

## In General - Here's How I Do It

I started flying in 1959. I was 19 and paying attention to procedures wasn't very high on my list. If the propeller was going around I was pretty much good to go. About the only thing I really did on preflight was check the oil and drain the sumps, usually letting the fuel fall on the ramp and glancing down to see if I could detect any drops of water. Along the way I worked for a Piper distributor and later a Money dealer and flew many different types of planes, I don't ever remember holding a checklist in my hand, carefully going over each item prior to takeoff.

But, 59 years later things aren't as casual anymore, my instant recall isn't as "instant", my timing isn't as "timely" and my ability to multi-task isn't as "multi". So, I've taken on a much different attitude about it all and have worked to make things more procedural and "by-the-book". I now carefully preflight the plane looking for anything that may be loose or missing, dents or wrinkles in the skin that might indicate a hidden problem, freedom of the controls and the general overall look and feel of it all. When I check the oil I spend a couple of extra moments looking around the engine compartment just to see what I can see. I walk around the plane checking things and when I'm through I get the preflight check list and read every item to make sure I didn't forget something.

I've started doing something that I believe helps keep me focused and reinforces good practices. I talk to myself "out loud". During my business career I occasionally had to give speeches to large groups. I discovered that if I rehearsed the speech out loud things seemed to go better. For some reason hearing yourself say things out loud seems to help you focus and reinforce what you're doing. I've found the same benefit with flying and it's now just part of what I do. Another side benefit is that it lets your passengers know that you're on top of things. This may not be appropriate in all cases, but if you're by yourself, or with friends I think it's a good idea. (Note: it's a great idea when you're with your flight instructor. It lets the instructor know how good a grasp you have of the situation).

I carefully follow the "engine start" checklist and at run-up it's strictly by the book. I hold my finger on each checklist item making sure I don't skip anything and when it says "check flight instruments" I touch each instrument in sequence across the panel making sure it's working correctly and set the way I want. One important item often casually glanced at is the primer knob. When the checklist says "check primer" I pull on the knob to make sure it's completely locked. It isn't obvious by glancing down if the primer is locked and a loose primer can cause a lot of trouble. The time to make sure it's secure is on the ground, not in the air. And, as mentioned, I do all this talking out loud.

When the run-up is done and it's time for takeoff I go over what I need to do next. I make the radio call and remind myself (out loud) of the speeds for rotate and climb, "rotate at 60, climb at 80". Once in the air you may be staying in the pattern or departing the area, but one thing is common, "I start looking for traffic". My first responsibility is flying the plane, but a real close second is "my heads on a swivel looking for traffic".

When heading away from the departure airport there's some important things that require the pilots attention. Monitoring the engine, managing fuel, navigating, radio calls and very importantly, looking for traffic. Tablet computers with software such as ForeFlight can be helpful, but can also be a distraction. If you're up in the air trying to figure out how to operate the software, you're guilty of ignoring something important. I've noticed that it's very easy to spend too much time staring at the

tablet screen rather than monitoring what's going on, maintaining situational awareness and looking for traffic.

Arriving at the destination airport starts a very busy time. Radio calls, getting in the pattern, pre-landing checklist and the always important, looking for traffic are demands on the PIC. As with preflight and engine run-up I believe it's important to follow a pre-landing checklist. I use the "GUMPS" acronym for the clubs 150 and 172 planes I fly. Gas, Undercarriage, Mixture, Props and Seatbelts. I say the words out loud and as I do I touch and look at each item. Just saying the words "Gas - on both" without actually looking at the fuel selector doesn't mean anything. Neither plane I fly has retractable gear, or constant speed prop, so those words don't have any meaning, but I say them anyway and touch a "make believe" control on the panel. This consistency will help when I'm in an airplane with those features.

If I'm staying in the pattern shooting Touch and Goes I still go through the takeoff and landing procedures each time around the patch and I say it all out loud. Doing this helps keep my head in the game and reinforces what needs to be done at each step in the process.

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 operate. 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.

I've come to believe that when flying airplanes taking short cuts is a really bad idea. I highly recommend using checklists, being consistent with procedures and paying attention to everything. I also believe that saying things out loud as you do them is a good tool for keeping your mind involved and reinforcing good practices.

This approach may not be your cup of tea, but it has definitely helped me in my "rusty pilot" comeback after a 50 year layoff.