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Volume 1

Aviation Maintenance Technician Handbook–Airframe, Volume 1

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Aviation Maintenance Technician Handbook—Airframe

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Volume Contents

Preface

The Aviation Maintenance Technician Handbook—Airframe (FAA-H-8083-31A) is one of a series of three handbooks for persons preparing for certification as an airframe or powerplant mechanic. It is intended that this handbook provide the basic information on principles, fundamentals, and technical procedures in the subject matter areas relating to the airframe rating. It is designed to aid students enrolled in a formal course of instruction, as well as the individual who is studying on his or her own. Since the knowledge requirements for the airframe and powerplant ratings closely parallel each other in some subject areas, the chapters which discuss fire protection systems and electrical systems contain some material which is also duplicated in the Aviation Maintenance Technician Handbook—Powerplant (FAA-H-8083-32A).

This volume contains information on airframe construction features, assembly and rigging, fabric covering, structural repairs, and aircraft welding. The handbook also contains an explanation of the units that make up the various airframe systems. Because there are so many different types of aircraft in use today, it is reasonable to expect that differences exist in airframe components and systems. To avoid undue repetition, the practice of using representative systems and units is carried out throughout the handbook. Subject matter treatment is from a generalized point of view and should be supplemented by reference to manufacturer's manuals or other textbooks if more detail is desired. This handbook is not intended to replace, substitute for, or supersede official regulations or the manufacturer's instructions. Occasionally the word "must" or similar language is used where the desired action is deemed critical. The use of such language is not intended to add to, interpret, or relieve a duty imposed by Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR).

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The subject of Human Factors is contained in the Aviation Maintenance Technician Handbook—General (FAA-H-8083-30).

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Comments regarding this publication should be sent, in email form, to the following address:

AFS630comments@faa.gov

Rick Domingo
Executive Director, Flight Standards Service

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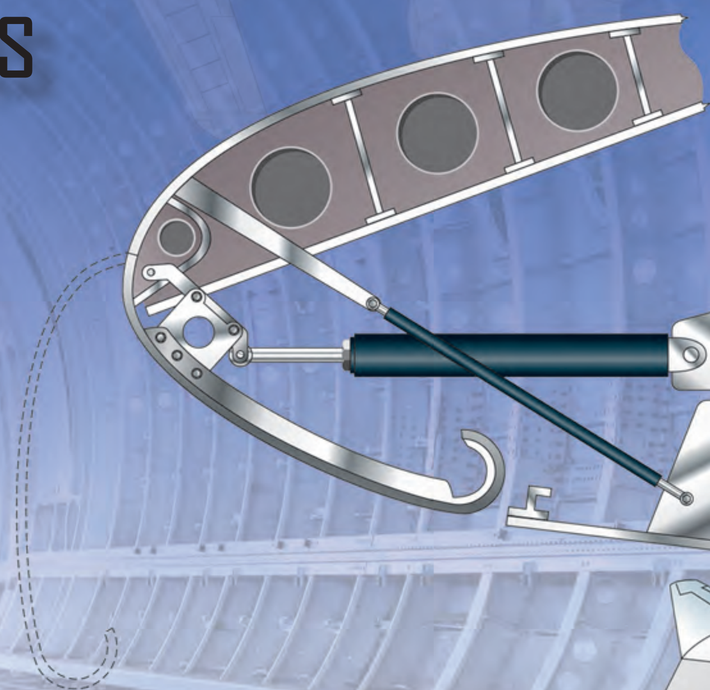
Chapter 9

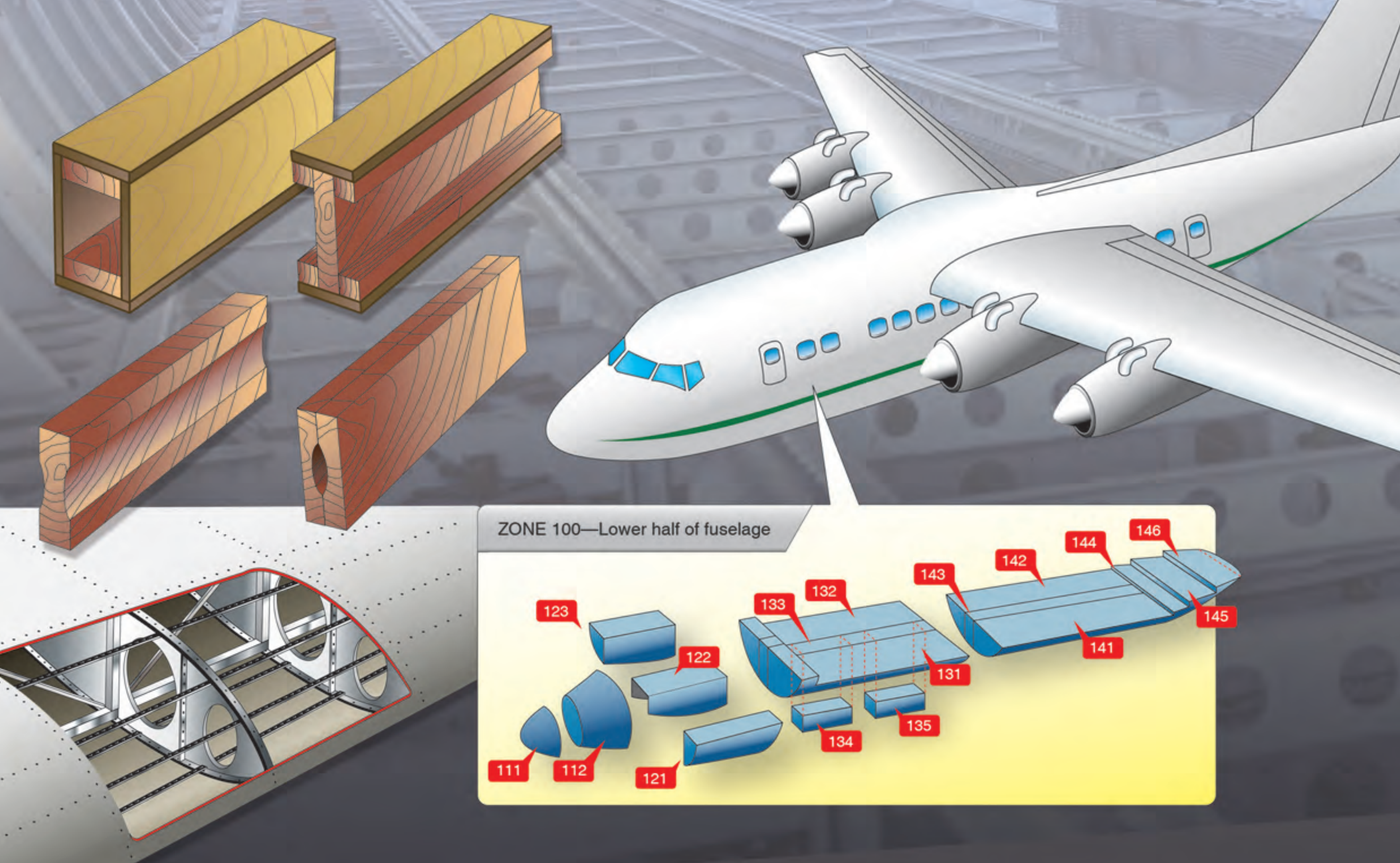
Aircraft Structures

A Brief History of Aircraft Structures

The history of aircraft structures underlies the history of aviation in general. Advances in materials and processes used to construct aircraft have led to their evolution from simple wood truss structures to the sleek aerodynamic flying machines of today. Combined with continuous powerplant development, the structures of "flying machines" have changed significantly.

The key discovery that "lift" could be created by passing air over the top of a curved surface set the development of fixed and rotary-wing aircraft in motion. George Cayley developed an efficient cambered airfoil in the early 1800s, as well as successful manned gliders later in that century. He established the principles of flight, including the existence of lift, weight, thrust, and drag. It was Cayley who first stacked wings and created a tri-wing glider that flew a man in 1853.





Earlier, Cayley studied the center of gravity of flying machines, as well as the effects of wing dihedral. Furthermore, he pioneered directional control of aircraft by including the earliest form of a rudder on his gliders. *[Figure 1-1]*

In the late 1800s, Otto Lilienthal built upon Cayley's discoveries. He manufactured and flew his own gliders on over 2,000 flights. His willow and cloth aircraft had wings designed from extensive study of the wings of birds. Lilienthal also made standard use of vertical and horizontal fins behind the wings and pilot station. Above all, Lilienthal proved that man could fly. *[Figure 1-2]*

Octave Chanute, a retired railroad and bridge engineer, was active in aviation during the 1890s. *[Figure 1-3]* His interest was so great that, among other things, he published a definitive work called "Progress in Flying Machines." This was the culmination of his effort to gather and study all the information available on aviation. With the assistance of others, he built gliders similar to Lilienthal's and then his own. In addition to his publication, Chanute advanced aircraft structure development by building a glider with stacked wings incorporating the use of wires as wing supports.

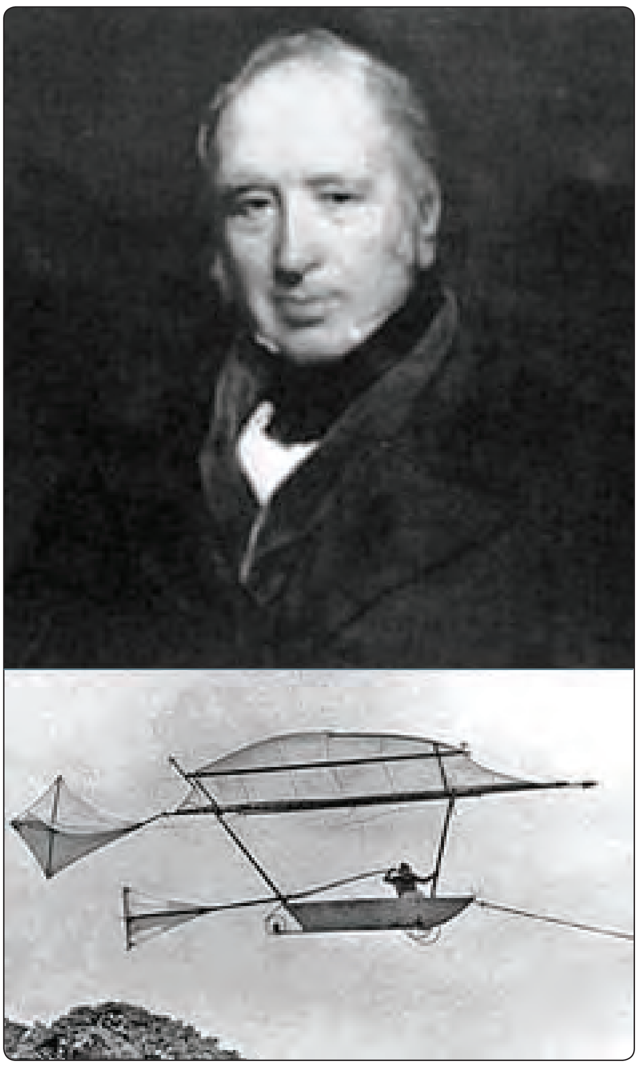


Figure 1-1. *George Cayley, the father of aeronautics (top) and a flying replica of his 1853 glider (bottom).*

Figure 1-2. *Master of gliding and wing study, Otto Lilienthal (top) and one of his more than 2,000 glider flights (bottom)*

The work of all of these men was known to the Wright Brothers when they built their successful, powered airplane in 1903. The first of its kind to carry a man aloft, the Wright Flyer had thin, cloth-covered wings attached to what was primarily truss structures made of wood. The wings contained forward and rear spars and were supported with both struts and wires. Stacked wings (two sets) were also part of the Wright Flyer. *[Figure 1-4]*

Figure 1-3. *Octave Chanute gathered and published all of the aeronautical knowledge known to date in the late 1890s. Many early aviators benefited from this knowledge.*

Powered heavier-than-air aviation grew from the Wright design. Inventors and fledgling aviators began building their own aircraft. Early on, many were similar to that constructed by the Wrights using wood and fabric with wires and struts to support the wing structure. In 1909, Frenchman Louis Bleriot produced an aircraft with notable design differences. He built a successful mono-wing aircraft. The wings were still supported by wires, but a mast extending above the fuselage enabled the wings to be supported from above, as well as underneath. This made possible the extended wing length needed to lift an aircraft with a single set of wings. Bleriot used a Pratt truss-type fuselage frame. *[Figure 1-5]*

Figure 1-5. *The world's first mono-wing by Louis Bleriot.*

More powerful engines were developed, and airframe structures changed to take advantage of the benefits. As early as 1910, German Hugo Junkers was able to build an aircraft with metal truss construction and metal skin due to the availability of stronger powerplants to thrust the plane forward and into the sky. The use of metal instead of wood for the primary structure eliminated the need for external wing braces and wires. His J-1 also had a single set of wings (a monoplane) instead of a stacked set. *[Figure 1-6]*

Figure 1-4. *The Wright Flyer was the first successful powered aircraft. It was made primarily of wood and fabric.*

Figure 1-6. *The Junker J-1 all metal construction in 1910.*

Leading up to World War I (WWI), stronger engines also allowed designers to develop thicker wings with stronger spars. Wire wing bracing was no longer needed. Flatter, lower wing surfaces on high-camber wings created more lift. WWI expanded the need for large quantities of reliable aircraft. Used mostly for reconnaissance, stacked-wing tail draggers with wood and metal truss frames with mostly fabric skin dominated the wartime sky. *[Figure 1-7]* The Red Baron's Fokker DR-1 was typical.

In the 1920s, the use of metal in aircraft construction increased. Fuselages able to carry cargo and passengers were developed. The early flying boats with their hull-type construction from the shipbuilding industry provided the blueprints for semimonocoque construction of fuselages. *[Figure 1-8]* Truss-type designs faded. A tendency toward cleaner mono-wing designs prevailed.

Into the 1930s, all-metal aircraft accompanied new lighter and more powerful engines. Larger semimonocoque fuselages were complimented with stress-skin wing designs. Fewer truss and fabric aircraft were built. World War II (WWII) brought about a myriad of aircraft designs using all metal technology. Deep fuel-carrying wings were the norm, but the desire for higher flight speeds prompted the development of thin-winged aircraft in which fuel was carried in the fuselage. The first composite structure aircraft, the De Havilland Mosquito, used a balsa wood sandwich material in the construction of the fuselage. *[Figure 1-9]* The fiberglass radome was also developed during this period.

Figure 1-7. *World War I aircraft were typically stacked-wing fabric-covered aircraft like this Breguet 14 (circa 1917).*

After WWII, the development of turbine engines led to higher altitude flight. The need for pressurized aircraft pervaded aviation. Semimonocoque construction needed to be made even stronger as a result. Refinements to the all-metal semimonocoque fuselage structure were made to increase strength and combat metal fatigue caused by the pressurization-depressurization cycle. Rounded window and door openings were developed to avoid weak areas where cracks could form. Integrally machined copper alloy aluminum skin resisted cracking and allowed thicker skin and controlled tapering. Chemical milling of wing skin structures provided great strength and smooth high-

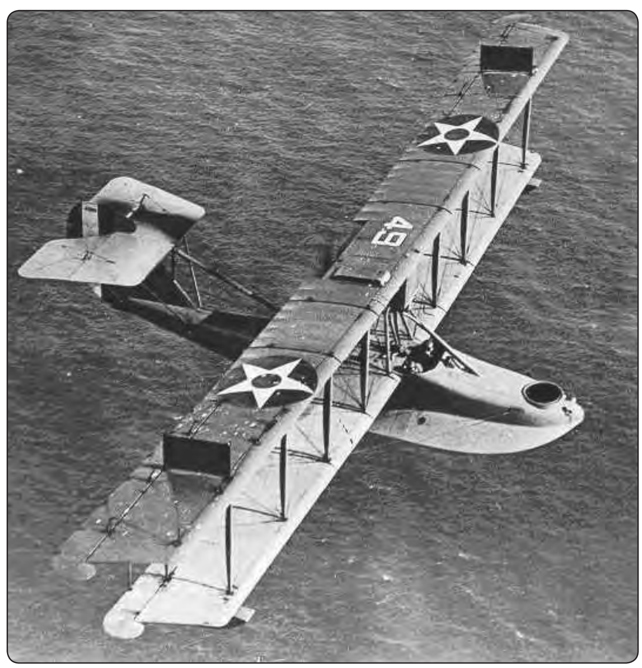


Figure 1-8. *The flying boat hull was an early semimonocoque design like this Curtiss HS-2L.*

Figure 1-9. *The De Havilland Mosquito used a laminated wood construction with a balsa wood core in the fuselage.*

Figure 1-10. *The nearly all composite Cessna Citation Mustang very light jet (VLJ).*

performance surfaces. Variable contour wings became easier to construct. Increases in flight speed accompanying jet travel brought about the need for thinner wings. Wing loading also increased greatly. Multispar and box beam wing designs were developed in response.

In the 1960s, ever larger aircraft were developed to carry passengers. As engine technology improved, the jumbo jet was engineered and built. Still primarily aluminum with a semimonocoque fuselage, the sheer size of the airliners of the day initiated a search for lighter and stronger materials from which to build them. The use of honeycomb constructed panels in Boeing's airline series saved weight while not compromising strength. Initially, aluminum core with aluminum or fiberglass skin sandwich panels were used on wing panels, flight control surfaces, cabin floor boards, and other applications.

A steady increase in the use of honeycomb and foam core sandwich components and a wide variety of composite materials characterizes the state of aviation structures from the 1970s to the present. Advanced techniques and material combinations have resulted in a gradual shift from aluminum to carbon fiber and other strong, lightweight materials. These new materials are engineered to meet specific performance requirements for various components on the aircraft. Many airframe structures are made of more than 50 percent advanced composites, with some airframes approaching 100 percent. The term "very light jet" (VLJ) has come to describe a new generation of jet aircraft made almost entirely of advanced composite materials. *[Figure 1-10]* It is possible that noncomposite aluminum aircraft structures will become obsolete as did the methods and materials of construction used by Cayley, Lilienthal, and the Wright Brothers.

General

An aircraft is a device that is used for, or is intended to be used for, flight in the air. Major categories of aircraft are airplane, rotorcraft, glider, and lighter-than-air vehicles. *[Figure 1-11]* Each of these may be divided further by major distinguishing features of the aircraft, such as airships and balloons. Both are lighter-than-air aircraft but have differentiating features and are operated differently.

The concentration of this handbook is on the airframe of aircraft; specifically, the fuselage, booms, nacelles, cowlings, fairings, airfoil surfaces, and landing gear. Also included are the various accessories and controls that accompany these structures. Note that the rotors of a helicopter are considered part of the airframe since they are actually rotating wings. By contrast, propellers and rotating airfoils of an engine on an airplane are not considered part of the airframe.

The most common aircraft is the fixed-wing aircraft. As the name implies, the wings on this type of flying machine are attached to the fuselage and are not intended to move independently in a fashion that results in the creation of lift. One, two, or three sets of wings have all been successfully utilized. *[Figure 1-12]* Rotary-wing aircraft such as helicopters are also widespread. This handbook discusses features and maintenance aspects common to both fixed-wing and rotary-wing categories of aircraft. Also, in certain cases, explanations focus on information specific to only one or the other. Glider airframes are very similar to fixed-wing aircraft. Unless otherwise noted, maintenance practices described for fixed-wing aircraft also apply to gliders. The same is true for lighter-than-air aircraft, although thorough

Figure 1-11. *Examples of different categories of aircraft, clockwise from top left: lighter-than-air, glider, rotorcraft, and airplane.*

Figure 1-12. *A monoplane (top), biplane (middle), and tri-wing aircraft (bottom).*

coverage of the unique airframe structures and maintenance practices for lighter-than-air flying machines is not included in this handbook.

The airframe of a fixed-wing aircraft consists of five principal units: the fuselage, wings, stabilizers, flight control surfaces, and landing gear. *[Figure 1-13]* Helicopter airframes consist of the fuselage, main rotor and related gearbox, tail rotor (on helicopters with a single main rotor), and the landing gear.

Airframe structural components are constructed from a wide variety of materials. The earliest aircraft were constructed primarily of wood. Steel tubing and the most common material, aluminum, followed. Many newly certified aircraft are built from molded composite materials, such as carbon fiber. Structural members of an aircraft's fuselage include stringers, longerons, ribs, bulkheads, and more. The main structural member in a wing is called the wing spar.

The skin of aircraft can also be made from a variety of materials, ranging from impregnated fabric to plywood, aluminum, or composites. Under the skin and attached to the structural fuselage are the many components that support airframe function. The entire airframe and its components are joined by rivets, bolts, screws, and other fasteners. Welding, adhesives, and special bonding techniques are also used.

Major Structural Stresses

Aircraft structural members are designed to carry a load or to resist stress. In designing an aircraft, every square inch of wing and fuselage, every rib, spar, and even each metal fitting must be considered in relation to the physical characteristics of the material of which it is made. Every part of the aircraft must be planned to carry the load to be imposed upon it.

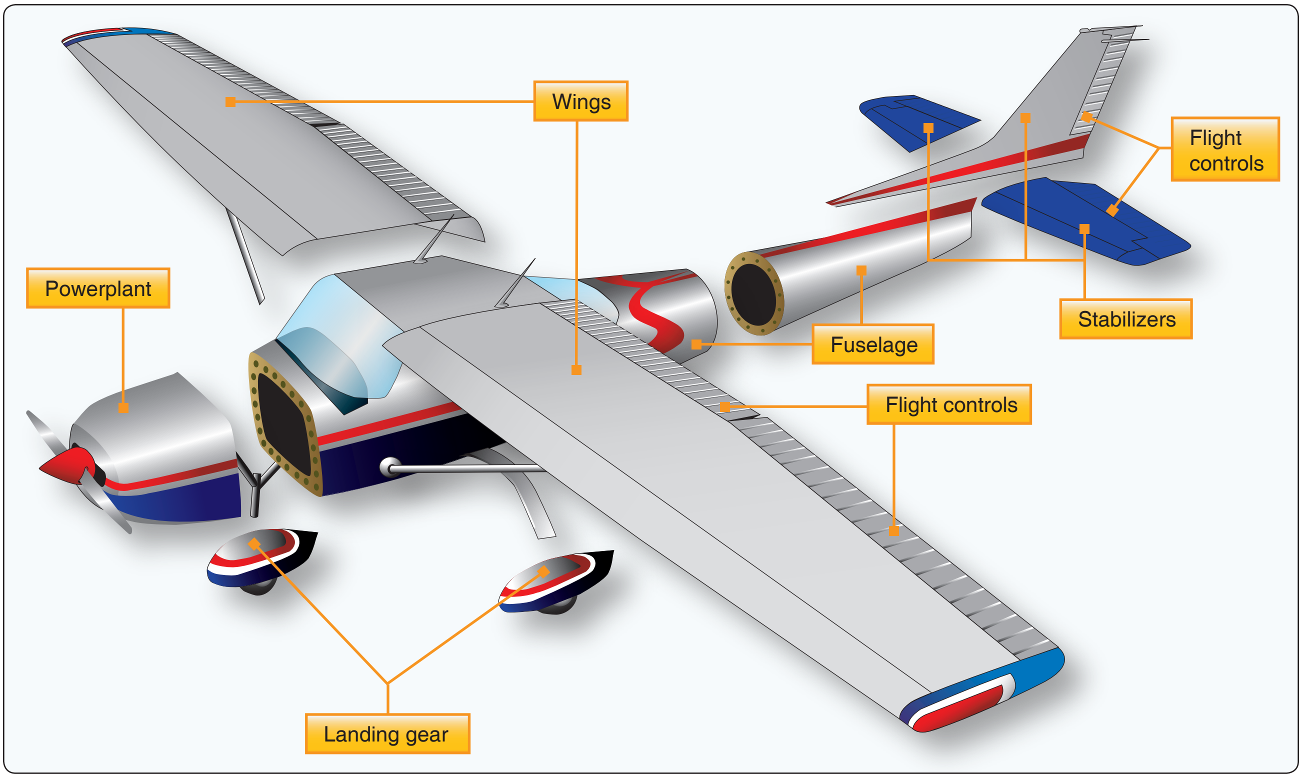


Figure 1-13. *Principal airframe units.*

The determination of such loads is called stress analysis. Although planning the design is not the function of the aircraft technician, it is, nevertheless, important that the technician understand and appreciate the stresses involved in order to avoid changes in the original design through improper repairs.

The term "stress" is often used interchangeably with the word "strain." While related, they are not the same thing. External loads or forces cause stress. Stress is a material's internal resistance, or counterforce, that opposes deformation. The degree of deformation of a material is strain. When a material is subjected to a load or force, that material is deformed, regardless of how strong the material is or how light the load is.

There are five major stresses *[Figure 1-14]* to which all aircraft are subjected:

- Tension
- Compression
- Torsion
- Shear
- Bending

Tension is the stress that resists a force that tends to pull something apart. *[Figure 1-14A]* The engine pulls the aircraft forward, but air resistance tries to hold it back. The result is tension, which stretches the aircraft. The tensile strength of a material is measured in pounds per square inch (psi) and is calculated by dividing the load (in pounds) required to pull the material apart by its cross-sectional area (in square inches).

Compression is the stress that resists a crushing force. *[Figure 1-14B]* The compressive strength of a material is also measured in psi. Compression is the stress that tends to shorten or squeeze aircraft parts.

Torsion is the stress that produces twisting. *[Figure 1-14C]* While moving the aircraft forward, the engine also tends to twist it to one side, but other aircraft components hold it on course. Thus, torsion is created. The torsion strength of a material is its resistance to twisting or torque.

Shear is the stress that resists the force tending to cause one layer of a material to slide over an adjacent layer. *[Figure 1-14D]* Two riveted plates in tension subject the rivets to a shearing force. Usually, the shearing strength of a material is either equal to or less than its tensile or compressive strength. Aircraft parts, especially screws, bolts, and rivets, are often subject to a shearing force.

Bending stress is a combination of compression and tension. The rod in *Figure 1-14E* has been shortened (compressed) on

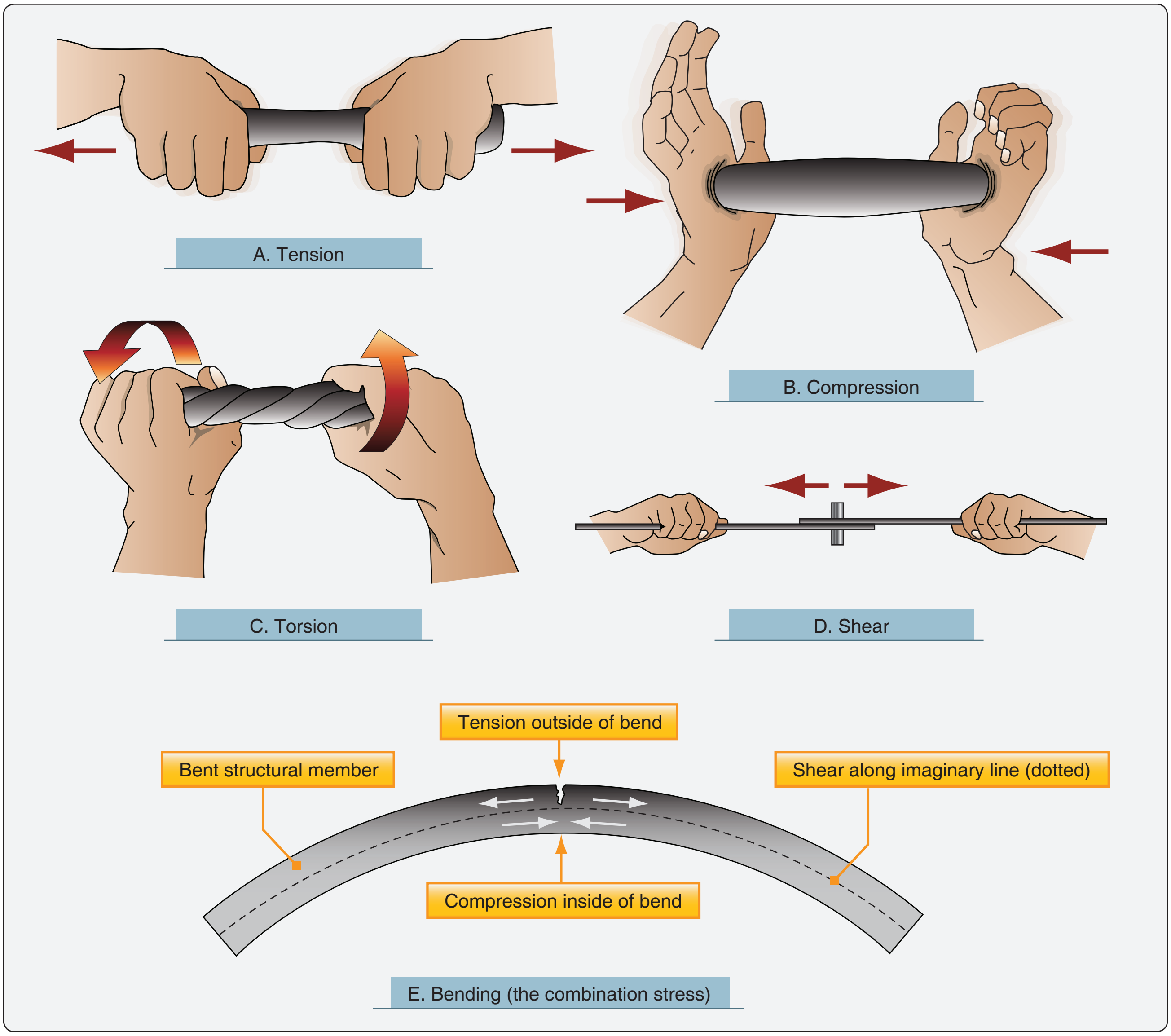


Figure 1-14. *The five stresses that may act on an aircraft and its parts.*

the inside of the bend and stretched on the outside of the bend. A single member of the structure may be subjected to a combination of stresses. In most cases, the structural members are designed to carry end loads rather than side loads. They are designed to be subjected to tension or compression rather than bending.

Strength or resistance to the external loads imposed during operation may be the principal requirement in certain structures. However, there are numerous other characteristics in addition to designing to control the five major stresses that engineers must consider. For example, cowling, fairings, and similar parts may not be subject to significant loads requiring a high degree of strength. However, these parts must have streamlined shapes to meet aerodynamic requirements, such as reducing drag or directing airflow.

Fixed-Wing Aircraft

Fuselage

The fuselage is the main structure or body of the fixed-wing aircraft. It provides space for cargo, controls, accessories, passengers, and other equipment. In single-engine aircraft, the fuselage houses the powerplant. In multiengine aircraft, the engines may be either in the fuselage, attached to the fuselage, or suspended from the wing structure. There are two general types of fuselage construction: truss and monocoque.

Truss-Type

A truss is a rigid framework made up of members, such as beams, struts, and bars to resist deformation by applied loads. The truss-framed fuselage is generally covered with fabric. The truss-type fuselage frame is usually constructed of steel tubing welded together in such a manner that all members of the truss can carry both tension and compression loads. *[Figure 1-15]* In some aircraft, principally the light, single-engine models, truss fuselage frames may be constructed of aluminum alloy and may be riveted or bolted into one piece, with cross-bracing achieved by using solid rods or tubes.

Monocoque Type

The monocoque (single shell) fuselage relies largely on the strength of the skin or covering to carry the primary loads. The design may be divided into two classes:

1. Monocoque
2. Semimonocoque

Different portions of the same fuselage may belong to either of the two classes, but most modern aircraft are considered to be of semimonocoque type construction.

The true monocoque construction uses formers, frame assemblies, and bulkheads to give shape to the fuselage. *[Figure 1-16]* The heaviest of these structural members are located at intervals to carry concentrated loads and at points where fittings are used to attach other units such as wings, powerplants, and stabilizers. Since no other bracing members are present, the skin must carry the primary stresses and keep the fuselage rigid. Thus, the biggest problem involved in monocoque construction is maintaining enough strength while keeping the weight within allowable limits.

Semimonocoque Type

To overcome the strength/weight problem of monocoque construction, a modification called semimonocoque construction was developed. It also consists of frame assemblies, bulkheads, and formers as used in the monocoque design but, additionally, the skin is reinforced by longitudinal members called longerons. Longerons usually extend across several frame members and help the skin support primary bending loads. They are typically made of aluminum alloy either of a single piece or a built-up construction.

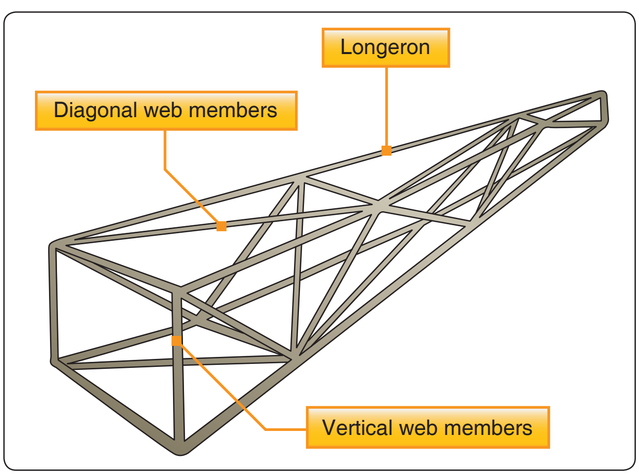


Figure 1-15. *A truss-type fuselage. A Warren truss uses mostly diagonal bracing.*

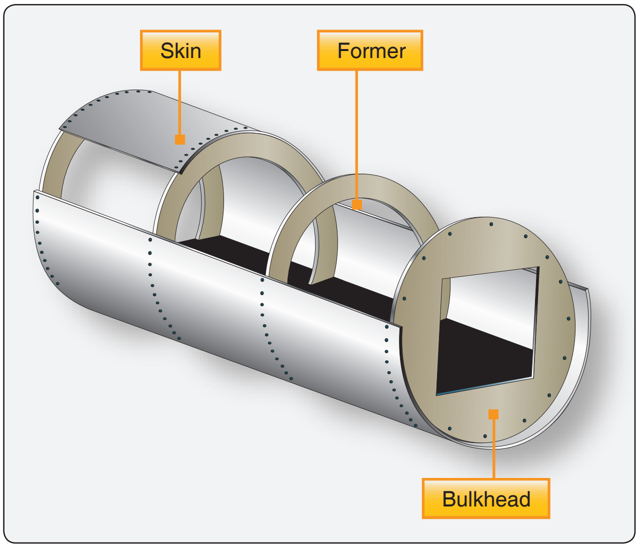


Figure 1-16. *An airframe using monocoque construction.*

Stringers are also used in the semimonocoque fuselage. These longitudinal members are typically more numerous and lighter in weight than the longerons. They come in a variety of shapes and are usually made from single piece aluminum alloy extrusions or formed aluminum. Stringers have some rigidity but are chiefly used for giving shape and for attachment of the skin. Stringers and longerons together prevent tension and compression from bending the fuselage. *[Figure 1-17]*

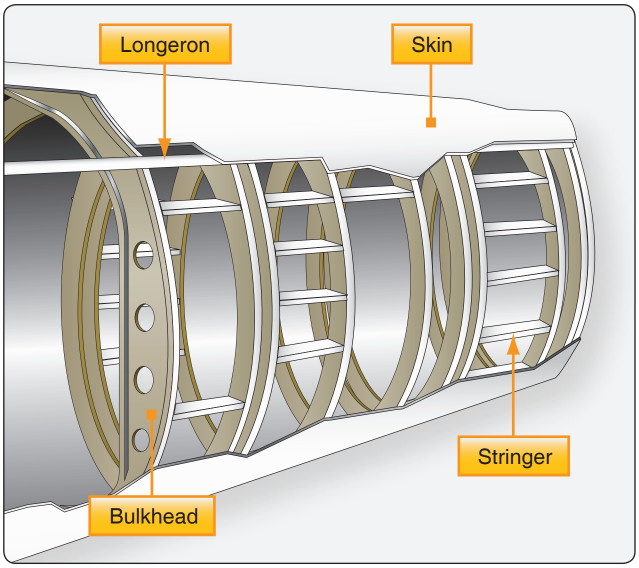


Figure 1-17. *The most common airframe construction is semimonocoque.*

Other bracing between the longerons and stringers can also be used. Often referred to as web members, these additional support pieces may be installed vertically or diagonally. It must be noted that manufacturers use different nomenclature to describe structural members. For example, there is often little difference between some rings, frames, and formers. One manufacturer may call the same type of brace a ring or a frame. Manufacturer instructions and specifications for a specific aircraft are the best guides.

The semimonocoque fuselage is constructed primarily of alloys of aluminum and magnesium, although steel and titanium are sometimes found in areas of high temperatures. Individually, not one of the aforementioned components is strong enough to carry the loads imposed during flight and landing. But, when combined, those components form a strong, rigid framework. This is accomplished with gussets, rivets, nuts and bolts, screws, and even friction stir welding. A gusset is a type of connection bracket that adds strength. *[Figure 1-18]*

To summarize, in semimonocoque fuselages, the strong, heavy longerons hold the bulkheads and formers, and these, in turn, hold the stringers, braces, web members, etc. All are designed to be attached together and to the skin to achieve the full-strength benefits of semimonocoque design. It is important to recognize that the metal skin or covering carries part of the load. The fuselage skin thickness can vary with the load carried and the stresses sustained at a particular location.

The advantages of the semimonocoque fuselage are many. The bulkheads, frames, stringers, and longerons facilitate the design and construction of a streamlined fuselage that is both rigid and strong. Spreading loads among these structures and the skin means no single piece is failure critical. This means that a semimonocoque fuselage, because of its stressed-skin construction, may withstand considerable damage and still be strong enough to hold together.

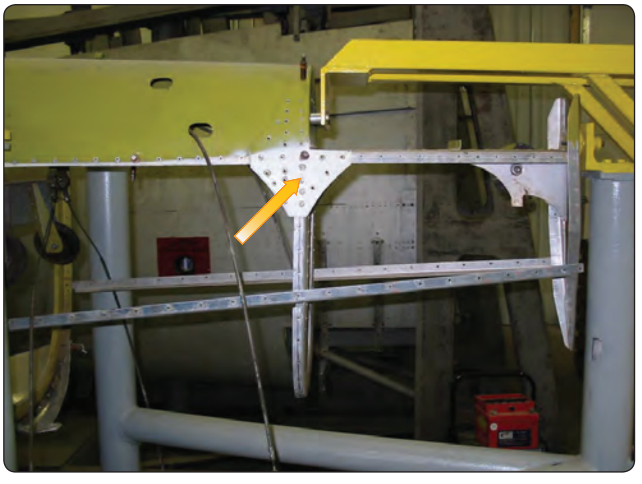


Figure 1-18. *Gussets are used to increase strength.*

Fuselages are generally constructed in two or more sections. On small aircraft, they are generally made in two or three sections, while larger aircraft may be made up of as many as six sections or more before being assembled.

Pressurization

Many aircraft are pressurized. This means that air is pumped into the cabin after takeoff and a difference in pressure between the air inside the cabin and the air outside the cabin is established. This differential is regulated and maintained. In this manner, enough oxygen is made available for passengers to breathe normally and move around the cabin without special equipment at high altitudes.

Pressurization causes significant stress on the fuselage structure and adds to the complexity of design. In addition to withstanding the difference in pressure between the air inside and outside the cabin, cycling from unpressurized to pressurized and back again each flight causes metal fatigue. To deal with these impacts and the other stresses of flight, nearly all pressurized aircraft are semimonocoque in design. Pressurized fuselage structures undergo extensive periodic inspections to ensure that any damage is discovered and repaired. Repeated weakness or failure in an area of structure may require that section of the fuselage be modified or redesigned.

Wings

Wing Configurations

Wings are airfoils that, when moved rapidly through the air, create lift. They are built in many shapes and sizes. Wing design can vary to provide certain desirable flight characteristics. Control at various operating speeds, the amount of lift generated, balance, and stability all change as the shape of the wing is altered. Both the leading edge and the trailing edge of the wing may be straight or curved, or one edge may be straight and the other curved. One or both edges may be tapered so that the wing is narrower at the tip than at the root where it joins the fuselage. The wing tip may be square, rounded, or even pointed. *Figure 1-19* shows a number of typical wing leading and trailing edge shapes.

The wings of an aircraft can be attached to the fuselage at the top, mid-fuselage, or at the bottom. They may extend perpendicular to the horizontal plane of the fuselage or can angle up or down slightly. This angle is known as the wing dihedral. The dihedral angle affects the lateral stability of the aircraft. *Figure 1-20* shows some common wing attach points and dihedral angle.

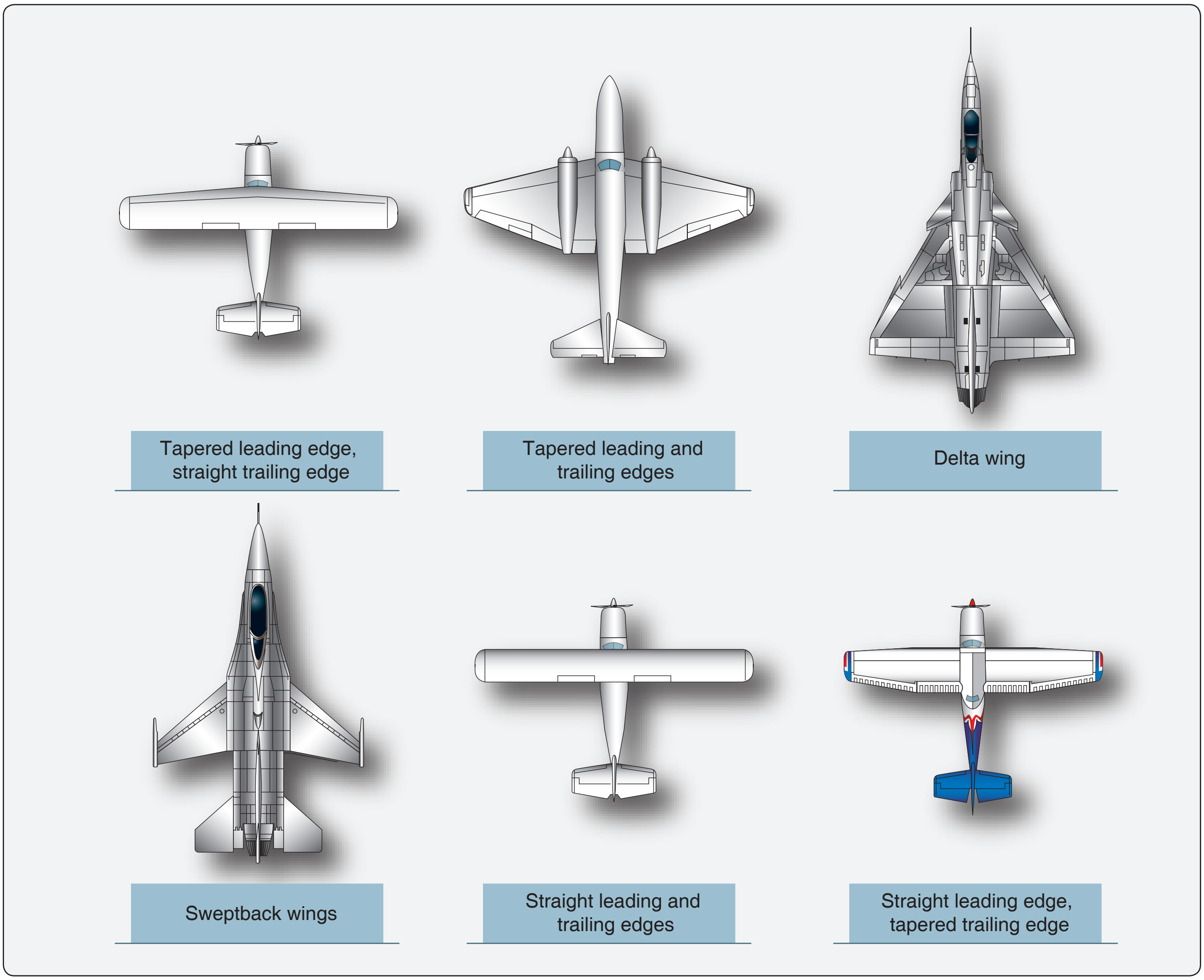


Figure 1-19. *Various wing design shapes yield different performance.*

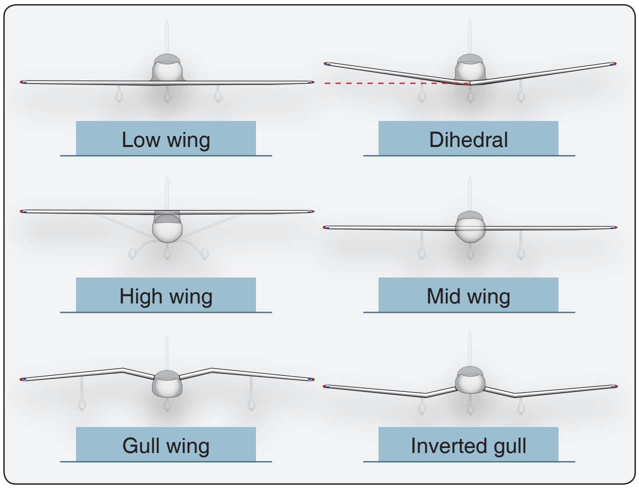


Figure 1-20. *Wing attach points and wing dihedrals.*

Wing Structure

The wings of an aircraft are designed to lift it into the air. Their particular design for any given aircraft depends on a number of factors, such as size, weight, use of the aircraft, desired speed in flight and at landing, and desired rate of climb. The wings of aircraft are designated left and right, corresponding to the left and right sides of the operator when seated in the cockpit. *[Figure 1-21]*

Often wings are of full cantilever design. This means they are built so that no external bracing is needed. They are supported internally by structural members assisted by the skin of the aircraft. Other aircraft wings use external struts or wires to assist in supporting the wing and carrying the aerodynamic and landing loads. Wing support cables and struts are generally made from steel. Many struts and their

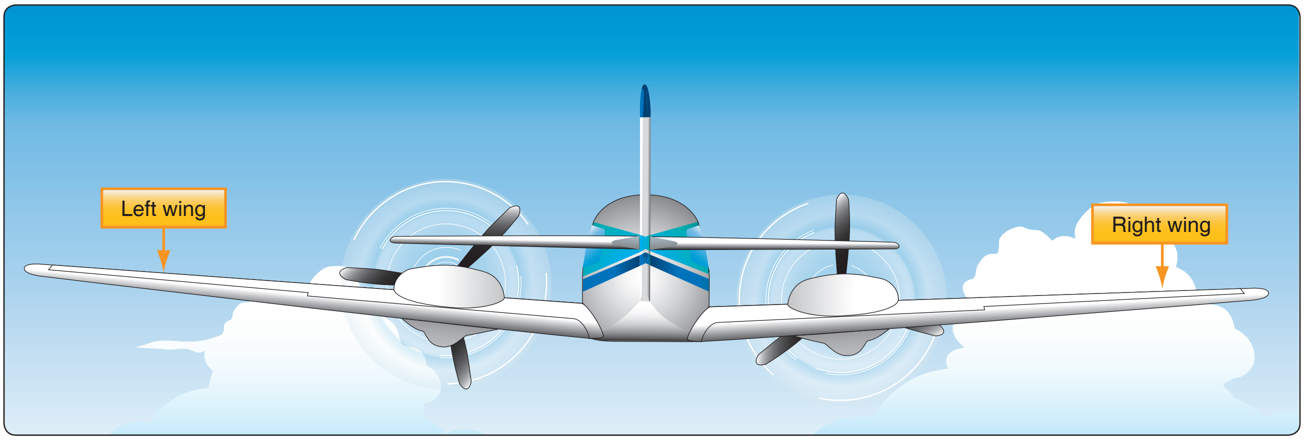


Figure 1-21. *"Left" and "right" on an aircraft are oriented to the perspective of a pilot sitting in the cockpit.*

attach fittings have fairings to reduce drag. Short, nearly vertical supports called jury struts are found on struts that attach to the wings a great distance from the fuselage. This serves to subdue strut movement and oscillation caused by the air flowing around the strut in flight. *Figure 1-22* shows samples of wings using external bracing, also known as semicantilever wings. Cantilever wings built with no external bracing are also shown.

Aluminum is the most common material from which to construct wings, but they can be wood covered with fabric, and occasionally a magnesium alloy has been used. Moreover, modern aircraft are tending toward lighter and stronger materials throughout the airframe and in wing construction. Wings made entirely of carbon fiber or other composite materials exist, as well as wings made of a combination of materials for maximum strength to weight performance.

The internal structures of most wings are made up of spars and stringers running spanwise and ribs and formers or bulkheads running chordwise (leading edge to trailing edge). The spars are the principle structural members of a wing. They support all distributed loads, as well as concentrated weights such as the fuselage, landing gear, and engines. The skin, which is attached to the wing structure, carries part of the loads imposed during flight. It also transfers the stresses to the wing ribs. The ribs, in turn, transfer the loads to the wing spars. *[Figure 1-23]*

In general, wing construction is based on one of three fundamental designs:

1. Monospar
2. Multispar
3. Box beam

Modification of these basic designs may be adopted by various manufacturers.

The monospar wing incorporates only one main spanwise or longitudinal member in its construction. Ribs or bulkheads

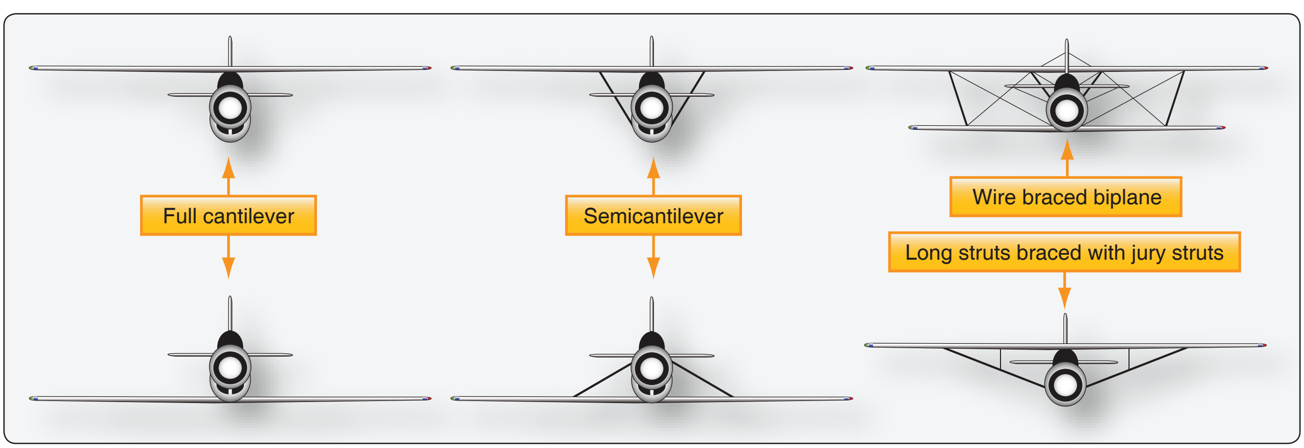


Figure 1-22. *Externally braced wings, also called semicantilever wings, have wires or struts to support the wing. Full cantilever wings have no external bracing and are supported internally.*