

Training, General: Conducting Introductory Flights by Ralph Butcher

Use the principle of primacy when introducing individuals to general aviation.

Insights : Ralph Butcher

Introductory Flights

Use the principle of primacy

"Be a pilot. Stop dreaming. Start flying." You undoubtedly know about this successful program--sponsored by AOPA and other entities--which was developed to promote flying with a \$49 (now \$59) introductory flight at participating flight schools.

As an active participant, I was surprised when someone from the program called to complain because "we do stalls" during a flight. This call reminded me of what I frequently see in today's media: Something is taken out of context and reported, which generates a false assumption by the reader or viewer.

Years ago, I realized the benefit of an introductory flight for people who were contemplating flying--and for people who just wanted to try. I and signed up for lessons. Consequently, I made that flight the first lesson in my private *pilot flight training syllabus in order to take advantage of the principle of primacy*, which the *FAA Aviation Instructor's Handbook*, FAA H-8083-9, defines as "The statement that creates a strong, almost unshakable, impression."

Most people when introduced to flying have three deep-seated beliefs: The flight instruments are critical--you can't be without them; an airplane is extremely dangerous. Engine failure will result in a crash.

The erroneous thinking regarding flight instruments is understandable. During my years of airline flying, the first comment I often heard when I made when they visited the cockpit was, "Wow, look at all those instruments!" That made an everlasting impression on me. It took time to get used to taking to fly an airplane.

For the introductory flight, I start applying the principle of primacy as we walk out to the airplane. At some point I stop and talk about the instruments. This is when a pilot evaluates airport wind conditions and traffic flow. Wind direction and velocity is a critical concern to a pilot.

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At the airplane, I explain the importance of the preflight inspection, and as I perform that task, I explain how the flight controls work: *The wing pushes the air down and because of the wing's shape, the air pressure above the wing is reduced.* Shortly thereafter, I learn the technical reasons at the proper time.

In the cockpit, I explain why pilots use checklists. Humans make mistakes, and aviation safety mandates that we back up our memory with written checklists at specific times.

I then cover up the six flight instruments with one half of a manila file folder and explain that the instruments are not needed for safe flight, providing the pilot has a full understanding of airplane attitude--which I define--and engine power relationships, knowledge to acquire with proper instruction. I keep the instruments covered for the entire flight, which makes it much easier for an instructor's eyes outside the cockpit during subsequent lessons should they occur.

After engine start and when on the taxiway, I have the individual taxi the airplane. I explain that when turning the airplane, the control yoke is not rotated, as they would turn the steering wheel in a car, and that the relative position of both rudder pedals is like that of a bicycle's handlebar.

After takeoff, I fly toward our scenic coastline, point out familiar landmarks, and let the person experiment with the flight controls for a few minutes; I then ask him to stay on the controls while I perform an *imminent* stall. This is a gentle, power-off, flaps-up stall with a power-off recovery. When the initial buffeting occurs, I explain what's happening and have him push the nose down until the buffeting stopped. Stall recovery is quite simple, and with proper use of the flight controls and the throttle, there is no danger of doing something that he can't control.

While still at idle power, I trim for the glide and again have him fly the airplane. I explain that if the engine had quit--something unlikely--the airplane would remain fully controllable and fly exactly as it's now doing. He will be taught proper flight planning and be shown suitable forced-landing areas so that he can always land the airplane safely. We then return to the airport and conclude the flight.

No one has ever walked away from one of these flights without extreme enthusiasm. Little do they know that I have discovered and created a few insights that will make it much easier for an instructor to teach them how to fly.

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