DZ AVIATION

PILOT CAREER PATH · PRIVATE PILOT TO THE AIRLINES

From first flight to the airlines

The main steps from a first lesson to an airline job, with the FAA minimum for each one.

1 Private Pilot

Fly yourself and passengers in good weather (VFR).

Ground school, FAA written test, first solo, cross-countries, night flying, checkride.

FAA MINIMUM
40 hours total
incl. 20 dual and 10 solo

2 Instrument Rating

Fly in clouds and low visibility under instrument flight rules (IFR).

Approaches, holds and IFR procedures, a 250 nm IFR cross-country, written test, checkride.

FAA MINIMUM
40 hours instrument time
plus 50 hours cross-country as PIC

3 Build your hours TIME BUILDING

Fly as pilot in command to reach the experience the commercial certificate requires.

No instructor needed for this time.

GOAL
250 hours total
incl. 100 PIC and 50 cross-country

4 Commercial Pilot

Fly for compensation or hire, and qualify to train as an instructor.

Commercial maneuvers to tighter standards, long day and night cross-countries, written test, checkride.

FAA MINIMUM
250 hours total
incl. 20 hours of training

5 Multi-Engine Add-On

Adds multi-engine privileges, which airline applicants need.

Training in a twin-engine airplane, then a checkride. No written test.

FAA MINIMUM
No set hours
Training, endorsement and checkride

6 Flight Instructor (CFI)

Teach student pilots, and build flight time while getting paid.

Two written tests (fundamentals of instructing, aeronautical knowledge), spin training, teaching every maneuver from the right seat, checkride.

YOU NEED FIRST
Commercial + instrument
and 15 hours PIC in the airplane class

7 Instrument Instructor (CFII)

Teach the instrument rating too.

Instrument instructor written test, teaching IFR procedures and approaches, checkride.

USUALLY AFTER
CFI certificate
No extra hour minimum

DESTINATION

The airlines. Build toward 1,500 hours, the ATP minimum, including 50 hours in multi-engine airplanes. Many pilots build this time as flight instructors.

FAA minimums from 14 CFR Part 61 (§§ 61.109, 61.65, 61.129, 61.63, 61.183 and 61.159), current as of November 2026. The full requirements include more items, so check the current regulations. For information only.

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