



## **Four simple steps to improve your Proficiency**

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Most pilots will agree that being proficient is much more desirable than simply being current. The major question these pilots ask is, how can I become proficient?

There are four simple steps that you can take to become this proficient pilot. (1) Ground school with an instructor to build the mental model for what the glider should be doing. (2) Self practice on the various normal and emergency procedures that allow you to complete the maneuver. (3) Flight practice with an instructor. (4) Continued solo practice with self critiques to demand good performance.

Before beginning any training program your first task is to establish firm goals and evaluation criteria to know if you have reached these goals. If the task is difficult, then consider breaking it into a series of smaller steps, with well established intermediate goals that can be used to measure your progress. The next step is to determine what outside help you need to begin this training. Remember the first rule of any instruction is that the practice session should not be more dangerous than a real emergency.

Let's imagine that you want to improve your landing skills. In particular you're just not happy with your crosswind landings. You haven't broken anything, yet, but you just can't seem to grease it on when there's a crosswind blowing. Here's an outline that you can take to your instructor to help flesh out the specific tasks and establish how to improve your flying enjoyment.

In order to make good crosswind landings you need to be able to make good normal landings. So we will concentrate on the using the 4 simple proficiency steps to help you make better normal landings. You can then work with your instructor to develop the 4 step process for improving your crosswind landings.

Step 1) Start by getting out of the glider and sit down with your instructor and walk through the landing steps. In order to make a good landing you need to have a good mental picture of where the glider is and where it is going. You also need to have a good mental model for what to do when external factors interfere with your current plan. Ground instruction can help work out things like, when do you start planning the approach, on downwind or when you are ½ mile away and are heading back to the gliderport. The earlier you can start the planning the easier it will be to execute this plan, and the easier it will be to notice when things start going astray and you need to switch to plan B.

One of the fundamental skills needed to make good landings is the ability to judge when angles change. Note that we don't say you need to judge if you are approaching at a specific angle, that skill will come later with practice. Right now all you need to do is notice when the angle starts to change. On downwind leg look down at your intended landing spot and notice the angle. While flying the downwind leg maneuver the glider to keep the angle constant. If the angle starts getting steeper, smoothly start opening the spoilers or stop drifting toward the runway. Move your ground track or open the spoilers just enough to stop the angle from changing. If the angle is getting flatter, smoothly start closing the spoilers, or stop drifting away from the runway. Move your ground track or close the spoilers just enough to stop the angle from changing. Keeping the angle constant will allow you to easily reach your intended landing spot. Talk to your instructor for more details on why maintaining a constant is so important to making good landings.

Discuss also things like determining the appropriate pattern/landing speed for the current conditions, how the wind will effect your ground track, how to deal with other traffic, and emergency procedures. Also discuss the use of the BGA's diagonal leg that allows you to 'cut the corner' between downwind and base.

Step 2) Once you have been through this ground training with your instructor, continue it on your own. At home or anytime you have a few free minutes, sit down and imagine you are trying to land and build the mental model for what the glider will do during this approach. Throw some curves at yourself too, so imaging what you would do if someone pulled another glider out onto the runway while you were on short final, on base leg, on downwind, and so on. Always remember that one option is to pick another spot and modify your approach to land at that new spot. If you can't think up reasonable options, talk to your instructor.

Step 3) Now that you can build a good mental model of the landing pattern and deal with unusual situations, its time to start getting some in-flight practice. Go out to the glider with your instructor and cover the altimeter and airspeed indicator. Your going to practice the constant angle method described above so reduce the distractions that the instruments provide. Then with your instructor, make a few pattern tows and see how easy it is to land successfully when you watch the descent angle.

Step 4) Continue practicing this angle method on every landing. While you probably wouldn't try covering up the instruments for every landing, learn to keep your eyes outside the cockpit and watch the angle. If you find yourself looking at the instruments, then go back to step 3 and continue practicing no instrument approaches with your instructor. The more you do them, the less you will feel the need to look at your instruments when flying solo.

Continuously critique your own performance. If you find that you are unable to consistently make good landings, then don't simply accept or rationalize this. Go back and repeat all 4 steps. Examine how you are handling step 2 of this proficiency process. Lack of mental preparation and practice will adversely affect your in-flight performance.

Follow these 4 steps and soon you too will be known as that proficient pilot that everyone wants to emulate.