

What's New and Upcoming in Airman Testing

Airman Certification Standards & ACS Codes

Airman Certification Standards (ACS)

Since September 2011, the FAA has been working closely with a diverse group of aviation community stakeholders convened to help the agency improve the testing/training standards, guidance and test development/test management components of the airman certification process.

The industry participants in this effort have developed the Airman Certification Standards (ACS) framework as a way to improve airman training and testing, specifically by providing an integrated, holistic system that clearly aligns airman testing with certification standards and guidance.

Built on the existing Practical Test Standards (PTS), which explicitly define the performance metrics for each flight proficiency element listed in 14 CFR, the ACS approach enhances the PTS by defining the specific elements, aeronautical knowledge, and risk management needed to support each Area of Operation/Task. By presenting the elements of knowledge, skill, and risk management in the integrated ACS format, the ACS approach better serves the applicant, the instructor, and the evaluator. In addition, the ACS approach will enable the FAA to create and maintain a clear link among the regulations, knowledge/skill performance standards, guidance, and test materials.

The FAA has accepted the industry group's recommendation to adopt the ACS approach, and the agency continues to work with this group to refine the ACS and plan for its eventual implementation. Current efforts involve FAA support for industry efforts to prototype the ACS approach in selected locations.

For more information, including the industry group's proposed ACS documents for the private pilot, commercial pilot, and authorized instructor certificates and the instrument rating, please see the ARAC Airman Testing Standards and Training Working Group's report at http://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/rulemaking/committees/documents/media/ATSTWG.RR.9.30.2013.PDF.

ACS Codes

One of the overarching goals of the ACS effort is to create an integrated, coherent airman certification system in which standards, guidance, and testing can be aligned and maintained in alignment. Such symmetry is key to fully realizing the benefits the ACS system promises to both the FAA and its many stakeholders. It is also key to conformance with accepted industry standards for certification programs, which require that items to be trained and tested be directly linked to the job/task analysis – in this case, the ACS.

To help achieve this goal, the aviation community experts who developed the ACS have also developed a new coding system that will eventually apply to both Airman Knowledge Tests and Practical Test tasks. These codes provide the means to correlate the tasks in the ACS with guidance and testing, and to keep them aligned going forward.

When the FAA implements the ACS approach, the ACS codes will supersede the current system of “Learning Statement Codes” (LSC), which has become too limited to serve as the mechanism for alignment and too complex to effectively serve the needs of the FAA and the stakeholder community.

The proposed coding system has four elements that are anchored in the ACS (not in reference documents, like the current LSCs).

PA.XI.A.K:

PA = (private pilot airplane) – identifies the applicable ACS.

XI = Area of Operation (Night Operation)

A = Task (Night Preparation);

K1 = Task element [knowledge (K), skill (S), risk management (R)]

The ACS-based coding scheme will:

- Clearly align guidance and test questions to the ACS;
- Make the airman test report meaningful to stakeholders (applicant, instructor, evaluator);
- Provide a means for automated generation of tests, whether using the existing test forms or future randomized selections; and
- Eliminate subjectivity and vastly simplify system management requirements for the FAA.