



Cleared for Takeoff



The FAA Safety Policy Voice of Non-commercial General Aviation

Why Was My Student's Practical Test Canceled?

A Look at Some Common Checkride Day Errors and How to Prevent Them



FAA Safety Briefing Magazine

Following ▾

9 min read · Jun 21, 2024



By Kenny Bain & Regina Brock, FAA General Aviation and Commercial Division's Delegation Group



In the past 12 months, more than 50,000 practical tests were ended before they even started due in part to applicant qualification and aircraft airworthiness issues. Flight instructors are unwittingly hastening their students off to practical tests only to be turned away by the designated pilot examiner (DPE). Issues with endorsements, lack of aeronautical

experience or aeronautical knowledge, application errors, and aircraft airworthiness issues are all contributing factors. These cancellations bring about a glaring backlog of applicants waiting, sometimes months, to obtain a much-anticipated practical test.

Part of the flight instructor's responsibilities are to evaluate the student's piloting ability, make practical test recommendations, and ensure the student is prepared and ready before scheduling the practical test. Last-minute cancellations, because an applicant isn't ready, further encumber an already backlogged process.

Some of the common errors made are simple, correctable mistakes. Applicants are disqualified from testing due to deficiencies with Title 14, Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR), part 61 aeronautical experience and knowledge requirements, missing endorsements, Integrated Airman Certification and Rating Application (IACRA) issues, and aircraft airworthiness issues. We spoke with FAA aviation safety inspectors (ASIs) and DPEs about the ineligibility issues and discovered many common errors. Let's discuss some specific examples.

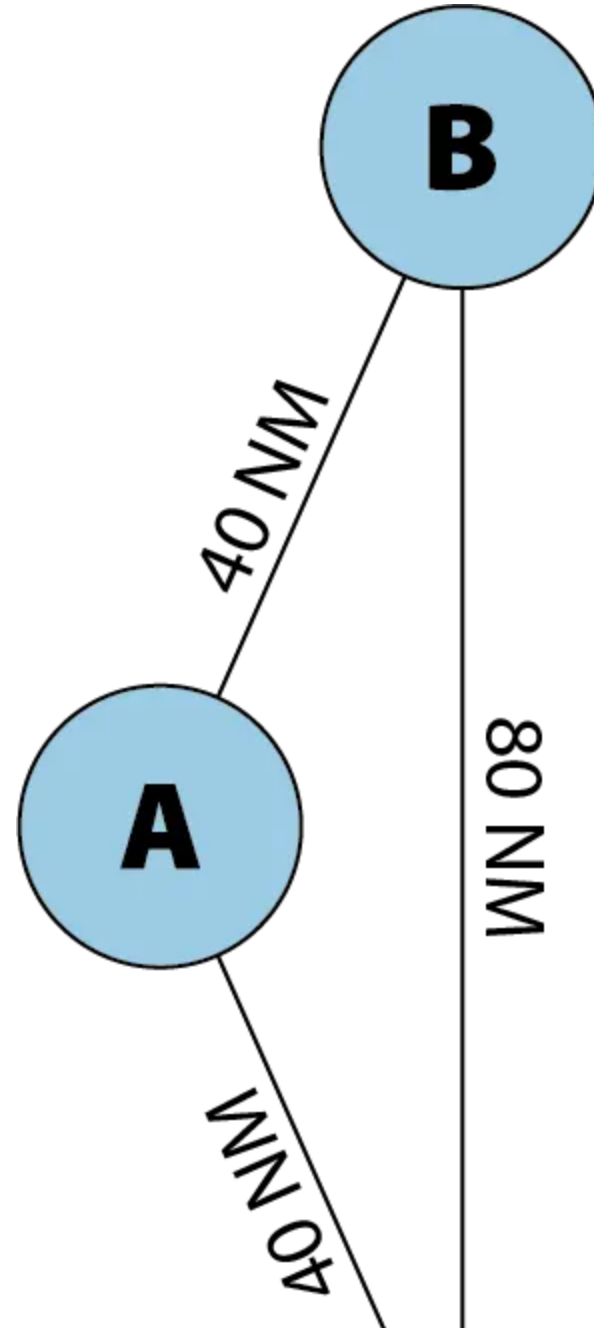


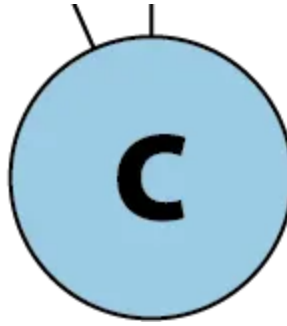
Common Flight Experience Errors

One issue that often comes up is not meeting the flight time requirement for the solo cross-country flight. 14 CFR section 61.109(a)(5)(ii) describes the solo cross-country requirements for a private pilot applicant airplane single

engine rating. The requirement is for “one solo cross-country flight of 150 nautical miles (nm) total distance, with full-stop landings at three points, and one segment of the flight consisting of a straight-line distance of more than 50 nautical miles between the takeoff and landing locations.” To fully understand this regulation, reference the definition for cross-country time found in section 61.1(ii), which defines cross-country time for the purpose of meeting the aeronautical experience requirements for a private pilot certificate, commercial pilot certificate, and instrument rating. To meet this requirement, in part, the cross-country must “include a point of landing that is at least a straight-line distance of more than 50 nautical miles from the original point of departure.” The definition does not require that any one leg of the flight be 50 nm, but the flight includes a point of landing that is at least a straight-line distance of more than 50 nm from the original point of departure. (See the Sisk 2008 and Van Zanen 2009 legal interpretations at bit.ly/FAA-legal).

Let's see if you can determine if your student meets the solo cross-country requirement for a private pilot certificate per section 61.109(a)(5)(ii). Your student departs Airport A and flies 40 nm north to Airport B, then flies 80 nm south to Airport C, then another 40 nm north back to Airport A with full-stop landings at all airports. Did this student meet the solo cross-country requirement?





The answer is no. Even though the student met the total distance of 150 nm requirement, there was no landing that was at least a straight-line distance of more than 50 nautical miles from the original point of departure, as defined by section 61.1.

Section 61.129(a)(4)(i) is the commercial aeronautical experience requirement for airplane single engine. The requirement is for “one cross-country flight of not less than 300 nm total distance, with landings at a minimum of three points, one of which is a straight-line distance of at least 250 nm from the original departure point.” The same rule applies here as well. The student must have a straight-line distance from the original departure point, which is at least 250 nm from the *original point of departure* and includes a landing.

DPEs have reported issues with the requirements of section 61.129(a)(4). This section requires “10 hours of solo flight time in a single engine airplane or 10

hours of flight time performing the duties of pilot in command in a single engine airplane with an authorized instructor on board.” The pilot *must* choose *one* of these options as was clarified in an FAA legal interpretation (Gannis 2016). Flight instructors must not combine the two alternatives.

Common Aeronautical Knowledge Errors

The logging of the aeronautical knowledge areas of sections 61.105 (private pilots), 61.125 (commercial pilots), and 61.65 (instrument ratings) are not being met. If provided, the flight instructor *must log the ground training* given on the appropriate knowledge areas for the certificate or rating sought. This is not an endorsement. The regulation in the sections listed above states in part: “A person *must receive and log ground training* from an authorized instructor or complete a home-study course on the aeronautical knowledge areas for the aircraft category and class rating sought.” If ground training is provided, this must be logged in the student’s logbook or training record, not only to satisfy the regulatory sections discussed, but section 61.189(a) as well. Finally, if using the option of a “home-study course,” make sure the certificate specifically states that ground training on the appropriate knowledge areas was completed. Another important item of note is that the use of a “home-study course” does not satisfy the ground training requirements of sections 61.107 or 61.127, which apply to flight proficiency. An applicant must receive and *log ground and flight training* from an

authorized instructor on the areas of operation of the section that apply to the aircraft category and class rating sought.



(Civil Air Patrol photo)

Common Endorsements Errors

Missing endorsements is another big issue. Specifically, section 61.39(a)(6)

states: "... an applicant must have an endorsement, if required by this part, in the applicant's logbook or training record that has been signed by an authorized instructor who certifies that the applicant has received and logged training time within 2 calendar months preceding the month of application in preparation for the practical test; is prepared for the required practical test; and has demonstrated satisfactory knowledge on the subject areas in which the applicant was deficient on the airman knowledge test." This is *not* the same endorsement required by the general eligibility requirements found in section 61.103 (private certification) and section 61.123 (commercial certification). Examples of all endorsements can be found in Advisory Circular (AC) 61-65H, *Certification: Pilots and Flight and Ground Instructors*.

Make sure your student is qualified to take the practical test:

Practical tests are stressful, and no instructor intends to send their student to a practical test only to be sent home before the test begins. By following some simple guidelines, you, the flight instructor, can ensure your student is prepared and more relaxed to sit for the practical test.

1. Make a checklist of items required for the practical.
2. Plan time with your student prior to the practical test to verify their eligibility.

3. Review the eligibility requirements in 14 CFR part 61 for the certificate or rating sought. Verify the aeronautical experience is documented in the student's logbook.
4. Check for a current flight review if applicable.
5. Review the IACRA application and verify the times match what is in the student's logbook. Review all the blocks in the application and check for errors. Make sure the name matches the student's identification and the knowledge test.
6. Provide the required endorsements. Refer to 14 CFR part 61 eligibility requirements and AC 61-65H.
7. Coordinate with the DPE. Have them review the application, endorsements, and aircraft maintenance logs prior to the day of the practical test, if possible.
8. Don't be afraid to ask questions. DPEs and other flight instructors are great resources.
9. Have an experienced instructor review your student's eligibility.
10. Be onsite for the beginning of the practical test. If something is missing, such as an endorsement, then you could potentially fix the issue, and the practical test could continue.

11. If given consent by your student, join your student and the DPE for the debrief. This can be a valuable learning experience for the instructor and will help you provide better instruction to future students.

Another way to increase efficiency and help reduce wait times is to only schedule the practical test when your student has completed training and is fully prepared. Also, schedule with only one DPE, and if you must cancel, make sure to cancel as far out as possible so the DPE can schedule another applicant.



(Civil Air Patrol photo)

Airworthiness and Maintenance

Next, let's talk about aircraft airworthiness and maintenance records. We spoke with ASIs and DPEs about common airworthiness issues that have

caused a practical test to be canceled. Here are the issues:

1. All items of inoperative instruments and equipment don't meet the requirements of 14 CFR section 91.213(d), (placarded, deactivated, or removed and a maintenance record made if appropriate).
2. Aircraft registration is not current and valid.
3. Airworthiness certificate is not onboard or legible with the correct registration number.
4. Missing fasteners.
5. Compass correction card is not legible.
6. Missing or broken static wicks.
7. Frayed or damaged seat belts.
8. Missing seat stops.
9. Broken or cracked fairings.
10. Missing or illegible placards.
11. Oil, fuel, or hydraulic fluid leaks.
12. GPS database for instrument practical tests is out-of-date.



Please also review aircraft maintenance records, and check for the following:

1. Annual inspection completed within the last 12 calendar months.

2. Airworthiness Directive compliance record indicates no one-time or recurring ADs are due.
3. 100-hour inspection completed if the aircraft is used for hire.
4. Pitot static and transponder check within the last 24 calendar months.
5. VOR check within the last 30 days.
6. Any open discrepancy in the aircraft dispatch log.
7. Weight and balance.

If you have a question about a maintenance issue, please bring it to the attention of the maintenance department or mechanic. If you spotted an issue, the DPE is likely to as well. You don't want a practical test to be canceled because of a missing cowl screw. Even better, have maintenance personnel go through the aircraft records with you and do a comprehensive aircraft pre-flight with them present before the practical test. You may be able to address any problem before it becomes an issue for the DPE.

The FAA is listening to the aviation community, and we are aware of the lengthy wait times to get to the practical test. Flight instructors report delays of one to two months when they contact DPEs to schedule. The FAA has recently stepped up efforts to add additional DPEs to ensure better

utilization of the designee representatives.



(Photo by Paul Cianciolo)

In the meantime, flight instructors can help by following the tips in this article to make sure your student does not get turned away on the day of the practical test because of eligibility issues or an unairworthy aircraft.