



Flight Training and Your CFI[©]

Gary Palmer Feb 11 2022

Flight training is a personal thing. You are going to sit in an airplane with your instructor and share these closed quarters for many hours (cumulative). There has to be a good feeling of respect and communication. And that must be in both directions. I have experienced the instructor who talked at me, not caring if I heard or understood, just seeming to express how much he knew. That is not a beneficial situation.

As you interact with your instructor, you have opportunity to learn. That brings me to an important point about instruction, the focus in on BOTH teaching and learning. Your job is to learn and your instructor teaches, but the instructor is teaching based on 1 of 3 foundations. Instructors use these foundations to draw out the information and knowledge they then communicate for you to learn.

- 1) **What the instructor was taught.** What we learn is what we tend to teach. This means that an instructor taught bad information or habits had to recognize and overcome them, or they teach them to you.
- 2) **What the instructor experienced.** Experience is a great teacher. There should be no doubt that an instructor with thousands of hours as a pilot and hopefully hundreds or thousands of hours instructing has more experience to draw from. While still possibly subject to originally taught bad habits, time and experience has a way slamming our faults as we gain experience. We learn our mistakes because we make them and get called out because of it. I bet no pilot makes that kind of mistake twice.
- 3) **What the instructor read.** The FAA has a number of great publications. They tell us the legal things we must do as well as the preferred right way to do things. Sometimes, teaching “by the book” requires a careful application to accommodate the immediate situation.

So how does a student learner find the right CFI?

Ask your potential CFI how many hours they have. A CFI must have a minimum of 250 hours. That is not much as it is the minimum for a commercial pilot and should include the private pilot hours as well as instrument training. So a CFI with several hundred hours of experience does not have a lot of experience. You will be reading a lot of the same materials used to teach, so it is quickly seen if the CFI learned the materials. A more difficult thing is if the CFI was taught any bad habits. This could be detected by using a second CFI to just “check you out” during your training.

Do the hours matter that much?

This is an opinion, but I think they do. The reason is that a few hundred hours for a CFI offers little experience. If they have few hours and start teaching they have less opportunity to fly and experience aviation just as a pilot. Also, an instructor tends to do many of the same things repeatedly. Flying around the airport or practice area, escorting students on cross countries, usually to the same airport. This instructor can do a great job teaching exactly what is needed, but might be limited teaching what is additionally useful.

A last thought about your instructor is their level of commitment. They may promise to see you through, but if they eventually want a job in the airlines, an important question is how many hours they have. The airlines are picking up pilots with 1200 to 1500 hours. Currently, 1500 is a minimum but they help train you while you acquire the last few hundred. So will your instructor leave you as soon as that new job comes along? Many schools bet on this by using the flight hours as a means of “intangible compensation”; basically most of the hourly instructor cost goes to the school and the instructor gets a little of it, but they get all those flight hours. If an instructor is anxious to get in the plane and start the engine as a precursor to starting the lesson, that instructor might be looking at you as a source for building hours.