



Selecting The Right CFI[©]

Gary Palmer Dec 3 2021

Choosing a CFI can make a huge difference to successful flight training. Second to that is the school if you use one. Many students do not understand the “behind-the-scenes” drivers which inspire or motivate many CFIs and schools.

Schools are typically in business to make profit. I have not heard of a non-profit, but that does not mean there isn't one. But schools at least want to cover costs and the way they do that is by generating revenue from selling supplies, renting aircraft or renting Certified Flight Instructors (CFIs). When renting a plane, the school only makes money when the engine is running. Yes, there are cases where there are minimum hours if you take the plane overnight, but most schools rent by engine hour. Of course, they charge by the Hobbs hour, not tach (reference my [Hobbs vs. Tach](#) article). This is often one of the largest revenue streams for a school; this and renting instructors.

Renting an instructor means you, as a student, will pay to have a CFI in the plane with you. There might even be occasions when you pay for a CFI who remains on the ground worrying about your solo flight, but that is a policy into which you should inquire with your flight school or CFI.

There is one other thing needing discussion, CFI compensation. While you might pay \$75/hour for your CFI they might actually only get \$25 or \$30/hour. The rest goes to the school. Not to say the school does not deserve their cut, but with such small compensation why does an instructor do it?

How else are CFIs compensated? That answer is hours! Many CFIs are using flight instruction as a stepping stone to gain flight hours in order to qualify for the job they really want. This should matter to you! Some instructors are good pilots, but not good at instruction, they just want hours and getting paid something is better than the expense of buying hours or a plane. So if you are not clicking with your CFI, you can ask to try another (see my [Student Pilot Bill of Rights](#)). There are some CFIs who are very good at what they do, even though they have an objective of a different job. Do not rule against a CFI who wants that airline position based on that fact alone just as low hours does not mean they lack applicable experience.

It also means that your CFI, if they are building time, can be very interested in getting into the plane with you and having the engine started because all that time counts in their log book. Unfortunately, if you spend 20 minutes discussing the flight with the engine running, you just paid for 20 minutes of aircraft time and 20 minutes of CFI when you maybe could have done that prep on the ground before starting. Often there is much to discuss with the engine running, so remember there are normal things done on the ground with engine running.

This is the distinction between motivation or why they come to work and compensation or what they get from the work. Some schools actually pay very low wages because the CFIs are given the opportunity to gain hours quickly. I was actually told by one chief instructor that they pay with “candy and hours”; at least he was honest! Ask your CFI how many hours they have or what motivates them to be a CFI. That answer can help you understand their motivation and how it can affect your bank balance.