense for what being in a small airplane is like. On your very first flight, the instructor is likely to let you have the controls (with him/her keeping a close watch, of course).

How hard is it?

Every student that I have ever had the privilege to introduce to the world of flying at some point told me that flying was easier than they had anticipated. The closest thing that I can say is: *"Nothing about flying is hard, except mastering the thousands of necessary easy things."* Like anything worth doing, learning to fly takes some diligence and effort, but it can be done by virtually anybody from age 16 to 106.

The Timeline

The following timeline is written with airplanes in mind, and varies slightly for helicopters and other aircraft types. If you schedule 3 lessons a week, you're likely to fly 2 a week (because of weather and other issues), and will earn a Private Pilot certificate in 3-6 months. Each flying lesson will likely include between 1 and 1.5 hours of flying, though the "cross country" flights (flights that go 50 or more miles from your local airport) that you will do as part of your training will be a bit longer. Each flight lesson will generally contain a pre-flight and a post-flight briefing and discussion with your instructor, so figure on 3-3.5 hours as a conservative "car to car" benchmark. The goal is to pass a combination flight and oral test, known as a "checkride" with an FAA Designated Examiner.

To be eligible to take a checkride, you must meet certain aeronautical experience requirements and have completed your written (knowledge) test. Much of your flying time will be spent on preparing for things that you will be tested on during your checkride. This includes standard maneuvers and procedures that you will have to fly. All of the maneuvers and requirements are standardized in a series of publications called the Practical Test Standards. You can find links to the practical test standards on our website.

Solo Flight!

Part of the aeronautical experience requirements includes some solo flight. That's right--no instructor. Just you, an airplane, and the wild blue yonder. Of course, this is an exhilarating and anxious event, but people have safe first solos every day. Someday soon, maybe that could include you.

Talking about "average" times to solo is misleading and counterproductive. Unfortunately, occasionally students seem to think that getting to solo is some sort of race. In practice, if you ever hear somebody bragging about how few hours they soloed in, then you can almost be certain that they are only revealing their own lack of experience. Amongst experienced pilots, it's understood that this number means absolutely nothing. The famous WW2 ace Chuck Yeager who broke the sound barrier in the Bell X-1 aircraft took an inordinately long amount of time to solo.

After my students are ready to solo, I generally fly another 5 hours or so with them AND have them fly with another instructor just to be super-super sure that everything is on the up-and-up. That all said, many people solo in between their 20th and 35th hours, so it can be generally said that it occurs about halfway through the training.

For airplanes, you will learn at least the following maneuvers and procedures during your training: normal takeoffs and landings, slow flight, stalls, turns, ground reference maneuvers, cross country planning and navigation, use of radios, use of navigational equipment, emergency procedures, aviation weather, aviation psychology and physiology, aircraft systems, aerodynamics, regulations, and more. You may be apprehensive about some of this training regimen until you actually do it and see that it's really not that bad, and is intended to keep you safe! Everything that you will be taught has the goal of making you a safe and competent pilot. Safety is the watchword of aviation and is priority one.

Conclusions

I hope I have provided you with a reasonable introduction to flying. To get more specifics, go down and visit the nice folks at Yokota Flight Training Center - we will be more than happy to answer your questions and get you set up as necessary.

Blue Skies,

Yokota Flight Training Center

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