

Am I Too Young to Begin Training? How Do I Pay for It?

QUESTION#1

Dear Mr. Machado:

I'm currently confused about something and would like your help. Before I go any further I'd like to tell you that I am currently 15 and very interested in flying.

I have this burning desire to fly, but I will have to wait until I'm 17 to obtain a private pilot license. I am begging my parents for money but they say I'm too young to start my lessons.

Am I really too young to start taking flying lessons now? If not, would you please tell my parents to hand over some cash? I'd really like to start lessons now so I can build time toward an eventual airline transport pilot rating. If my parents won't give me the money, is there anything I can do to help support my flying lessons?

*Thanks,
Wayne*

ANSWER #1

Greetings Wayne:

OK, let's start with an attitude adjustment. I hate to say it, but you seem to be treating your parents like an ATM. Keep in mind that if you push their buttons the wrong way, the only cash you're likely to see is a CD by Johnny Cash. It might help if you acknowledged that this isn't something they OWE you, and that you recognize it's costly and a special commitment on their part to your education.

To make that commitment, they'd have to see that it made sense and that you in turn were really dedicated to it.

It does make sense. As a matter of educational psychology, you're certainly not too young to take flying lessons at 15. After all, it's legal in the U.S. to solo a glider and/or a balloon at 14. If youngsters can solo at this age, you can certainly benefit from taking lessons at 15.

If money weren't an issue, I'd recommend beginning flight training at 15 or even 14 for one basic reason: learning to fly is one of the best educational experiences a youngster can have. In a unique way it helps a person mature very quickly. This is reason enough to start early, in my book.

If your parents are willing to help, you have to think seriously about timing. If you start flying too early, you might be ready for solo long before your 16th birthday, which is the legal minimum. This means you'd typically have to continue with dual instruction or put off your training until you approach your birthday. Some folks wait until they're 16 ½ to begin their flight training. This way, when they've finished their lessons they're nearly 17 and are qualified to take the private pilot exam.

Now is a good time to studying for your written exam, too. A passing score is good for two years. Passing the test will give your parents the confidence that you are serious about this endeavor.

Of course, finding the money to fly is an entirely different story if your parents can't or won't help you pay for flying lessons. So I have a suggestion. Start your own business to help make flying money. Here's an idea. There are many folks who don't have smoke detectors in their homes. You could purchase smoke

detectors in bulk for perhaps \$5 a piece or less, and sell them for \$10 each (or more) installed. Most homes could use at least five good smoke detectors. That nets you a total of \$50 with one installation which would take less than an hour. You earn \$25. The best part is that you'll establish a relationship with your customers and arrange to replace their batteries once every six months for a reasonable fee. Personally, I can't see how this idea could fail, unless the folks in your neighborhood all run around in asbestos leisure suits.

And keep in mind that most flight schools won't let a minor begin flight training without a parental OK, so you really want to stay on your parents' good side in this matter. You could, for example, point out that it's better that you're flying than getting tattoos and nose rings, which is what your friends are probably all doing with their money. This approach might help your parents see the value of your involvement in flying.

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