

CHARLESTON FLIGHT SERVICES, LLC



Frequently Asked Questions

How long will it take to earn my private pilot's license?

The length of the training process depends upon several factors. Students who fly an average of approximately three times a week may be able to earn their licenses in about four months. Some students are able to fly less often. Some students who have flown only on select weekends, and who have taken long breaks in between training, have taken up to three years to complete the process, but they nonetheless remained committed and earned their licenses. Outside circumstances aside, it is important to keep in mind that, regardless of the frequency of your flights, everyone responds to the airplane differently, and while nearly anyone can learn to fly, some will pick up on things more quickly than others. A good estimate for a dedicated student, with weather cooperating, would probably be about five months of training.

At a minimum, the FAA requires you to have at least 40 hours of flight time, including 20 hours of flight training and 10 hours of solo flight. The average number of hours at which students earn their licenses is between 60 and 70.

How much will it cost to earn a private license?

Obviously, the cost depends upon how quickly you progress. Those who fly more often usually earn their licenses in fewer hours, and therefore spend a little bit less on training.

A typical student can expect to pay between \$5,000 and \$8,000 for flight lessons and plane time. You will also need a few books and some training supplies. Flight fees can be paid on an "as-you-go" basis so there is not a large amount of money to invest initially, although we frequently offer discounts for packages of pre-paid lessons.

Contrary to what many people might think, becoming a pilot is not at all a hobby exclusive to wealthier individuals. Some students are working college students, simultaneously funding their college education and flight training. Many others are moms and dads with families to support. With an open mind, and a little budgeting, even an individual with a modest income can afford to learn to fly.

People often overlook the fact that financial assistance is available for flight training. Scholarships can also be of great help, and are available to men and women through certain groups. Check the advertisements in the back of *Flight Training* and *AOPA Pilot* magazines for specific details.

How old do I need to be to get a pilot's license?

You can begin flight training at any age; however, to fly solo in the aircraft you need to be at least 16 years old. To be eligible for a private pilot certificate, you must be at least 17 years old. There is no upper age limit to beginning your flight training.

What can I do once I have my license?

Basically, with your Private Pilot license, you will be a “fair-weather” pilot. In your training, you’ll learn about the specific weather conditions that will legally prohibit you from flying, as well as the conditions with which you, personally, are uncomfortable, and in which you might opt not to fly.

You will be able to fly single-engine aircraft, with engines of 200hp or less, including Cessna 150s, 152s, 172s, and 182s, and Piper Cherokees, Warriors, and Archers. You will not be limited to these specific models- these are just some of the more common ones flown by private pilots. With a little additional training, and an endorsement from an instructor, you can also learn to fly “high-performance” aircraft, (with engines of over 200hp) and “complex” aircraft (with controllable-pitch propellers, flaps and retractable landing gear).

Private pilots can carry passengers, but they cannot be paid or compensated in any way for doing so.

Once I get my license, what do I have to do to keep it current?

The specifics for currency can be found in the FAR/AIM, (basically the Bible for pilots) but generally you will need a “biennial flight review” (aka “BFR”) every two years, which consists of ground school (and oral exam) and check-ride with a flight instructor. BFRs are conducted with flight instructors, not with the FAA examiners with whom you take your initial check-ride for your license.

In order to carry passengers, the pilot must have made three take-offs and landings in the same type of aircraft during the preceding 90 days. To carry passengers at night, the pilot must have made three takeoffs and landings during the preceding 90 days during the period of one hour after sunset to one hour before sunrise.

To stay current with Charleston Flight Services, the pilot must have flown one of *our* aircraft in the preceding 60 days. If this currency lapses, the pilot will just need to schedule a quick flight with one of our instructors before he/she rents again.

What will my training involve?

Earning your license involves preparing yourself to take three tests: a written knowledge test, an oral knowledge test, and a practical test in the airplane. The written exam must be taken first; then the oral test is taken on the same day as the practical test. This combination of oral and practical tests is known as the “check-ride.”

To prepare for the written knowledge test, you will work with us on ground school training, which is an FAA requirement. At that point, most people find it beneficial to make an appointment to take their written exam right away, while the information is fresh in their minds. This can be done any time prior to the FAA Private Pilot check-ride. The written test remains valid for two years. Written tests are administered at FAA-designated testing centers. We can point you to the nearest center.

As far as flight training, we highly recommend scheduling in at least 1 ½ hour blocks, which allows about 45 min – 1 hour of flight time itself, as well as some time beforehand for necessary preflight inspection and briefings with the instructor, and time afterwards for debriefing. The first several lessons should be of this general nature. Once the student becomes proficient in certain standard procedures, he/she will begin to prepare for the first solo flight in the airport traffic pattern. Once the student has soloed, he/she will be able to fly alone in good weather, practicing landings in the traffic pattern, and maneuvers in the local practice area.

Lessons with the instructor after that point will mostly consist of preparation for the student’s solo “cross-country” flights, which are flights from point A to a point B that is 50+ nautical miles away. A few of these lessons will obviously be longer than previous flights, and are usually booked in two- to three-hour blocks. After sufficient training in cross-country procedures, the student will log at least 5 hours of solo cross-country flight.

Additional lessons will cover emergency, night, and instrument flight procedures, as well as brush-up work on maneuvers and landings before the student takes his check-ride.

I want to be a commercial airline pilot- is this how I get started?

Obviously, working toward a career in aviation is a very large commitment, but all pilots (other than those who receive their training through the military) begin with getting their private pilot’s license. Very briefly, after the private training will follow instrument and commercial training. Instrument training consists of *roughly* the same duration and expense as the private pilot license, while commercial training is considerable less in duration and expense.

With a commercial license, the pilot will then have to accumulate several hundred more hours of flight time (as an instructor, charter pilot, etc.), as well as additional ratings to fly multi-engine aircraft, etc., before applying to a regional airline, or to become a corporate pilot.

At Charleston Flight Services, we can instruct you as far as you wish to go – private pilot, instrument rating and commercial license.

Keep in mind- this is the story in a *very small nutshell*, but at least it gives an idea of what can follow after the private training, should the pilot choose to pursue a career in aviation.

So how do I start? Is there any commitment if I take a lesson, but do not wish to continue?

You can start by booking a “discovery” or “intro” flight, which will be your first official flight lesson. Since you will be sitting in the pilot’s seat and flying the plane for part of the time, you will definitely get a feel for what your future lessons might be like, and you can discuss any questions or concerns with your instructor. If you enjoy it and would like to fly again, great! Just schedule another lesson. If you’d rather take a break and think about it, or you choose not to fly again, that’s fine too. If you have a scheduled flight and need to cancel or reschedule, you are just required to provide at least one full day of advance notice.

What kind of planes will I be flying?

We use two models of Cessna single-engine aircraft for our training. Both are very easy to fly and are by far the most common aircraft used by flight schools for that reason. The 150J is a two-seater, while the 172M seats 4 people. Which one you use will depend on your size (the 2-seater naturally has a lower weight limit than the 4-seater), the planes’ availability and scheduling from time to time, and personal preference.