

The Positive Flight Review

By Richard Carlson - SSF Chairman

Recurrent training is the hallmark of the professional pilot. Every airline and military pilot is required to undergo some form of recurrent training, typically on an annual basis. This training allows the pilot to refresh those unused skills, things they don't usually practice on a regular basis. Some insurance companies also require pilots flying complex airplanes to take annual recurrent training at an approved flight school.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that all of us lose skills that we don't practice on a regular basis. Those might be decisions making skills or more mechanical skills, things that we successfully demonstrated to a Designated Pilot Examiner when we took our last practical test to obtain our latest rating or certificate.

Decades ago the FAA issued the Flight Review regulation (14 CFR 61.56) to help us get the recurrent training we need to recover any lost skills.

The purpose of the Flight Review is best summarized by the statement “**A review** of those maneuvers and procedures that ... **are necessary** for the pilot to demonstrate the **safe exercise** of the **privileges of the pilot certificate**” [FAR 61.56 (a) (2)]. How you demonstrate this is can be accomplished in several ways.

The method most of us have used is what should be called the classical Flight Review (FR). This is what the rest of paragraphs (a) and (b) cover. Paragraph (a) states that a classical FR consists of a **minimum** of 1 hour of flight training and 1 hour of ground training. Paragraph (a) (1) provides a short list of topics (general operating procedures and the appropriate part 91 flight regulations) that must be covered. Paragraph (a) (2) gives the Flight Instructor the latitude to focus on those maneuvers the pilot has not practiced in the past 24 calendar months. Paragraph (b) allows a glider pilot to substitute a **minimum** of 3 flights for the **minimum** of 1 hour of flight time.

It is important to note that the times or flights are a minimum, and based on how rusty your skills are it may take more to successfully complete this classical FR. If you don't fly, or practice all the maneuvers you were trained to, do on a regular basis, then you should expect it will take more than the minimum to complete your FR.

Paragraph (c) describes the maximum length of time a FR is valid stating “**Except as provided in** paragraphs (d), (e), and (g), no person may act as pilot in command of an aircraft unless, since the beginning of the 24th calendar month before the month in which the pilot acts as pilot in command that person has:

1. Accomplished a flight review given in an aircraft for which that pilot is rated by an authorized instructor and
2. A logbook endorsement from an authorized instructor who gave the review certifying that the person has satisfactorily completed the review.”

Note that lead part of that sentence, “Except as provided in ...”. This means that sub-paragraphs (1) and (2) only apply to what this article is describing as a classical FR.

If there is a classical FR, then that implies that there are alternate methods that a pilot can use to accomplish the FR. The rest of the paragraphs in 61.56 describe these alternate methods and note that 1 category of pilot is exempt from the FR and another category is exempt from the ground training requirement.

Paragraph (d) begins to describe the alternate methods of compliance. Sub-paragraph (1) states that completing “a pilot proficiency check or practical test conducted by an examiner, an approved pilot check airman, or a U.S. Armed Force, for a pilot certificate, rating, or operating privilege” does not need to take a [classical] FR. This means that an airline pilot or military pilot completing their annual recurrent training will also have the date of their FR reset to 24 calendar months in the future. It also means that once you get a new rating or certificate (become a private pilot or add a SEL rating to your glider private pilot certificate) then your FR date is reset to 24 calendar months in the future.

Sub-paragraph (d) (2) was added to clarify that obtaining, adding an additional, or renewing a flight instructor certificate may, in some cases, also qualify as an alternate means of compliance and reset your FR renewal date. The CFI renew must include both ground and flight activities to qualify as a FR.

Paragraph (e) describes another alternate means of compliance. It states “A person who has ... satisfactory accomplished one or more phases of an FAA-sponsored pilot proficiency award program **need not accomplish the flight review** required by this section”. Unpacking this paragraph some results in the following:

- The only current FAA-sponsored pilot proficiency award program is the WINGS program.
- A phase of WINGS is accomplished by completing 3 ground activities (courses, seminars, webinars) and 3 flight activities (a preset group of specific tasks listed in the appropriate glider Practical Test Standard (PTS) document).
- Flight activities can be spread out over weeks or months (though they must all fall within a 12 calendar month period).
- Flight activities can be done in multiple aircraft (glider, airplane, helicopter) and each flight could be with a different instructor.
- Completing a phase of WINGS resets your FR renewal date.
- Any pilot (student to ATP) can participate in the WINGS program and complete a phase of WINGS.
- Begin by creating an account on the FAA Safety web site (<https://www.faasafety.gov>) and explore the site. (A future article will cover the WINGS program for the glider pilot in more detail).

Paragraph (f) provides a partial exemption for the flight instructor. It states that a flight instructor who has renewed that certificate using a FAA approved course “need not accomplish the one hour of ground training specified in paragraph (a)”. So taking a 16 hour FAA approved course substitutes for the 1 hour of ground training specified as part of the classical FR.

Paragraph (g) provides the other exemption stating “A student pilot need not accomplish the flight review required by this section provided the student pilot is undergoing training for a certificate and has a current solo flight endorsement as required under 61.87 of this part”. This allows the student pilot to solo even though he/she does not have a FR endorsement.

Paragraph (h) allows the pilot to use FR flights to comply with any currency requirements described in FAR 61.57.

Paragraph (I) describes how a pilot can use an approved flight simulator or flight training device to accomplish the flight portion of the FR. Note there are no approved flight simulators or flight training devices that can substitute for flights in a glider.

Now that we've covered the regulations, let's briefly discuss what this means.

The Flight Review is **not a test**. You **cannot fail!** That said, it may take more than the minimums as described in paragraph (a) and you should be prepared for that especially if you haven't been practicing all the maneuvers you were trained to accomplish. When was the last time you did a stall series? What about slow flight, or boxed the wake on tow? These were all things you were proficient at, and the FR is your chance to demonstrate those skills and refresh any that are weak.

You should come prepared to the FR. You can do this by evaluating your current flying activities and identify any maneuvers that you have not been practicing on a regular basis. Sit down and review your log book and the appropriate PTS before you contact your instructor. Give yourself plenty of lead time to complete everything before your current FR expires.

Strongly consider using the WINGS program and work to obtain a new WINGS phase instead of doing a classical FR. This can greatly reduce the stress and it will also provide you with a specific set of flight tasks that you can prepare for and complete over the course of several months.

Bottom line, treat the FR requirement as it was intended. Your opportunity to refresh any skills that have deteriorated over time. Doing this will make for a much better experience for both you and your instructor.