

Choosing a flight instructor.

For me it was a simple choice as to where I would do my flight training, however in the end it wasn't the best choice. I was fortunate to be introduced to flying at a young age as my father had his license and would take me flying with him. I've lived seven miles from the local airport for my whole life and drive past it every day on the way to and from work. The airport has an operating FBO, aircraft rental, maintenance facilities and instructors on staff. One would assume it was the perfect choice as I initially did.

The training started off as anyone would expect with rental agreements and other forms to fill out before taking to the skies. There were two instructors available and I scheduled lessons with both at the beginning so I could decide which instructor best suited my learning style. Things went well and I settled on an instructor that I had wanted to do my training with. Then at approximately 6 hours into my flight training I was left with no instructors at all because both had left for new jobs. I had known one of the students that was near to finishing his training and I decided that instead of fighting with him for instructors while I hadn't even soloed yet that I would take a break from the flight training until permanent instructors were hired again. Mistake number two.

Two months later I was back on track with the flight training. I scheduled lessons with both instructors so I could again find which instructor matched my learning style best. After two months with no flight training I found myself nearly back at step one, learning the instructors teaching style and working to get a feel back for the airplane. I continued my training completing my solo flights and dual cross countries when it struck again. My instructor left for a different job. I was beginning to notice a trend. I continued my lessons with the second instructor trying to complete my night flying lessons. Unfortunately the way the scheduling worked there I had to schedule nearly three weeks in advance for night flights. The problem was compounded with bad luck and had numerous cancelled lessons for bad weather. Almost two months later I had my night training finished and went in to schedule a lesson to review maneuvers and get ready for a solo cross country. That's when I was given the news that the instructor had left. At this point I was getting fairly annoyed with having so many instructors. After thirty hours of total flight time and four instructors, I was feeling like I spent half my time getting used to the new instructors teaching styles and learning to do things the way the new instructors wanted. That's when I made my third mistake - a six month break from flight training.

As spring broke and the frequency of aircraft flying over increased I found myself back at the airport. This was perhaps arguably my 4th mistake for going back to the same place. I scheduled a lesson with one of the two new instructors and on the day of the lesson was told we would be doing the rest of the training in a 172 instead of the 152 because with the instructor, me and full fuel we would be surpassing the gross weight limit and I guess they aren't able to rent an aircraft out with 3/4 filled fuel tanks for a 1 hour flight. So I switched to the 172 and spent the day working on landings. No renewed solo endorsement, nothing really learned as the instructor mainly just sat along for the ride not giving much feedback and was even talking on the cell phone for part of the lesson. I left that day with a new level of frustration.

Several days before my next scheduled lesson with the same instructor they switched me to the second instructor. I asked why I was switched and was told that the instructors were now rotating working weekends. In essence if I wanted to fly with the same instructor on the weekends it would have to be an every other week lesson. The day of my second lesson came and I caught myself thinking "Thank goodness it's raining, no flight training today!". I was shocked. I was doing this for fun and it regressed to such a level of frustration that I rejoiced in bad weather cancelling my flight lesson. That is when I made my best decision - I canceled my scheduled lessons and decided to finish my training elsewhere.

I started searching the internet for information on where I could finish my training. I was looking at larger airports with large FBO's because I knew they had flight training available, but my real breakthrough came when I searched the NAFL web site (National Association of Flight Instructors). I found out there was a flight instructor at the next closest airport (45 minutes away instead of 10 minutes) and promptly gave him a call and set up a meeting. The meeting went great and was better than I expected. I finally found a flight instructor who was doing it for the love of flying, not just as a requirement to build hours for another job. In just three lessons with him I was more comfortable in an airplane than with the previous 32 hours where I was before. We practiced maneuvers never done with any of the previous instructors. The atmosphere at the airport was great and inviting and now I go there just to visit and see what's going on. In a month and a half I flew 23 hours and finished my private pilot license. Flying had become fun again!

Your flight instructor and school can make a world of difference and can be a make or break deal for you if you have a bad experience right at the beginning. I'm afraid to know how many people shared a bad experience as mine and simply gave up. Flying should be fun, so make sure the instructors you go with reflect that before you assume that the closest is the best choice for you, please stop first and talk with them.

A few things to think about:

- Why is the instructor teaching? For the sake of teaching others to fly or to build hours to move on?
- How long does the instructor plan to be there?

- Will they help push you along through the training? When I took my 6 month break it was like they didn't notice I was even there in the first place. No calls to see why I stopped or to get me back.
- What is the atmosphere at the airport like? Is it like a business and uptight or is it inviting and a great social place.

Even though I have finished my training I still fly out or drive out to that airport to visit the friends I've made while I was doing my training, and continue to meet new people because of it's excellent atmosphere. And a huge thanks to my instructors Steve and Kandace for bringing the fun back into flying! Chris