

Concrete Examples for Training Expectation-Drift Recognition

Scenario (CFI or DPE-controlled, safe ambiguity)

You're on downwind at a non-towered airport. The student has heard three aircraft announce "landing Runway 27." Pattern is normal, workload is moderate.

You (CFI/DPE) say on the intercom:

"Expect base-to-final for Runway 9."

The student nods, continues flying, and begins preparing for Runway 27 anyway — because that's the pattern they expected.

CFI/DPE delays intervention for a few seconds

Everything is still safe. Let the student *feel* the mismatch.

Then ask:

- "What were you expecting?"
- "What did you actually hear?"
- "What made you accept your interpretation?"
- "When did the picture stop matching?"

This forces the student to **recognize the drift**, not just correct the outcome.

Controlled ambiguity (the training move)

After the discussion, repeat the exercise:

Give a *slightly* unexpected instruction that is still safe. Something that *doesn't fit the pattern* but *is not wrong*.

Examples:

- "Extend downwind for spacing — traffic is opposite direction."
- "Report right base for Runway 18."
- "Maintain 1,300 instead of the usual 1,000."
- "Follow the Skyhawk on a three-mile final — not the one on base."

These are **not traps**. They are **pattern-safe mismatches** designed to make the student *notice* the moment the mental model stops fitting.

Debrief (the critical part)

Don't say:

"You missed the clearance."

Say:

"When did your mental picture change, and when should it have changed?"

This teaches the **challenge function**, not the correction.

Why this example works

- It's **simple**.
- It's **safe**.
- It's **realistic**.
- It's **repeatable**.
- It trains **recognition**, not just compliance.
- It fits your seminar's architecture: **Expectation → Interpretation → Verification → Commitment**.

And most importantly:

It gives CFIs and DPEs a **concrete, actionable technique** instead of the usual "be more careful."

Example 2 — IFR Clearance Change (Unexpected Altitude)

Scenario

The student is flying an IFR departure they've practiced many times. They expect: *"Climb and maintain 2,000, expect 6,000."*

ATC instead issues:

"Climb and maintain **3,000**, expect 7,000."

The student reads back:

"Climb and maintain **2,000**, expect 6,000."

You **do not correct immediately** because the aircraft is still safe at current altitude.

Training move

After a few seconds, ask:

- “What were you expecting?”
- “What did you actually hear?”
- “What made you accept the expected altitude instead of the assigned one?”

Then replay the clearance and let the student *feel* the mismatch.

Controlled ambiguity option

Later in the lesson, deliberately give a *slightly* unexpected altitude on a practice clearance:

“Climb and maintain **2,500.**”

Not unsafe. Just different enough to force the student to **process**, not **predict**.

Debrief

“When did your mental picture diverge from the clearance, and when should it have changed?”

This trains the **challenge function**, not rote readback.

Example 3 — Towered VFR Pattern (Unexpected Runway)

Scenario

Student is in the pattern at a towered airport. Runway 18 has been in use all afternoon. Every aircraft ahead has been assigned Runway 18.

Tower says:

“Cessna 4AB, enter right downwind **Runway 23.**”

Student acknowledges:

“Right downwind **Runway 18**, Cessna 4AB.”

You **delay intervention** for 3–5 seconds. Everything is still safe on downwind.

Training move

Ask:

- “What runway were you expecting?”

- “What runway were you actually assigned?”
- “What made you substitute the expected runway?”

Controlled ambiguity option

On the next lap, give a *slightly* unexpected instruction:

“Extend downwind — sequencing for opposite-direction traffic.”

This forces the student to **update the mental model** rather than rely on the familiar pattern.

Debrief

“At what moment did the picture stop matching the instruction?”

This trains **recognition of mismatch**, not just correction.

Example 4 — Taxi Route Expectation (Familiar Airport Trap)

Scenario

Student taxis at their home airport. They know the usual route to Runway 27: Alpha → Bravo → Hold short 27.

Ground says:

“Taxi via **Alpha, Delta**, hold short Runway 27.”

Student begins turning toward Bravo anyway — the *expected* route.

You allow the incorrect turn to begin **just enough** to let the student *feel* the mismatch, but still safe.

Training move

Ask:

- “What taxi route were you expecting?”
- “What route were you actually assigned?”
- “What made you default to the familiar route?”

Controlled ambiguity option

Later, give a safe but unexpected taxi instruction:

“Taxi via Charlie, cross Runway 18, hold short Runway 27.”

Not a trap. Just different enough to force **active verification**.

Debrief

“When did the actual route diverge from the expected route, and when should you have noticed?”

This trains **pattern-interruption**, not memorization.

Why these examples work

Each one:

- is **safe**
- is **realistic**
- creates **controlled ambiguity**
- forces the pilot to **notice the mismatch**
- trains the **recognition**, not just the correction
- reinforces your seminar’s core model: **Expect Less → Observe More → Interrupt Early**