



*The*  
**Savvy**  
—FLIGHT—  
INSTRUCTOR  
*Secrets*  
*of the*  
**Successful CFI**

**GREGORY N. BROWN**

SECOND EDITION

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by Gregory N. Brown

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The engine is the heart of an aeroplane,  
but the pilot is its soul.

Sir Walter Raleigh  
*The War in the Air*, 1922

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## Preface

to the Second Edition

The regulations and the *Aeronautical Information Manual* rest battle-worn on your shelf, and you've finally wrapped up one of the toughest orals of your flying career. You're sharp on the fundamentals of instruction, and can identify every student personality type. You can now fly and talk at the same time, all from the right seat. You can write lesson plans in your sleep, enter mysterious endorsements in student logbooks, and actually explain the finer points of a lazy eight. That's everything you'll ever need to know in order to flight instruct...no more questions, right? Just get on with the instructing, and finally you can get paid to fly.

Yeah, right! Like being all dressed up with no place to go, as the saying goes. This book is designed to help with all those "other" flight instructing questions, like why and how to become a CFI in the first place, and how to get your first instructing job. Where do flight students come from? And once you've got them, how do you keep them flying? How can you optimize your students' pass rate on checkrides? And how do you get flight customers to come back to you for their advanced ratings?

Along with tips on how to attract and retain flight students, we'll examine professionalism in flight instructing. In short, how to use your instructing activities to increase student satisfaction, promote general aviation, and advance your personal flying career all at the same time.

Among the challenges of writing a book about flight instructing is the tremendous diversity of our profession and businesses. Practitioners of our art range from freelance flight instructors to small flight schools, to university degree programs and large private flight academies. Specialties run the gamut from primary flight training

of pleasure fliers, to airline instructors and everything in between: tailwheel endorsements, glider and seaplane ratings, aerobatics, and type ratings. Ours is a vocation and an industry where the exception truly is the rule.

Yet over the years I've learned that despite widely differing management requirements between providers, the marketing, customer service, and delivery of training on the flight line "where the boots hit the ground" must by nature remain remarkably similar.

Therefore, while occasional parts of this book may be outside the direct activities of any one reader, instructors of all flight-training backgrounds should find value in every chapter when it comes to professionalism, customer satisfaction, and business success by applying its central themes, methods, and philosophy.

### **What's New in this Second Edition**

New in this edition are nearly 20 years of additional wisdom, experience, and know-how. While this edition retains the key marketing, pilot training, and customer support concepts that made the original edition required CFI reading, those areas have been refined and expanded to incorporate the latest industry philosophies and techniques. The intro-flight chapter, for example, has been extensively updated to include the latest guidance on how best to sell today's prospects on flying.

The single biggest development since writing the first edition is the advent of online marketing and social media, the effective use of which is thoroughly detailed throughout this book. Sure, our flight training sales messages and customer service objectives have evolved, but not nearly as much as the technology for delivering them. Our greatest current marketing challenge is to offer our services with the sophistication of other competitive activities beckoning from just a click away on our customers' computers and mobile devices.

In this edition there is a new dedicated section addressing aspiring flight instructors, including why and how to qualify, and how to get hired once you earn the certificate. There's extensive new coverage of techniques for systematizing customer success and satisfaction policies, strategies for pricing and structuring flight training to fit today's market, integration of affordable simulation technologies into your training programs, and tips for coping with the "CFI shortage."

For those wanting to delve deeper, I've called upon five highly qualified contributors to share their specific expertise as "*Finer Points*" in this new edition. Learn how today's flight training innovators promote their services and serve their customers in **Heather Baldwin's** case-studies chapter. For guidelines on crafting effective customer

service policies, learn how flight school owner and marketing guru **Dorothy Schick** puts customers first. Longtime DPE **Jason Blair** shares insights on checkrides and CFI specialization opportunities. Ever wonder how the big academy and collegiate pro-pilot programs operate so efficiently, and what can be learned from them? Then don't miss **Ben Eichelberger's** flight training standardization chapter. And no one is better qualified to project future flight training trends than renowned aviation writer and editor **Ian Twombly**.

There is also a new place online to continue exploring many of the materials referred to in the new edition: The ASA website has a special page dedicated to "Reader Resources" for this book. These will be indicated throughout by the following symbol:

 **Reader Resources** [asa2fly.com/reader/sfi](http://asa2fly.com/reader/sfi)

Go to the corresponding web address to find additional reading, helpful articles and further examples of the social media tips, flight instructing stories and teaching aids discussed here—there is even a bonus article called "*Greg's Pilot Training Tips*" that you can download from that webpage.

In short, this second edition of *The Savvy Flight Instructor* retains all the qualities that made the first edition so valuable to CFIs and flight schools, plus a whole lot of important new material you won't want to miss!

## Acknowledgments

I am grateful to many people for their help and inspiration during development of both editions of *The Savvy Flight Instructor*. Ours is a diverse and complex activity, and there are as many good approaches to its practice as there are instructors, so one never stops learning.

For this new edition, I enlisted the help of several noteworthy contributors. Many thanks to Heather Baldwin, Jason Blair, Ben Eichelberger, Dorothy Schick, and Ian Twombly for delivering dedicated chapters to broaden and deepen the book. In addition, Dorothy contributed examples of her exceptional TakeWING flight-training promotional materials along with marketing expertise. A special thank-you to Jason Blair for contributing additional valuable insights on numerous topics, and offering encouragement and motivation along the way.

Thanks to Ed Bryce, William Woodbury, and Manny Peralta for contributing valuable sidebar material, to Bruce Williams for sharing flight-simulator expertise, Dr. Mike Wiggins regarding Cognitive Information Processing Theory, Mark Harris for his guidance on sales techniques and software, and to Kelly Gibbs for transcription.

DeAndre Jamison, Jim Pitman, Richard Jackson, and the fine crew at Galt Airport shared their wisdom as subjects of magazine articles incorporated into this book, while others who contributed quotes and anecdotes are recognized in the text.

I've enjoyed the privilege of writing for numerous flight-training professional publications. Miscellaneous content appearing in this book originated in articles I wrote for *Flight Training* magazine, *Flight School Business News*, *NAFI Mentor*, the *Be A Pilot Newsletter*, *Aviation for Women*, and *Smithsonian Air & Space*. Editors Tom Haines, Ian Twombly, Scott Spangler, and Pat Luebke in particular have been instrumental in nurturing my material and writing voice.

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My appreciation goes out to the many fine people over my career who through their professionalism have directly or indirectly influenced my philosophy and performance as a flight instructor. Among them are Fred Gibbs, Jason Blair, Jim Pitman, Rod Machado, Keith Lamb, Ed Bryce, Gene Bishop, Laurel and Tom Lippert, Tom Carney, Shane LoSasso, Terry Harshbarger, Margaret Statzell, Mitch Grundman, Rory Higman, Greg Roberts, Alan Altman, Bob Vetter, Doug Rossman, and Mary-Ellen Clinkingbeard.

A special word of thanks to all the instructors and flight students who have taught and inspired me over the years, through both good example and bad. I deeply hope to have contributed at least a small fraction to your success in aviation, especially when compared with all I've gained in return. Thanks to every one of you!

Most importantly, thanks to all of you flight training professionals who have invested in *The Savvy Flight Instructor* to advance the successes of your students and careers since the first edition came out in 1997. May you find this new edition even more relevant and fulfilling than the last one.

*Greg Brown*



## Introduction: Welcome to a Very Special Club

*H*ave you ever thought about your good fortune to become a flight instructor? Consider the great thrills of your life. For most of us, those first flying lessons rank high on the list. None of us forgets the flight instructors who gave us the foundation of a truly unique career.

As instructors, each of us owns the special opportunity, and earns the special thrill that comes from introducing our students to the joys of piloting. Sure, instructing has its problems. It's a lot of work; the pay is rarely anything to brag about, and we're not always as well recognized in the industry as perhaps we should be.

Yet I challenge you to find many pilots who've ever instructed and now regret the experience. Instructing is truly at the heart of aviation. From the grassroots of new student starts all the way up to pilot competency checks on a jetliner, instructors are the spark plugs (igniters, for you turbine pilots) that make aviation "go."

### **More than Just Passing Through...**

If you're like many pilots, you regard instructing as a necessary waypoint along your route to a flying career. Just passing through, you might say. But if you're going to earn the respect it takes to attract students to invest their hard-earned money with you, your instructing career must be more than just passing through.

What you teach tomorrow in a Cessna, a Cirrus, a Piper, or a Diamond may very well impact the safety of tens of thousands of passengers over the lifetimes of your students. Next time you meet someone who's been flying for many years, ask about that pilot's long-ago instructors. Then ask about the occasions when the faces and words of those past teachers have reappeared to help that pilot at critical moments.

It was my fourth or fifth lesson, some 45 years ago. My instructor Bob, and I were practicing stalls.

“Keep the ball in the middle,” Bob urged me repeatedly. Somehow the strength of a young college kid just didn’t seem enough to center that little circle at the bottom of the turn coordinator.

Suddenly the horizon started flopping...seemed like the nose of our little Cessna 150 was plummeting straight into a spinning Earth. After the first long moments of panic I looked over at Bob. I can see him clearly to this day sitting in the right seat, his arms calmly crossed as we spun out of control.

“Bobbbbb!” I yelled. Bob slowly turned his head and looked at me.

“Well, what’re you gonna do about it?” he asked, with an air of total calm.

“I don’t *knooooooooow!!!*”

“We’re in a spin, right?” came the measured reply. “How do you get out of a spin?” Not the hint of a wrinkle disturbed his brow.

I was too scared to think or answer.

“Nose down, and opposite rudder,” Bob told me. In fact I think he said that three or four times. Bob never did touch the controls, nor even uncross his arms. I made the recovery myself, armed with his advice. It was one of my earliest lessons, but since that day I’ve never doubted my ability to identify and escape a spin. More wisdom from Bob to a new VFR pilot: “Never fly into weather you can’t see through.”

I haven’t spoken with Bob in years, though his words still periodically materialize in my head to guide or admonish me. He left the flight school shortly after I finished my Private Pilot Certificate, reportedly to enter seminary. (I’ve always hoped that flying with me wasn’t the reason he “got religion.”)

I now know that my first experience with spins probably wasn’t much different than yours or anyone else’s. I seriously doubt that Bob would remember me if I ran into him tomorrow. Yet, he looms large in my memory.

I learned some important things from him about both piloting and instructing that remain with me in a big way today. I suspect that you feel the same way about your first instructor.

Other instructors later taught me their own tricks and secrets of flying. Their faces, too, appear to me at appropriate times: instrument and multi-engine flying, descent planning in jets; motivating students, dealing with weather, contending with emergencies.

Now put yourself in that flight instructor's seat. As a CFI you own the greatest independence, and in some respects the greatest responsibility you will experience in your flying career. Your opportunities to promote aviation and impact flight safety are tremendous.

The details of the specific lesson you give tomorrow will not likely stay with you for long. Your full schedule over the next few weeks will probably erase it. But your student will remember what happens at tomorrow's lesson in great detail. If you do a good job, you'll set the tone for at least one other pilot's safe and smart operations for many years to come. That's professionalism—whether you instruct only for the next six months, or for the next forty years.

As a flight instructor, I want to be remembered for the right reasons after tomorrow's lesson, and I'll bet you feel the same way. In one sense, we're the ones who make airplanes fly. In every sense, we're the ones who make pilots fly. Welcome to a very special club!





BECOME  
A FLIGHT  
INSTRUCTOR!



## One

### Opportunity Knocking: Be a Flight Instructor

*W*anted—enthusiastic, knowledgeable pilots for part-time, full-time, or freelance professional flying. Lots of fun and adventure, highly respected position, and great learning experience. Age no factor. Travel as much (or as little) as you like. Get paid to fly!”

#### **Me? An Instructor?**

Do you enjoy teaching and encouraging people? Get your kicks recruiting others to aviation? Would a full- or part-time flying job interest you? How about owning your own flying business?

If your answer was yes to any of these questions, you should consider becoming a flight instructor. Opportunities are growing for a new generation of pro CFIs. You know, folks like us who delight in sharing the joy of flight. Aviators who’d love a professional flying career, but don’t necessarily want to live life on the road. And those who delight in professional piloting even while sustaining other full-time careers. Here’s why becoming a flight instructor is a worthy mission for *you* to pursue.

First, the old adage, “the best way to master a subject is to teach it,” is most certainly true. As an active CFI your knowledge and flight proficiency will rapidly exceed your greatest expectations. By teaching others you will truly learn to fly as a pro.

Next comes the reward of setting goals and achieving them. Many of us find ourselves sitting at home on a given day, thinking, “Gee, I wish there was a reason to go flying today.” Well, there is! Start working toward that CFI and you’ve got a meaningful personal and professional objective to justify the time, effort, and investment in continuing regular flying.

Then there's the contribution to be made to the aviation community. Not only do CFIs impact the safety and proficiency of pilots they train, but they're critically important in recruiting new blood to aviation. The vast majority of new pilots sign up through the direct or indirect efforts of active CFIs. Want to increase the number of pilots while lowering flying costs? We need your help carrying the flag!

Perhaps best of all, here's your opportunity to become an honest-to-goodness pro pilot, even if airline or corporate flying doesn't fit your plans. Almost every aviator harbors dreams of flying professionally. But for various reasons—age, family, and lifestyle considerations, success in another occupation—only so many people are in position to pursue, say, the captain's seat in a Boeing, or a Learjet. Well, here's your opportunity to fly professionally under schedule and conditions more or less of your own choosing, and get paid to do it.

### **What Does it Take to Qualify?**

"Hold on," you say, "becoming a CFI takes years of study, and thousands of flight hours, right?"

Not at all! With dedication and concentrated effort, one can become a competent CFI with less than 300 total logged flight hours. After earning your Private Pilot certificate, it takes only three more steps to become a primary flight instructor: an Instrument rating, the Commercial Pilot certificate, and then the Flight Instructor certificate itself. That's certainly not a long path.

Regulations allow new Private Pilots to begin training for the instrument rating as soon as they like. Earning your Instrument rating is roughly comparable in effort and hours to earning your Private Pilot certificate. (All CFI applicants must be instrument rated, even if they never plan to fly IFR. However, instrument proficiency need not be demonstrated on the CFI-Airplane Knowledge or Practical Tests.) As with the Private certificate, FAA Knowledge (written) and Practical (oral and flight) Tests are required. But once earning your instrument rating, the advance to flight instructor can be rapid.

For your Commercial Pilot Certificate you'll need from 190 to 250 hours total flight experience by checkride time, depending on the nature of your training, including some minimum cross-country and pilot-in-command (PIC) time. Commercial training itself goes quickly compared to the Private or Instrument—often achievable in fifteen hours or less. Again there are Knowledge and Practical tests to pass, and then you're ready to pursue your Flight Instructor Certificate.

There are no minimum training or aeronautical experience requirements for the Flight Instructor certificate itself, but it will probably take you fifteen to twenty flight hours to earn, plus a good deal of ground instruction. Along with Knowledge and

Practical Tests there is an additional FAA written addressing, “Fundamentals of Instruction.” (Qualified school and university teachers can often bypass this “FOI” test.)

The oral portion of the CFI Practical Test is notoriously challenging, but what’s covered there is largely material you’ve seen before. Keep sharp on your Private and Commercial Pilot knowledge, and you’ll have little trouble mastering the CFI tests. Of course teaching technique is an important component of the tests, too. If there’s one certificate where you should seek out a truly outstanding flight instructor to learn from, it’s the CFI.

**Flight instructors fall into the most favorable medical status of almost any professional pilot. Only a third-class medical certificate is required, so if you qualify physically to be a student pilot, you can instruct. What’s more, some instruction can even be conducted without a medical.**

Finally, there’s no age limit for flight instructors except that you must be eighteen to earn your Commercial and therefore CFI Certificates. This is one activity where experience and maturity are valued. You’re a sixty-year-old student pilot? Fine! Move right along and earn your CFI!

### **How Quickly Can I Become an Instructor?**

Now for a few tips to speed you along.

Many people don’t realize how easily they can become Basic Ground Instructors—teaching ground school and signing off applicants for their written Knowledge tests. Just pass two FAA written tests and head over to the nearest FAA Flight Standards District Office (FSDO) to collect your certificate. You don’t even have to be a Private Pilot to qualify! Not only will teaching ground school help pay for your flying, but it’s great preparation for flight instructing, and may allow you to deduct some flight training expenses from your taxes.

Speaking of written tests, the airplane-category Knowledge Tests are nearly identical for Commercial Pilot, Flight Instructor, and Advanced Ground Instructor. Study for one and knock off all three at once! (Instrument rating, Instrument Flight Instructor, and Instrument Ground Instructor Knowledge Tests are also similar to each other.)

For those who plan to knock off their Commercial and CFI certificates in short order, here’s a little trick to accelerate your progress. After completing the very similar Commercial and Flight Instructor-Airplane writtens, arrange with your CFI and pilot examiner to train for and take your Commercial Pilot Practical Test from the right seat. That way your right-seat flying skills will already be nailed when you dive into CFI training—could save you five or even ten hours of training.

## **What Should I Expect in Flight Instructor Training?**

In training for your flight instructor Practical Test, you will first master flying all private and commercial maneuvers from the right seat (if you haven't already).

Next, you will learn to write and apply lesson plans to teach every required Private and Commercial maneuver both on the ground and aloft, along with key aeronautical knowledge subjects. Through this process, you'll get the opportunity to review the required knowledge for each subject area in the course of teaching it. So other than keeping sharp on your flying and aeronautical knowledge, and becoming familiar with the FAA's *Aviation Instructor Handbook*, there is little additional preparation required to start flight instructor training.

You've likely heard that the initial pass rate for first-time flight instructor applicants is lower than for other pilot certificates and ratings. One reason is that there's little room for laxity. As a CFI you'll impact the safety of others outside your own cockpit, and habits you teach will inform other pilots' operations far into the future.

Also, for the first time you must demonstrate the ability to effectively explain concepts to others, in addition to mastering them yourself. Therefore, applicants who have experience teaching literally anything in- or outside aviation are more likely to pass the first time. This can benefit older CFI applicants, for example, who most often have educated others in the course of life experience.

Here are two preparation tips to increase your chances of passing the CFI checkride on your first attempt. First, volunteer to assist student pilots with their ground school training, either by teaching topics to an organized ground school class (preferred), or through private mentoring. This will not only reinforce your knowledge of the material, but will help you organize your thoughts into logical presentation techniques.

Finally, shortly before taking the Practical Test, I encourage all first-time CFI applicants teach at least one "real lesson." Find a friend or relative interested in becoming a pilot, schedule an airplane, and teach him or her an entire first lesson including ground briefing, preflight, first flight lesson, and debrief. Of course you can't charge for this lesson or log it as dual, but your experience in teaching it will be invaluable in sensitizing you to the teaching level required by your students, and will thereby help prepare you to satisfy the examiner or FAA inspector conducting your checkride.

### **What Are the Privileges and Benefits of Being a CFI?**

Your initial Flight Instructor certificate will authorize you to train Private and Commercial pilots, give Flight Reviews, Wings Program training, and various other endorsements. (Imagine, you giving flight reviews!) You'll also qualify for many other duties including intro flights, aircraft and renter checkouts.

Additional instructor ratings, such as instrument, multiengine, and other aircraft categories like glider and helicopter, are easy to add if you have journeyman skills in the ratings sought.

