

**Ground school, it just can't get any respect.**

**Flight training begins on the ground, not in the air.™**

Too many pilots, and I used to be one, do not give ground school the respect it deserves. With the benefit of nearly a decade of aviation experience and hindsight to look back upon, I have changed my viewpoint. When I first became a newly Certificated Flight Instructor (CFI) I quickly learned how much more there was to learn when trying to simultaneously teach, monitor traffic for safety, work the radio in Class B airspace, and also fly the airplane with the student pilots.

All pilots will agree that flight planning begins on the ground, not in the air. Yet, many of these same pilots think that they can skip ground school, read a book or watch a DVD, and then jump right into flight training knowing everything they need to know. There is so much learning outside of a textbook a student pilot will gain from a quality ground school it is hard to adequately quantify. There is no book or DVD made that compares to a group setting ground school for being able to ask questions, observe, and listen to other pilot's stories and to interact with student pilots of all experience levels.

Certificated Flight Instructors are expected to set the tone for student pilots and mold them into competent, skilled, and safe aviators. Unfortunately, many flight instructors are not as comfortable with their ground instruction skills as they are with their Stick-n-Rudder flight training abilities and consciously, or subconsciously, move their students toward the book and DVD self-study programs to relieve themselves of the responsibility.

I know of no instructor who would suggest that a pilot (new student or advanced rating) go flying without first doing his flight planning basics on the ground (weather, NOTAMS, performance). Yet, many instructors do not offer, or stress the value, of ground school or even one on one ground instruction. At a minimum, an instructor should have a 10~20 minute pre-lesson brief and the same post lesson with his student.

As a new CFI, I would often write off the ground instruction time on my student's bills because I was uncomfortable charging for it as I did not perceive it as "flight instruction". Of course, this perception was wrong and all I was accomplishing was cutting my paycheck in half and reinforcing to the new pilots that ground instruction was not valuable. All flight (or ground) instruction is valuable, even if all we did was to plant a seed for thought, or keep the student pilot from hurting himself or damaging the equipment for an hour or two on a sunny afternoon. An instructor has invested much of his time, emotions, efforts, and money to get here. He deserves to be compensated as a skilled professional for all of his time. As instructors, we all need to protect our industry and promote professionalism by not giving away our time for free. (Unless you are doing a charity gig like EAA Young Eagles, FAASTeam, or Civil Air Patrol, etc.)

A very effective training method we have found is to combine our Private Pilot ground school with our Flight Instructor candidates and Flight Instructor Refresher Course (FIRC), ground schools. Our instructor candidates meet prior to the student pilot class to discuss the Fundamentals of Instruction, instruction techniques, regulations, and safety concerns. We then pair them up with a student pilot as a mentor, and we have them each choose one topic (i.e. weather, systems, navigation, etc.) to present to the student pilots as a group during the eight-week course.

The benefits for new and experienced instructors of a class like this are very visible. There is a marked change in all of the instructors who have gone through these internships and training programs. No one can successfully argue that a self-study online FIRC course, where you sit home alone at your computer, can teach someone how to teach better than actually teaching a class of live student pilots.

The benefits to this shared learning and course co-teaching are good for the course instructors as well. We learn by observing our students and CFI interns in action. All instructors know that the best way to learn something is try to properly teach it to someone else. This has helped our instructor candidates improve their subject matter knowledge, teaching skills, and public speaking abilities. Our student pilots have benefited because they see from the start how important it is to know your material and how it affects their flight planning, from the ground up. Bonus, they have a mentor to work with from the start.

Most instructors do not have a large pool of students to conduct a large classroom ground school several times a year. But if local instructors were to team up and pool their resources (students) they could find a sufficient number of students needing a formal ground school. A good size class has a minimum of 10~15 student pilots and several CFI candidates. When the course is complete, the students return to their respective flight instructors or flight schools for flight training.

Next time you breeze over the ground portion of your flight lesson, step back and ask yourself what new or additional information your student should know that he cannot, or should not, get for the first time in the air. Ground school, it deserves your respect. Flight training begins on the ground, not in the air.™

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