

Problems With Flight Instructors

Question

Mr. Machado:

.... I began lessons 8 years ago at HPN (Westchester City airport, White Plains, NY) with a real hardnose type [instructor] who owned his own 152 and instructed on the side. We never did a preflight briefing nor did he provide an explanation as to what I would experience during airwork.

If I was high on the approach my instructor would grab the controls and put in a slip (I knew what it was from reading about it but was never shown how to do it). I could go on and on. This guy was a high-timer with some 2000 hours in a 152 and lots of time in a P210 and 310. Schedule and weather allowing, I flew about twice a month but could never understand why I wasn't catching on. I was never told that consistency was key! Some 55 hrs. later spread over a 2 year period, I still had not soloed. My instructor just kept repeating, "This is going to take you a lot of time and money," dropping hints I did not have what it takes. Several times in the plane, perhaps to challenge me, he would say, "I do not think you can do this." He rarely spoke in the plane except to point out my major mistakes.

Our chemistry was bad from the get go. On the third lesson I was told to maintain 80 knots and, being in the mechanical stage of training, had to think whether to raise or lower nose to achieve the airspeed. My instructor repeated it to me and while I was struggling to think. I suppose he figured that I was ignoring his statement. He literally screamed (in an intercom mind you), "I SAID EIGHTY KNOTS!" I froze and everything went downhill from there. At one point I flared very high and dropped it in. He turned to me in a very nasty tone and said "OH wasn't that a surprise," as if I was purposely doing this.

His approach was to learn by doing, not by demonstrating a maneuver first. I was intimidated by his knowledge and the tense atmosphere he created in his plane. Therefore, very little transfer of knowledge ever took place. After five years I cautiously went down to a local part 61 operation and was assigned a young fellow (age 24) who was enthusiastic, supportive and eager to teach. I told him about my previous experience and told him I hoped that learning to fly would not continue to be unpleasant for me.

From the beginning, my new instructor's attitude was that I could do this and that it wasn't hard to do. He made sure I flew consistently and scheduled at least two dual lessons per week. Our chemistry was great from day one and I soloed 21 hrs. later. I've finished three x-country solo trips and am wrapping up the private pilot license. With the right type of instruction I became convinced that I have what it takes to be a good and safe pilot. Why am I writing you all this? Well I have read so many of your articles where you deal with things such as learning plateaus, how to pick a good CFI, and you obviously have a measure of patience and dedication to teaching--an understatement if there was ever one. You are welcome to feature my story to those who have been really discouraged in their primary training or have an instructor whom they suspect they are less than compatible with.

Keep up all the great articles.

T. G.

Answer

Fortunately, there are some very good instructors out there. Unfortunately, you can't tell who they are by their age, sex, appearance or career ambitions. Often, word of mouth is your most reliable means of finding the good ones. That's why I recommend talking to designated flight examiners in attempting to find a competent teacher. After all, examiners see the final product of these instructors. They have a pretty good idea who the good ones are.

Call the local FSDO (Flight Standards District Office) and ask for the names and phone numbers of designated examiners in your area. Make an appointment for a short visit. Ask them to recommend someone fitting your criteria for a good teacher. For instance, tell the examiner that you're looking for a flight instructor who's reliable, patient, thorough and doesn't yell at his or her students. Get two or three names. Then, be prepared for a little gumshoe work. Visit the flight school and talk to the students of these instructors. It may take two or three visits to find out what you need to

know. Who knows, it may even take a month or two. So what? An ancient Chinese saying suggests that it's far better to go looking for a good instructor for three years rather than spend even one hour with a bad one.

Please remember that you are the consumer. You deserve to be treated with respect. Would you tolerate your plumber yelling at you or being sarcastic with you? I don't think so. Yet, we seem so willing to tolerate these behaviors from some flight instructors. It is absolutely NOT NORMAL for a flight instructor to yell at you. The only exception to this is if you're about to do something so wacky that it could get both of you killed. Even then, this is situational specific. If you turned the ignition key off during climbout because the engine noise was disrupting your concentration, you should expect to be yelled at. You should also expect your flight instructor to put a World Wrestling Federation move on you. At other times, yelling, sarcasm, or other signs of disrespect are not normal. Don't tolerate it. If you do, you're teaching that person that it's OK to treat you that way.

There are MANY good instructors out there. Your job? Find them.

Here's another idea that may help.

When you begin flight training make the first three lessons conditional. In other words, tell the instructor that you'll be evaluating your compatibility with him or her during these three lessons. If you like how things are going after three flights, make him or her your permanent instructor. At least this process makes it easier to furlough your instructor if things aren't going well.

Flying is too important to let a bad instructor ruin aviation for you. A good instructor makes all the difference. instructor can jump directly into the lesson with less distraction.

© [Rod Machado](#)