

Preparing for Your First Type Rating

by Mike Mikolay



Photo by Tom Page

Faced with obtaining your first type rating now that you're inked the deal to purchase a new aircraft? You better make the preparation for your type rating equally as important as finding a hangar or obtaining insurance. With a solid plan of action, you should be able to walk into your training center and feel confident knowing that you won't come out with too many bumps or bruises along the way.

What items do I need to consider?

Since obtaining a type rating is all about mastering the aircraft systems and flying the aircraft to a specific standard, it is obvious that you must do everything that you can to further both processes effectively and efficiently. You must do everything you can to make "drinking from the fire hose" as painless as possible.

The process is not all that different from any other rating or license you've obtained. However, the time spent learning both the aircraft and its systems are oftentimes condensed into a one- to three-week course. In addition, this training will most likely take place in an advanced simulator built to mimic the handling qualities of the real aircraft. Should your experience and the simulator certification level allow, you may be able to complete your type-rating check ride to earn your certificate without even touching the real aircraft!

No matter if you are going to take advantage of the initial simulator training that came with your aircraft or find a solution to take an accelerated type course in an actual airplane, a comprehensive plan to address this accelerated learning curve must incorporate

the need of recent flight experience, flight time in the actual aircraft, development of memory aides, advanced avionics training, preparations for the simultaneous issuance of an Airline Transport Pilot certificate (if prerequisites are met), and the ability to leave work matters at home so you can focus on your training. It sounds simple, but let's break it down further.

Recent Flight Experience

The time in your logbook and the ratings/certificates you hold will quickly determine how much time and effort you will need to spend to get ready for actual flight portion of your first type rating. Obviously a high-time commercial and multi-engine pilot with recent turboprop experience in the real world of IFR and high-altitude flying

will enable you to breeze through the flight portion of your simulator training. However, if you find yourself with a large gap in your flying, a lack of instrument proficiency, or feel even just the slightest bit “rusty,” now is the time to jump back in and grab a flight instructor.

The day before you leave for your training is not the time to dust off your headset and polish your skills. A few months before leaving, create a flight program that emphasizes basic instrument skills such as full instrument approaches, holding and VOR tracking. These items may seem trivial, but you want to have them down cold when you are trying to accomplish flying the aircraft while fending off the mix of learning checklist procedures, emergency procedures, power settings, and new avionics all while flying the simulator.

Treat actual flight time in the aircraft like gold.

Finding time to fly the actual aircraft should be a priority before you commence your training. Oftentimes this can be cost prohibitive and nearly impossible to accomplish, but by simply even riding in the co-pilot's seat with an experienced pilot can often provide insight or hints into the successful and efficient operation of the aircraft.

That being said, don't go out to try and master the aircraft in this manner by racking up 50-100 hours in your logbook. Bad habits can be learned that will actually hinder the positive outcome you are looking for. Fifteen to 30 hours in the actual aircraft will go a long way toward helping to familiarize you with the operation and characteristics of the aircraft. It will put you a step ahead when it comes to both the ground and flight portions of your type-rating course in addition to providing first-hand experience of the aircraft and its systems in action.



Don't forget the ground school.

Perhaps more challenging than actually flying the aircraft, the ground portion of your training can often leave you with your head spinning after the first day of class. The pace of the knowledge being hurled at you can almost be equivalent to the speed in which you plan to cruise in your aircraft. Many are caught unprepared for a classroom environment complete with questions, quizzes and tests.

Don't fret, you can prepare for the barrage of information you'll be expected to learn by simply taking the time to request and review the course materials prior to even stepping foot in the training facility. Most training companies can make arrangements to send you training materials after you sign up for the course. A copy of the Airplane Flight Manual, an Aircraft Checklist and an FAA approved course book that details the syllabus, aircraft systems and flight profiles are a few of the course materials that are often provided.

Keep in mind that review should not be confused with memorize. Much like over flying the aircraft prior to attending training, you don't want to find yourself reading each chapter of the course book like it is a required text that you will be tested on from your days back in grade school.

Once in the classroom you will find that the instructor is most

likely going to distill the information down to what you really need to know and not spend the time to cover every aspect verbatim from the course book. Focus your time by concentrating on the questions found at the end of each chapter since those tend to be a large portion of the key elements you will be expected to learn.

Don't forget the tricks that you learned that allowed you to succeed as a student both in education and with your previous studies of aviation. Create study sheets or flash cards to help review and learn the information. Speaking of flash cards, those three-by-five index cards are an excellent way to help commit the important items such as checklist memory items and the aircraft limitations to memory. Create the bulk of your cards before you leave and bring an extra stack along to be used for the additional pertinent data you glean from your ground school. In the end you will thank yourself for the effort since they will prove to be invaluable as you review them throughout the week and the eve of your oral exam and check ride.

Use avionics training aides.

As each year passes, it seems more and more information is crammed into the avionics we use to navigate through the wild blue. Since the bulk of this technology is found in the flight management system (FMS), you may find that a large portion of your ground school experience is focused on the explanation, learning and mastery of these pieces of equipment.

Depending on your avionic configuration, you may also find that your training institution will use either a computer-based training device to emulate the actual unit or, in rare cases, provide you with an actual unit to manipulate. Either way, it is important to use these sessions to fully understand

how the unit works, tricks to ease its operation and master the basics so you don't find yourself constantly with your head down while you really should be flying the aircraft.

Obviously, your instructor and the syllabus will dictate how much time is required to learn the system, but don't be afraid to utilize the devices on your own time outside the normal class if possible so that you can learn and experiment in its use at your own pace.

Why not get your ATP?

Your flight skills are honed, the ink has dried on your ground school plan of attack, and you are excited about tackling the simulator and its array of new avionics; are you ready for one more challenge? Consider obtaining the holy grail of aviation certificates, the Airline Transport Pilot (ATP). The standards you will be flying to during your training and subsequent type-rating check ride are one and the same for obtaining an ATP. Your type-rating check ride can also double as your ATP check ride so you are really getting two check rides for the pain and agony of one!

In all seriousness, this practice is a common way for pilots to obtain their ATP. Be sure to alert your training facility that you are intending to accomplish this task so that they can arrange to have a qualified examiner give you your final check ride.

Before advancing too far into the process you will need to make certain that you meet the requirements stated in Part 61, Subpart G – Airline Transport Pilot, in the current FARs. Pay special attention to 61.157 which details the flight time requirements you will

need to have logged and don't forget to immediately start studying for your ATP Written Exam. It is up to you whether you want to take the Part 135 or Part 121 version of the written test prior to your training since either one is acceptable when it comes time to take your check ride. Just remember to have a working knowledge of the respective FARs since those are fair game when it comes to the oral examination.

On the day of your check ride the examiner will usually take a moment at the beginning of your oral examination to review both your logbook and official test score. Remember to pack those items along with your flash cards and study materials. With a little extra hard work and determination above the normal preparation for your type rating, you can successfully navigate yourself into an ATP and further advance yourself into the upper echelon of the pilot ranks.

Try to leave work at home.

It is obvious that the success it takes to be an aircraft owner and operator requires dedication to earning a living. It is obvious that one to three weeks away from the office routine is near to impossible. But once you step into the training

environment, you are going to quickly find that the syllabus does not leave you with a large amount of free time.

In order for you to be just as successful and efficient in the aircraft, you may want to consider limiting the amount of work you bring with you as you attend your type-rating training. This should help allow you to focus on learning your aircraft and provide the best means in which to complete the course successfully. Obviously things will come up and issues will need to be handled. But by taking this mindset from the outset may help you feel more relaxed and dedicated toward your type rating.

The sum of the parts is equal to the whole.

Training for a type rating can be an exciting and exhilarating process. With the preparation outlined above, you can assure yourself that you will arrive ready to face the type-rating training program designed for your aircraft. In the end, you will easily prove your ability to master the aircraft and its systems to a level that earns you the coveted rating that will then be a permanent part of your certificate.

Good luck!



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