



**STEVE KROG**  
COMMENTARY / THE CLASSIC INSTRUCTOR

# What Are We Not Teaching Student Pilots Today?

Part 1  
BY STEVE KROG

I HAVE HAD THE pleasure of teaching people to fly fixed-wing aircraft for nearly 49 years and have taught many students young and old(er). Consequently, my viewpoints that I'm about to share may reflect long-held opinions. The bottom line, however, is that as an industry as a whole, we are *not* necessarily turning out competent-thinking pilots today. Rather, we are teaching students to just pass the test!

Several days ago, my FAA Safety Team representative and I met for our usual monthly session. We discussed numerous aviation safety-related topics including accident and incident reports. Unfortunately, there has been a fairly significant increase in general aviation accidents in 2021. Was this a result of poor initial training? A lack of pilots maintaining proficiency? At this point, we don't know.

One topic he shared with me was a troubling conversation he had recently with an area FAA designated pilot examiner (DPE). This DPE had given three private pilot checkrides in the previous three days. All three failed! Departing from a towered airport, the examiner directed each pilot candidate to a nearby nontowered airport where they were asked to enter the traffic pattern and demonstrate a short-field landing.



After showing some uncertainty, each pilot incorrectly entered the traffic pattern and attempted to land with an 8-10 knot tailwind. The first two finally opted to execute a go-around, but the third attempted to land anyway. The DPE finally had to take the controls to prevent an incident or accident. Why is this type of situation happening?

The DPE in this example added that each of the pilot candidates came from different flight schools and had different instructors, so there was no apparent commonality. This situation would certainly lead one to believe there is something seriously lacking in the flight training being provided to these young students.

I've personally observed this situation here at Hartford (HXF). We are a nontowered airport and quite busy in the summer months. A student pilot will announce their intention to land on the downwind runway. Sometimes they're even accompanied by an instructor. After two or three attempts followed by go-arounds, they leave the area. It certainly makes me wonder what kind of instruction this student received and what else was not being taught to this student.

Several months ago, I met with another area DPE. I wanted to know if he was observing any common weaknesses among pilot candidates. He shared this with me. He had given three private pilot checkrides earlier in the week, and all three had failed. None of the candidates could demonstrate a full power-off stall with a shallow bank. In one instance, the DPE had to take the controls to initiate a recovery. Why were these candidates even recommended for the checkride not knowing how to perform a stall?

Last week I had the opportunity to visit with two young pilots now flying for a regional airline. They had learned to fly at an FAA Part 141 flight school and had worked as instructors there acquiring the flight time necessary to advance their flying careers. Their opinions were interesting.



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Both young pilots expressed a near identical response when asked about instructing in a Part 141 flight school. “We teach to check the boxes and pass the test. We don’t teach the student to truly fly the airplane. Virtually every student is expected to go on for advanced ratings and will then gain more and better proficiency while doing so. If a student is struggling with some aspect of flight, we don’t have the flexibility in the schedule to spend extra time to help the student.”

*Before proceeding, I want to clarify that I have absolutely nothing against a Part 141 school. I’ve taught in them. I’m now teaching in a Part 61 environment.*

A career in aviation has become quite appealing to many young men and women of today. The airlines are expanding, and airline pilots are retiring faster than new pilots can be recruited, offering countless opportunities to fly. This has attracted many students. Unfortunately, many schools – both Part 141 and 61 – were not prepared to handle the large influx of students.

I spoke with a young man who had just graduated from a university Part 141 school. When he began four years ago, the school had six instructors and about 20-25 students in the flight program. Four years later, they were still using six instructors, but the student pilot base had grown to more than 60 in each class.

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STEVE KROG

Now the pressure is even greater on the instructors to push the students forward. It truly makes one wonder if a student is getting the necessary training to become a safe and knowledgeable pilot. These flight schools and staff members are being pushed well beyond their limits. Many of the Part 61 flight schools are experiencing the same pressures.

A true aviation pet peeve of mine was brought up by the two young airline pilots. The instructors they trained with were young, inexperienced, and lacked self-confidence. This trend began years ago and continues today. Most individuals who become flight instructors do so to build the required flight time to advance their flying careers. Consequently, you have the inexperienced teaching the inexperienced.

If a new student has an instructor who is apprehensive of stalls, the student will also become apprehensive. When, or if, the student advances to become a flight instructor, this characteristic will be passed on to their



students. The chain repeats every two or three years as we cycle in new instructors and the now "older" instructors move on to a more lucrative job in aviation.

Add this apprehensive mindset to a young instructor who is only concerned about building time with little interest in the challenge and pride of teaching.

Now the potential for turning out mediocre pilots significantly increases.

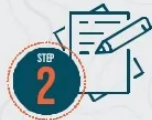
There is an old saying that states: "Good judgment comes from experience. And experience, well that comes from poor judgment!"

In the world of aviation, there is little room for poor judgment as it can and will lead to an incident, or worse.

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How do we break this chain? I'll delve more into the basics next month. But today we can all take an oath to be better, safer pilots by asking ourselves the following questions:

Are you truly the best that you can be? Or could you use a bit of practice — or dual instruction — to become a better pilot?

Do you feel confident to fly as you drive to the airport? Or have you looked at the surface wind report and begun sensing a growing pit in your stomach about flying today?

Can you honestly admit to yourself that you are completely comfortable and competent when performing stalls?

Do you feel completely confident to take your kids, grandchildren, or a neighbor's kids for a flight? Do you have the inner strength to say "Not today, kids" if needed, or do you feel pressured to fly anyway?

The FAA has published and promoted a program called IMSAFE. If you are not familiar with it, I strongly suggest you Google it. It can and will help you to properly assess your fitness to fly.

We as pilots make up a miniscule portion of the total population. Overall, our safety record is quite good, especially when compared to auto accident statistics. When we do experience an incident/accident, it usually makes the headline news of the day. When this happens, public perception views our industry negatively. Together, we all need to strive to become better, more proficient pilots — and that begins when we're first learning to fly. Teach your students to think outside the box and not just to memorize numbers to pass the test. **EAA**

**Steve Krog**, EAA 173799, has been flying for more than four decades and giving tailwheel instruction for nearly as long. In 2006 he launched Cub Air Flight, a flight training school using tailwheel aircraft for all primary training.

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