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Renewing Your “Lease”

Options for Flight Instructor Certification Renewal

Whether you pursue the noble profession of flight instruction full time, or have been an aviation educator sometime earlier in your career, every flight instructor is keenly aware of the intrinsic value of the flight instructor certificate. Not only can it be an invaluable asset towards accumulating flight time, aeronautical experience, and personal income, it's also considered (at least anecdotally) one of the most challenging practical exams to pass. However, there is another key difference that sets this certificate apart from other airman certificates earned — an expiration date.

Unlike a private pilot certificate, for example, a flight instructor certificate is valid only for 24 calendar months after an initial certification ride or renewal. In order to retain your flight instructor privileges, you must keep that certificate current and continue to renew, or else take another practical test unless you simply choose to let it expire. Thankfully,

there are several options to help you renew your certificate (and refresh your aeronautical knowledge). This article will explain each one in detail.

The Regs

To learn more about the renewal requirements for flight instructor certification, the best place to start is with Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR) section 61.197. This regulation lists five methods you can use to renew your flight instructor certificate if it has not expired. These five methods must be accomplished during the preceding 24 calendar months of expiration. In summary, they are:

1. Pass a practical test for a new instructor rating or for any rating on your current flight instructor certificate;
2. Endorse at least five students for a practical test, with 80 percent passing on the first try;

3. Show that you are in a position to regularly evaluate pilots or served as a company check pilot, chief flight instructor, company check airman, or flight instructor with a part 121 or 135 operator;
4. Successfully complete an approved flight instructor refresher course (FIRC); or,
5. Pass an official U.S. Armed Forces military instructor pilot proficiency check.

One important point worth reinforcing before we get into the details: a person cannot renew a flight instructor certificate that is already expired. So if your 24-calendar month eligibility window has elapsed, your only option to reinstate your certificate is to pass a practical test.

FIRC-gettaboudit

For a majority of flight instructors who are inside that 24-calendar month window, the FIRC route to renewal is by far the most popular. In fact, it's estimated that 70 percent of the roughly 30,000 active flight instructors use this option to renew. The reasons for a FIRC's popularity vary, but most cite convenience and education quality as draws. Some FIRC providers have received authorization to provide their content online — an attractive feature for some who may live in more remote areas or whose schedule conflicts with the typical weekend classroom offering times.

Regardless of the format, FIRCs are held to a strict set of criteria that includes at least 16 hours of course curriculum, testing standards, and a series of required core topics that all providers must cover. According to Advisory Circular 61-83H, *Nationally Scheduled FAA-Approved, Industry Conducted Flight Instructor Refresher Course*, FIRC programs should aspire to “challenge, motivate, and inspire attendees” as well as present meaningful information designed to help CFIs carry out their role more effectively. Recent updates to the AC helped clarify these standards further and have added a vital new core topic, loss of control.

To view AC 61-83H, follow the link in the Learn More section of this article. It covers everything you'll want to know about a FIRC. I also recommend reviewing the article, “FIRC: A New Look at a Familiar Program” in the September/October 2012 issue of this magazine at <http://1.usa.gov/Ob30H7>.

One last pointer about using FIRCs: you can use them to renew anytime during your 24-month currency window. To keep your same calendar month expiration date, though, you need to submit the FIRC

graduation certificate within three calendar months preceding the month of expiration. That gives you some breathing room leading up to your expiration month to schedule and attend a FIRC.

To offer an example, if a person whose current flight instructor certificate expires on October 31, 2017, seeks to renew his or her certificate through a FIRC and obtain a new expiration date of October 31, 2019, that person must present the FIRC graduation certificate to an Aviation Safety Inspector (ASI) on or after July 1, 2017. Submitting before that date will result in an expiration date calculated from the date you completed that FIRC.

Note that the three-calendar-month window is computed from the first day rather than the last day of the expiration month of the current flight instructor certificate. Therefore, if a person's flight instructor certificate expires on October 31, 2017, the three-calendar-month window is computed from October 1, 2017.

Aviator Evaluator

For flight instructors who have regular students, or whose position allows them to regularly evaluate other pilots, renewal options 2 or 3 from the earlier list (listed as (a)(2)(i) and (a)(2)(ii) in the 61.197 regulation) will likely be your go-to choice. For the latter, the FAA has updated the regulation to expand the renewal provisions and provide more clarity on the role of flight instructors who are “in a position involving the regular evaluation of pilots.” This list includes company check pilots, chief flight instructors, company check airmen, or flight instructors in a part 121 or part 135 operation. The FAA further acknowledges that PICs who regularly evaluate pilots have the same option. Eligible PICs may include:

- A PIC of a multiple pilot flightcrew aircraft under part 135,
- Corporate PICs of a multiple pilot flightcrew aircraft under part 125 or part 133,
- U.S. military pilots who are PICs of a multiple pilot flightcrew aircraft,
- U.S. military instructor pilots and examiners who regularly evaluate pilots.

Practically Speaking

Another renewal option for flight instructors is to pass a practical test for a new instructor rating or

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for a rating already on your flight instructor certificate. To add another rating to your flight instructor certificate, you must have the category and class rating on your pilot certificate. This option, although not as popular as some of the other renewal methods, is sometimes misinterpreted. For starters, to have a practical test renew your flight instructor certification, it has to be with a rating already listed on your flight instructor ticket, or towards an additional instructor rating.

For example, if you do not have an airplane category multi-engine class rating on your flight instructor ticket and pilot certificate, then passing an airplane category multi-engine class rating practical test for your pilot certificate would *not*

renew your instructor certificate — although, incidentally, this would satisfy your flight review requirements in 14 CFR section 61.56. It's important to also note that taking a practical

test for any one rating on your instructor certificate or adding a rating to that certificate, renews *all* of your instructor ratings. Similarly, if your instructor certificate has expired, taking a flight instructor certification checkride for any one rating held on your certificate will also reinstate *all* ratings on your instructor certificate (see 14 CFR section 61.199). Previous regulatory language in each of these areas may have given the impression that an applicant had to take a practical test for each of the ratings listed on their flight instructor certificate to either renew or reinstate. Happily, that is not the case.

Flight instructors renewing by practical test should also be aware that the test may be accomplished in a flight simulator or flight training device, provided it's done in accordance with an approved course conducted by a part 142 certificated training center (see section 61.197 (c)). Finally, for those who go the military route to renew with a military instructor pilot proficiency check, the process is pretty straightforward. It's a good idea however, to make sure you have documentation that is acceptable to the FAA to facilitate your renewal.

Spread Your WINGS

Although not listed in 14 CFR section 61.197, there are a couple additional methods flight instructors can use to renew their certificates. The reference for these is the guidance contained in

FAA's 8900.1 Order (specifically Volume 5, Chapter 2, Section 11), which covers certification of pilots and flight instructors. One option allows current flight instructors to renew if they serve as a flight instructor in the FAA's WINGS Pilot Proficiency Program and meet certain program criteria, such as evaluation of at least 15 WINGS-accredited flight activities with at least five different pilots within the 24 months preceding certificate expiration. AC 61-91J contains more on these requirements and is available at go.usa.gov/xNsF2.

Another option in the 8900.1 guidance document allows a current flight instructor to renew his or her certificate once designated as a Master Certificated Flight Instructor by the National Association of Flight Instructors (NAFI). To view more details, you can reference the 8900.1 Order directly at <https://go.usa.gov/xNsMD>.

Covering Ground

We've talked thus far about options flight instructors can use to renew their certification, but how about ground instructors? A ground instructor certificate does not expire, but to perform ground instructor duties, you must meet certain recent experience requirements, some of which overlap from the flight instructor realm. According to 14 CFR section 61.217, a ground instructor can remain current if they show one of the following occurred in the preceding 12 calendar months:

- Employment or activity as a ground instructor giving pilot, flight instructor, or ground instructor ground training;
- Employment or activity as a flight instructor giving pilot, flight instructor, or ground instructor ground or flight training;
- Completion of an approved FIRC and receipt of a graduation certificate for that course; or,
- An endorsement from an authorized instructor certifying that the person has demonstrated knowledge in the subject areas prescribed for ground instructor eligibility requirements (14 CFR section 61.213(a)(3) and (a)(4)) as appropriate.

The Certificate's in the Mail

So now that you've met the renewal requirements for your flight instructor certificate, how do you go about processing your new certificate? There are several options, but the one you use is most likely driven by the renewal method chosen. For example,

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at many in-person FIRCs, an Airman Certification Representative will be available on-site to process your graduation certificate for a fee, submit your renewal application online, and in some cases, offer you a temporary flight instructor certificate. Designated Pilot Examiners can also process your application after a successful practical test. Candidates for flight instructor renewal may also visit the local Flight Standards District Office or simply submit the application via U.S. Mail.

If you choose to mail it in, be sure to follow the guidelines contained in paragraph 5-504 of the aforementioned 8900.1 Order. Special requirements for mail-ins include submitting your permanent flight instructor certificate and, if applicable, notarizing any relevant training records. A copy of your old instructor certificate will suffice until your new one arrives.

Above and Beyond

Suffice it to say, being a good flight instructor goes beyond just staying current in accordance with

the regulations. It involves being actively involved in the aviation community and striving for a better understanding of, well, everything! It should also behoove a flight instructor, especially one actively instructing, to stay informed and up to date with regulation changes or technological innovations, as well as better methods of inspiring and motivating students to learn. ✈️

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Learn More

Advisory Circular 61-83H, Nationally Scheduled FAA-Approved, Industry Conducted Flight Instructor Refresher Course

go.usa.gov/xNsug

AC 61-91J, WINGS Pilot Proficiency Program

go.usa.gov/xNsF2