

SO YOU WANT TO LEARN TO FLY?

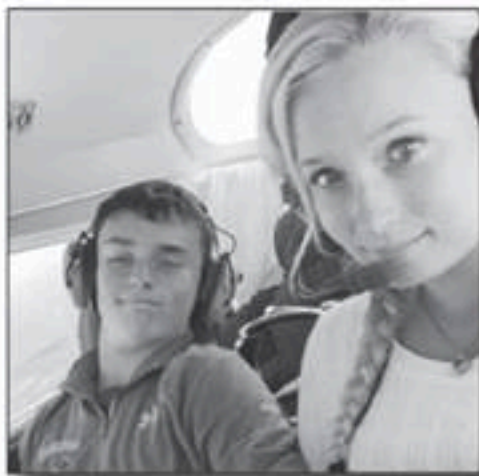
by Matthew Elia

Well, congratulations and welcome to the greatest activity known to man. It is demanding, costly and takes some serious effort, but it is so totally worth it!

If you're worried about cost, keep in mind learning to fly isn't really all that much more expensive than being a "car person," golfer or sailor. The money you'll spend in parts for the hot rod, on fancy golf clubs and memberships or on a boat/slip/supplies is very similar to the investment of getting into flying, with one major exception. After spending the money you'll literally be able to fly an airplane afterwards! Just think about that for a second... You will be able to fly a plane. I got into it when I was 13 and I've never looked back. The flying "bug" got me and never let go. You could be next!

So you're probably thinking, how do I get started with flight lessons, or at least learn a little more about what my options are... Well, that's easy. First, do a little online research. Most flight schools aren't marketing masters, they invest their money in aircraft maintenance, regulatory compliance, etc... The best way to get started is to find the closest airports to you. Once you know what is around in terms of airports, the next step is to search for the airport names (one by one), adding in the phrase, "flight school."

This will get you going in the right direction. Find a couple of flight schools, check out their websites, see if there is one that looks like it cares about their website. One of the tell tale signs you should watch for is the type of images on the various websites. Are the images just marketing images from aircraft manufacturers (these will be very clear and professional)? Or are the images of real people, with the flight school's actual airplanes? I firmly believe that flight schools should feature pictures of the aircraft they actually operate. This shows that the flight school takes pride in their operation.



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The next step for you, the potential student pilot, is to see if any of your flight school options have a social media presence. The most likely result is a Facebook page, though some schools also use Instagram and Twitter. When reviewing the websites and social media channels, pay attention to the last time the content was updated... A school that shares a lot of student accomplishments clearly has their act together and can be a good indicator of where students (like yourself) can be successful with their flight training.

Next, give the flight schools a call, how receptive and informative is the staff member who answers the phone for each school? Did you get the answers you were looking for or did the flight school employee provide you with seemingly canned responses to the questions they wanted to answer? Common sense is the "phone interview" will guide you right. Ask the flight schools if you can visit and tour their facilities. Stress that you want to see the airplanes you'd be flying.

You should keep in mind that flight schools make money only while their aircraft are flying. As a result, the opportunity to see an airplane at a given flight school might be a little tricky, but it's always good to try and see what you're getting into. By

comparing the aircraft from one flight school to another you'll get a good idea of which operation invests in their fleet, an important thing for you, since you can't just pull over to the nearest puffy cloud top while you're "up there." My last tip on this, is if you want to see the airplanes, visit the flight school on a stormy day, chances are if it is raining at least some of the aircraft will be parked and not up flying:

Now take action, go see the flight schools. Before you do this though, think seriously about the costs you discussed while talking to the flight schools on the phone. Question yourself, in a perfect world what can you afford? It's best to have an intended plan whether it is flying every day or once every other month, or anything in between. Having a schedule and sticking to it is paramount when it comes to being successful with your flight training.

The flight schools will each try to court you as a prospective client, use this to your advantage and ask an abundance of questions. Don't be afraid to physically walk into the flight school either, they depend on walk-ins. But remember, if they don't have the time of day for you, then you shouldn't have the time of day for them. Unless it's really busy, I go by the motto, if it's busy, there is probably a reason...

The next step is finding the best instructor for you; we'll explore that topic next time!

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