

Free Flight Training

The most fun I have flying, is landing an airplane. It's the most challenging, requires the highest level of skill and no two landings are the same. To confidently land an airplane you need to do some things "automatically". You need to do them without spending too much time dwelling on any one of them at the expense of ignoring what else is going on. If it's time to pull the power back to 1500 RPM you can't stare at the tachometer trying to adjust the last 100 rpm, at that moment it's more important to hold the nose up and trim for the proper glide speed, you can "tweak" the RPM later.

Landing a plane is a "flow of activity" glancing from one thing to the next, you're multi-tasking, juggling several balls at once. The pilot is dealing with lots of things and some of them have to be dealt with seemingly all at the same time. Making this look easy only comes with practice and repetition, and lots of it. It's sort of true that a good landing is *one you can walk away from and where the plane is reusable*, but we all strive to "paint-it-on" and when we do (which isn't every time), it's a source of pride and satisfaction.

To be competent landing a plane you first have to be confident, and confidence comes from practice. An important part of practice is "**consistently following good procedure**". Repetition is the key. Find a sequence of procedures that work for you and do it the same way every time. If the method you use is a good one and you do it that way every time it will eventually become second nature and you won't have to spend very much *attention-time* repeating it. Then, when something unexpected happens that takes you out of your groove (like extending the downwind leg), the easier it will be to get things back on track.

The first skill you develop learning to fly is to do a pretty good job of flying straight and level. Once you've picked up the visual and sound clues of what straight and level looks and sounds like you can do it pretty well without spending a bunch of time thinking about it. The same is true about flying the pattern and landing the plane.

There's something you can do to practice flying the pattern and making landings, and it's absolutely free.

"Fly an imaginary airplane while sitting in a chair".

This may sound silly, but it actually works. First, write down in detail the process and procedures necessary to fly the pattern and land the plane. Your notes should start with applying full power on takeoff, go through each segment of the pattern and end with a perfect touchdown. Make special note of the speeds for rotate, climb and glide using trim to help hold altitudes and speeds.

A note of caution: In the clubs 172 the trim wheel and manual flap lever are located on the floor and requires leaning over to adjust. When on the takeoff roll shooting touch-and-goes leaning over to set the trim and flaps for the next takeoff can be a problem. When you lean to the right the tendency is to push on the left rudder. I was witness one time of a brand new airplane veering off the runway to the left when the pilot leaned over to the right. The plane flipped over on its back and the pilot was trapped inside the plane upside down. When shooting touch-and-goes in the 172 I've adopted the procedure of lowering the flap handle, but leaving the trim set as is. As I'm preparing for lift off I remind myself to be ready for the nose-up trim pressure and only after I'm off the ground and climbing at a safe

speed do I adjust the trim. This works for me, but however you do it be very aware of directional control on the takeoff roll.

Back to chair flying...

Set up straight in a chair, hold your hands up to the imaginary controls, put your feet on the imaginary rudder pedals and go through each step of the process from take-off to touch-down.

Practice touch and goes. Go through takeoff, crosswind turn, downwind, base, final, and touchdown followed by the go around. **Don't leave anything out**, over dramatize, touch all of the controls, make the radio calls, look for traffic, go through the pre-landing checklist, fly downwind parallel to the runway, etc., (did I mention look for traffic), and as you go around the pattern, say each step out loud. Saying things out loud keeps you focused on each task and keeps you "ahead" of the airplane. Getting "behind" the plane is the most common cause of trouble landing a plane.

There's a practice athletes use, especially golfers, of visualizing a successful outcome to something they're about to do. While you're chair flying visualize you correctly doing things and after "flying a great pattern" hear the tires squeak onto the runway. As silly as this may sound it's actually a recognized valid training method. I was introduced to chair flying by one of the best flight instructors I've had. At one time, and before he was a captain on a 747, he taught the astronauts how to land the space shuttle.