

Accelerated Flight Programs – Do They Work?

Dear Mr. Machado:

I'm having trouble finding a good instrument instructor for my instrument training. I was curious about your opinion of the two-week, accelerated type of instrument training program advertised in many aviation publications. Do you think these programs are worthwhile? Can you really learn to fly instruments in two weeks? What are the drawbacks of this type of training?

Sincerely,

Dr. Thomas

Greetings Doc:

Here's what I think. Over the years I've had a chance to fly with several pilots who've been trained in these accelerated instrument courses. They were, for the most part, all competent and qualified instrument pilots. They were at least as qualified as some of the instrument pilots trained via the traditional method. In fact, when I was doing programs for ABC's Wide World of Flying video series, one of our producers earned his instrument rating at one of these accelerated programs. His training was filmed and became an episode for one of the videos. He passed his checkride and did quite well, by the way.

Do these programs work? Yes, they do. Perhaps the most important reason they do is that they have a reputation for providing highly experienced and competent instructors. I believe that this, above all, is the reason for their success. Nothing is more important than a good instructor. Nothing! This is the best reason to peruse this type of training.

Another reason accelerated programs work is because they rapidly reinforce the skills learned during instrument training. Consolidated training prevents the learning gaps that are common with a traditional instrument education when life intervenes or students run short on funds.

Yes, these programs are a little more expensive. That's because the instructor comes to your hometown to provide the training. It is, however, convenient for those who are too busy to travel. Passing the written is usually a prerequisite for beginning one of these courses.

As far as I can tell there is only one drawback to this type of instrument training. My experience indicates that if they don't fly on instruments right after training, pilots trained in the accelerated method tend to lose confidence a bit faster than those trained in the traditional, longer method. After a month or so of filing IFR flight plans, however, there's not much difference in confidence between those trained in either method. If you're considering accelerated instrument training, then plan on doing enough instrument flying after the fact to keep your confidence level high.

Dear Rod:

I'm in my early 30's and about ready to invest a lot of money in an accelerated flight training program to become a CFI, then eventually an ATP rated pilot.... Do these accelerated programs work? How do I know if I'm making a good investment here? The administrator at this flight school wants me to put a great deal of money down before I begin my flight training. What does your experience tell you about these programs?

Terry

Greetings Terry:

Accelerated flight training programs can and do work, depending on the quality of flight instruction you receive (this is true in unaccelerated programs as well, of course). Here's the most important nugget of knowledge I can give you about this situation. Ask this flight school for referrals to recent graduates (and those who will soon graduate) from exactly the program for which the school is asking you to fork over hard-earned dollars. If the school won't do that, I assume you understand how fast you should run in the opposite direction. If they do provide references, you need to chat with these people to see if the company's performance met or exceeded its promises. The only intelligent way to find out if a company performs as advertised is to look at (or in this case talk to) the product it produces.

Hello Rod:

I have a question involving ground time and cell phones. I recently attended an accelerated flight school and had a very bad experience. Most of my training has been with private CFIs in a one-on-one situation. To get to the point, I just finished my instrument rating by taking a 10 day course. During my tenure there, I was placed with four different instructors! I can understand one or two, but four seemed like a lot. (I was placed with whomever was available at the time). Most of the instructors thought it was OK to stop ground school every 30 minutes, so they could take care of personal affairs on their phones. Do you see this at a lot of schools? I know that phones are very important and a common item, but I was less than impressed. Is it usually trial and error to find a good flight school?

New instrument pilot,

Paul

Greetings Paul:

Unfortunately, these behaviors are all too common. I'm a little surprised to hear that this occurred at a 10-day type instrument training program, where there's typically good management and quality instruction. You'd have a very difficult time trying to convince me that shuttling an instrument student between four different instructors is good for the student. After all, it's not as if management didn't know you were coming for the training (you made a reservation, right?), nor was management confused on how long you might stay (at least 10 days, right?).

It's reasonable to assume that management would instruct the instructors to keep their non-emergency cell phone activity to a minimum and their ringers off during a lesson. A ground training break once every

hour for both student and instructor would provide a sufficient pause to minimize fatigue, return phone calls, drink coffee or recycle it if necessary.

You paid good money for this course and you ended up being disappointed. Consider this. There are some fantastic flight schools out there. Unfortunately, not all flight schools are created equal. Poor (or no) management is nearly always the root cause of the problems these schools have. Since reputation is usually the only way you have of separating the good from the bad, every prospective student would do well to put in a little more time researching different schools first before signing up and handing over their hard-earned money. My suggestion is to talk to as many of the school's previously graduated students as possible to get a feel for that school's ability to put up before signing up.