

FREQUENTLY ASKED AVIATION QUESTIONS

→ **Do pilots have to have 20/20 vision?**

No. For any class of medical your vision can be less than 20/20 as long as it is correctable to 20/20 with glasses or contacts. Check with a FAA medical doctor to determine your eligibility. While airlines and the military prefer 20/20 vision or better, some airlines hire pilots with up to 20/100, correctable to 20/20. Other aviation jobs allow for poorer vision, corrected to 20/20.

→ **As soon as I get my commercial license, can I fly for the major airlines?**

No. A commercial license is a step towards working for the major airlines as a flight crewmember. A commercial license allows you to fly in only certain flight operations for compensation. To fly as a captain for the major airlines, a person needs an airline transport pilot rating and be appropriately rated for the aircraft type (i.e.: B-737, A320, etc.). However, the person must first have a commercial license and an instrument rating before you can get an ATP rating, so the commercial license is a necessary step. The time between getting the commercial license and being qualified to fly for a major airline varies greatly, but is usually around five to seven years.

→ **Do most airlines hire only military pilots?**

No. Although currently most major airline pilots are ex-military, the trends are changing and more civilian pilots are being hired. Fewer pilots are available from the military so airlines are hiring more from a selection of civilian pilots. In 1998, more than 60% of the pilots hired were non-military. Today, the ratio is about 30% military and 70% civilian.

→ **Does being a pilot require a lot of math skills and science background?**

Some aspects of aviation require an understanding of basic math and science principles. High school algebra, geometry and basic physics will give you the educational background necessary to understand basic flight principles. Without this background more studying and one-on-one instruction may be required. However, most math-related activities in aviation are assisted with graphs and charts, and can be worked with a calculator.

→ **How long will it take me to get my license?**

Big Bend is a structured two-year program with the summer quarters optional. The first year prepares the student for their private license, which is usually earned in May or June; students must have their private license no later than the end of the first summer in order to return to the program. The second year prepares students for their commercial license and their instrument rating. When they receive these, usually in the Spring or Summer of the second year, they officially graduate from the program. As previously stated, summers are optional but often needed to complete the program. Additional ratings such as seaplane, multi-engine or instructor may be sought after the commercial program is completed; an additional rating usually takes a quarter to complete.

→ **Is flying dangerous?**

Although risks are involved in aviation and accidents can occur, there are procedures and precautions to minimize the danger. Safety is emphasized from the start at Big Bend and the students are constantly tested with hypothetical or simulated situations. Another key factor to safety is judgment. Instructors cannot teach every situation that might occur in flight; they provide basic procedures and important considerations. Students then need to use their judgment for the situation and apply what has been taught.

→ **Is flying easy?**

There are many aspects to flying; it requires more than just the physical skill of flying an airplane. Flying also requires mental concentration and alertness, combined with the ability to think ahead, anticipate and analyze while at the same time executing routine cockpit procedures. The ability to visualize the physical relationships involved in aircraft maneuvers is also an important attribute for pilots. A pilot cannot make an airplane do maneuvers that she/he does not understand. Flying is not necessarily hard, but it does require many skills and attributes. Some of these can be taught, but other skills the student needs to already have. The most important quality needed is motivation. Without motivation, the physical and mental attributes seldom reach the required levels.

As the requirements of aviation and the complexity of aircraft have increased over the years, so have the requirements placed on the pilot. A willingness to keep up with the requirements and stay informed is crucial to this career. As a young pilot moves through the ranks of private to commercial and beyond, he/she will need to stay current in the changes of aviation and the aircraft flown. Because of this, the learning process is never ending.

An important part of an aviation career is the ability to perform while being tested and re-tested. Many people find it difficult to continually be examined and evaluated. This causes many people to drop out of the career somewhere along the way. Some of the students who earn their licenses from Big Bend may go on to other fields and never use the skills they have acquired. Others may decide flying for the airlines is not their goal and pursue some other facet of aviation such as cargo, instructing, corporate, aerial photography or agricultural spraying.

→ **How will my career choice affect my lifestyle?**

As the world of aviation has grown over the past decades so have the requirements to be a pilot. The days of the stereotype silk scarf and leather jacketed barnstorming pilots are over and aviation is now considered a profession. A modern pilot needs to display an image of competency and professionalism that comes from years of training and experience.

A display of responsibility is also crucial. Drug use is unacceptable and drug testing has been introduced into the aviation industry. Alcohol use must be kept at a minimum; the rule for general aviation is eight hours between consumption and flying. However, most airlines require twenty-four hours. Smoking tobacco may be allowed, although most companies prefer to hire a non-smoker. Physical health in general is important for both passing the medical exam and to handle the stress and long hours often associated with a career in aviation.

Physical appearance is also important. Short hair is required for men, a neat style for women, weight should be in proportion to height, clothing needs to be in good taste, and a general clean appearance is important to maintain the image of a commercial pilot. This conformity does create limitations in ones lifestyle, but the benefits of the career far outweigh the costs.

There are many benefits to being a commercial pilot, however over the last ten years they have decreased in some areas. An airline captain flying for a major airline might make a six-digit income and work only ten to fourteen days a month, while a pilot working for a smaller or newer airline may earn only a modest five figure salary for the same amount of work. In reference to the work schedule, a captain may only work two weeks out of the month, but most of those nights are spent away from home and family. Also, often an additional day or two is necessary to travel to and from the home base where the flight originates.

A commercial pilot can have a very comfortable life and an excellent job, however it does set limitations and require sacrifices.