



## First Flight 2023

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*The Soaring Safety Foundation introduced the First Flight program in 2006 and again reminds you to take your first flight for 2023 with an instructor.*

Whether it's been six months since you've flown a sailplane as the soaring weather fell like the leaves in autumn or you've been able to continue flying all winter long, we strongly encourage you get on the schedule to take your first flight with your local CFGI for the new year.

The professional airline crews, who don't get to take the winter off, go through their recurrent training on at least an annual basis (some more often). Maybe that has something to do with their remarkable safety record. We get to fly much less often than they do with usually much less supervision or observation. Think of it as an annual refresher, a good workout to start the season off right.

Now you may be the Ace of the Base, fly the latest ship, have a diamond badge with 1000K diploma and think to yourself, "Ha! What's this young instructor who's never been beyond gliding distance from home got to show me? Are you willing to be surprised? Think of your instructor as a fellow aviator who's flown with a lot of other pilots at all levels of experience who's willing to devote their full attention to you. Maybe you'll get to share your techniques with them to pass along. As with the airline recurrent training, they can give you some scenarios to fly and watch you perform. Rope break, rock-off, short approach or right hand traffic? It's hard to surprise yourself with a rope break – are you really always ready? Maybe you'll wow them with your amazing airmanship. Maybe though, they'll be able to see some areas that you want to concentrate on. Did you breeze through your checklist without really checking? Did you look around before you released or prioritize the turn back over making sure the airspeed was right on a rope break? Has it been a long time since you boxed the wake – a little unsure to do it on your own? How well do you understand airspace and all of its rules and exceptions – now, what do I need to fly over top of Class C airspace again?

If you didn't complete your Flight Review this last year, this is a good opportunity to get a head start on it. Through the FAA's WINGS Proficiency Program, you can do the flights over time, with different instructors, even at different places. Ask the local CFGI, check the September 2022 issue of Soaring, or visit [faasafety.gov](http://faasafety.gov) to find out more.

They're there for you to help you be as good a pilot as possible. Use them.

Now from the CFGI's point of view. Maybe you're a little unsure of yourself flying with Ace, whom you know to have decades and thousands of hours more glider time than you do. They have that Diamond, and well, you've got a C badge. Don't be intimidated. They've come to you. Observe. The threats to their skills are currency, competency, and complacency. In their mind, their skills are where they were when they last parked the glider months ago. In actuality, those skills might not be quite as hot as they imagine.





Lack of currency in any skill-based endeavor leads to the erosion of those skills. Their logbook will show their exposure.

Competency will show in the degree of precision they fly with. Airspeed, tow position, landing accuracy, etc. Help them identify those areas that need more practice.

I once gave a review to a very-experienced pilot and notice that he tended to chase the airspeed needle instead of setting a pitch attitude and letting the airspeed fall into place, making small adjustments to the pitch attitude as necessary. When I offered that he could improve his flight efficiency by revising his airspeed technique he was happy to hear it.

Complacency will show in their meticulousness. Are they mouthing the words of the checklist, but the canopy remains unlocked?

Share discussions about planning. For example, how does the wind affect your emergency plan? Do you really want to land downwind after a rope break with a 20 knot wind?. At what point does the threat change from not making it back to the airport to going off the other end!

How about a discussion on their favorite bank angle? How does the thermalling bank angle relate to turn radius vs sink rate? Can they share how much V min-sink changes with bank angle at 30° and 45°? What bank angle is going to provide the least altitude loss for a turn back – and what airspeed will that require to do safely? They should know that BEFORE takeoff! The Soaring Magazine Aerodynamics Puzzler articles provide lots of material for discussion topics. I keep a binder of them for easy reference. The new members.ssa.org magazine archive makes it easy to go back and find them all without digging through the garage.

Share the WINGS method of completing a Flight Review (i.e. FAR 61.56 (e)). Ask them what they look for on a Skew-T, maybe you'll be able to learn something from them or maybe you'll be able to share back how to get one and interpret it. Same thing for acquiring weather and determining the status of TFRs and other special use airspace. The FAA's recently changed where to look up Airworthiness Directives (do they know where to find them for their glider now?)

Perhaps you can even make a game out of it. Pull out a sectional and see if you can stump each other. Here's one of my favorites: You're soaring 1000 feet above a mountain that tops out above 10K, what are your cloud clearance requirements?

Try to make it fun and interesting. Maybe you can pre-arrange a rock off with the tow pilot. A set of instrument covers makes for what I call "the airspeed game" – can you fly at (best glide, min sink, approach, etc.) without the airspeed? Take a peak when you think you've got it right. How about a challenge on airspeed accuracy in a 45° bank 360, or an altimeter covered approach to a different point than usual on the runway – to simulate an off airport landing.

Now look forward to Ace telling their other glider buddies what a great time they had and what a good experience it was.

Safe Soaring!



The author is a retired A350 captain/check pilot and active CFIG and flies his own ASG29 (XΔ) at Sky Sailing in Warner Springs, CA. He runs the soaring resources website [TheSoaringPage.com](http://TheSoaringPage.com) his soaring youtube channel ([youtube.com/billpalmer](https://youtube.com/billpalmer)) and has a diamond badge but no 1000 KM diplome (yet!)