

Training and Preparing for a New Flight Environment

A recent study of general aviation accidents suggests that, in addition to piloting proficiency, transition training and experience in diverse flight environments can improve a pilot's ability to recognize and successfully respond to new challenges.

Challenge Accepted

As pilots, it's always good to take on new challenges — whether it's flying a new type of aircraft or in a totally new environment. There's lots to learn from these experiences and they can certainly increase the fun factor with flying.

As with any new aeronautical endeavor, always be cautious and keenly aware of your limitations. It's important to ensure you are proficient enough to handle any of the challenges presented with unfamiliar environments. Let's look at a few ways you can expand your horizons to bolster safety and foster the fun of flying.



Shifting Gears

One popular way to expand your horizons is to get checked out in a different category or class of aircraft. Maybe you'd like to step up to the latest twin-engine technology. Or perhaps you'd prefer the more classic feel of a vintage tail dragger. Or it could be that the thrill of flying engine-less in a glider is beckoning you.

Another good challenge to consider is flying to a new location or environment. Does the versatility of flying with skis or floats sound appealing? How about snapping a few photos of some majestic mountaintops? Or experiencing the rugged remoteness that only backcountry flying offers?

Once you determine what new type of flying motivates you the most, you can design some great experiences to expand your flight envelope. The idea here is that a list of fun activities will enable you to build experience, stay proficient, and develop skills to help you become a safer pilot. Think of it as a "choose your own adventure" style of becoming a more well-balanced aviator.

Whichever type of aircraft or flying experience you choose, you'll want to get some quality training to maximize safety, utility, and fun. Comprehensive

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transition training and practice will ensure you'll get the most out of the machine — and yourself.

One additional note on changing to a different type of aircraft: it's best to banish the notions of moving "up" and "down" when it comes to aircraft transition. Any pilot who has transitioned from a standard category airplane to a light sport aircraft (LSA) will attest to the very real challenges involved in moving to a lower-performance airplane. Bottom line: whether moving to a more capable aircraft or to a simpler machine, every bird we fly deserves, and indeed demands, the utmost level of respect from its pilot.

Details Matter

Each new operational environment presents unique challenges and opportunities. The trick is to know what you're getting into and how to operate safely and confidently in unfamiliar environments. For that you'll need to do some research.

A good place to start is with the Chart Supplement — formerly known as the Airport/Facility Directory — and your local VFR charts which will give you airport, terrain, and some obstruction information. Magazine articles can be good general sources of information, as can aircraft type clubs and pilot clubs/associations. However, your best sources of information will always be the pilots and instructors who regularly operate in the environment. It's well worth the time and effort to seek them out for guidance.

Slow and Steady

Be patient when tackling a new flying challenge, and work your way up taking incremental steps. If it's flying to a new environment, like a high-density altitude area, start with a good-sized airport with longer runways. That will give you a feel for the longer takeoff runs and lower climb performance.



Flying For a Cause

Another way to expand your horizons is directing your flight activity to a good cause. Volunteer service flying has multiple benefits when done properly: it can provide opportunities to sharpen your skills, provide immeasurable value to the individuals and organizations it helps, and also enhance the public perception of general aviation as a valuable and beneficial activity. Keep in mind that this type of flying carries a lot of responsibility, and it does require some effort to do it right. Be sure to seek out the appropriate guidance and requirements first.

Resources

The *FAA Safety Briefing* magazine has written extensively on this subject. Please read the following for more great tips on expanding your horizons!

Birds of a Different Feather Issue (Nov/Dec 2018):
faa.gov/news/safety_briefing/2018/media/NovDec2018.pdf

"Shifting Gears—Tips for Tackling Transition Training (Sep/Oct 2017):
<https://spark.adobe.com/page/Z6FM71opuqCXv/>

"Cross Country Skiing—Aviation Style!" Pg. 10 (Nov/Dec 2014):
faa.gov/news/safety_briefing/2014/media/NovDec2014.pdf

Making Flying Fun Issue (Jul/Aug 2012):
faa.gov/news/safety_briefing/2012/media/JulAug2012.pdf

Wide World of Flying Issue (Sep/Oct 2011):
faa.gov/news/safety_briefing/2011/media/SepOct2011.pdf

