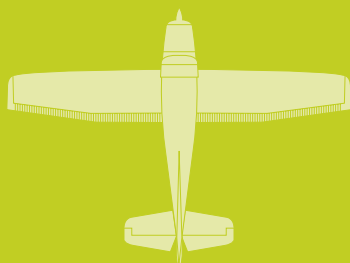


FIELD GUIDE TO FLIGHT TRAINING

# Flight Instructors



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<b>05</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
<b>06</b>	ABOUT THIS GUIDE
<b>09</b>	FOUNDATIONS FOR FLIGHT INSTRUCTION
<b>10</b>	<b>SECTION 1   BUILD A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR STUDENT</b>
<b>12</b>	CHECKLIST Strengthening the Instructor-Student Relationship
<b>15</b>	WORKSHEET Student Motivations Why fly? What's your learning style? What questions do you have?
<b>20</b>	<b>SECTION 2   CREATE MILESTONES</b>
<b>22</b>	CHECKLIST Identifying Milestones
<b>24</b>	WORKSHEET Student Progress Tracker
<b>26</b>	<b>SECTION 3   FOCUS ON THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE</b>
<b>28</b>	CHECKLIST Creating a Positive Experience
<b>34</b>	<b>SECTION 4   CONTRIBUTE TO THE COMMUNITY</b>
<b>36</b>	WORKSHEET Community Involvement
<b>38</b>	<b>GIVE BACK &amp; TAKE FLIGHT</b>

Navigate.  
Educate.  
Elevate.

Over the years, aviation has gone through many evolutions: from the first barnstormers, to the emergence of general aviation aircraft, to today's flight training experience. History has taught us that economic shifts, social factors, and technological improvements play an important role in the ways that people engage with aviation.

This raises the question: how can we continue to evolve the flight training experience so that it remains relevant to a 21st century audience?

As an instructor, you may have already identified some of these changes and adapted teaching methods to deal with them. This guide was designed to help you reflect on training methods that work,

identify your training style, and introduce new approaches that will contribute to student satisfaction and retention. Like using a checklist to shut out distractions and refocus on putting the gear down on approach, continually referring to this guide can help you maintain focus on flight training personalization elements which keep students interested and inspired. As a result, you'll improve student outcomes, develop your instructing skills, and spend more time doing what you love: flying.

# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

FOR YOU, BY YOU

The information and suggestions in this guide came from your peers. Over the course of a year, AOPA talked to flight instructors, schools, and students around the country about what matters most when it comes to flight training. Next, we distilled these findings into a series of actionable ideas, worksheets, tips, and suggestions.

By bringing together this flight training research, your expertise, and the evolving needs of our student pilot population, we can create the best possible flight training experience for each student.

## ADD YOUR EXPERTISE

Keep in mind that this guide is not intended to tell you what to do. Rather, it is intended to help you find new ways to support your students and keep them engaged throughout their flight training experience. The suggestions here will help you identify what's working in your flight instruction, evolve your teaching methods, focus on areas for improvement, and share your skills with fellow instructors. By making small, immediate changes and

working gradually towards appropriate shifts in your teaching style, you can create an even more effective and inspiring flight training experience.



## OTHER GUIDES IN THIS SERIES

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### **Field Guide to Flight Training**

[Flight Schools](#)

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### **Field Guide to Flight Training**

[Flight Students](#)





# FOUNDATIONS FOR FLIGHT INSTRUCTION

Through our research, we found four areas where instructors have the most impact on the flight training experience. By focusing on these areas, an instructor can greatly improve the student experience.

Explore the information and worksheets in the sections below, contribute your experiences, and begin to define your own flight training philosophy.

## **BUILD A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR STUDENT**

Offer guidance, feedback, and support to your student throughout their flight training experience.

## **FOCUS ON THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

Provide an efficient, organized, and personalized flight training experience that puts the student's time and money to good use.

## **CREATE MILESTONES**

Develop intermediate milestones that track student progress and reinforce their interest in aviation.

## **CONTRIBUTE TO THE COMMUNITY**

Invite your students to become a part of the aviation community, build peer connections, and share their interest in flying with friends and family.

# **BUILD A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR STUDENT**

PERSONALIZING THE FLIGHT TRAINING EXPERIENCE

Think back to when you first began your flight training—to the questions, uncertainties and excitement you felt as you moved from an aviation observer to an active participant. Also, take a moment to consider all of the people who helped you along the way.

The instructor-student relationship is a cornerstone of the flight training experience, and it plays an important role in helping students gain the confidence needed to progress towards pilot certification. It might seem simple, but each successful flight training experience begins with a relationship: the one between student and instructor.

## CHECKLIST

# STRENGTHENING THE INSTRUCTOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

*Use this checklist to assess your current methods of student support and identify new areas that you're interested in exploring. Photocopy the worksheets for use with all of your flight students.*

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## ORGANIZATION

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### REVIEW & REVISE

- Review course materials and goals with your student before and after each lesson.

### LOOK AHEAD

- Finish each session by preparing your student for the next flight training lesson.

### HAVE A PLAN

- Use a syllabus that clearly outlines the steps and milestones on your student's flight training journey, and refer back to it as your student progresses through training.

### MAKE TIME

- Set a time between lessons when you're available to answer student questions and discuss flight training. The [AOPA Flight Training Advantage \(AFTA\)](#) app is an effective way for you and your student to track his or her progress.

### STAY ON SCHEDULE

- Make a commitment to helping your student progress through flight training in a timely manner.

### LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- Email or call your students before each lesson with a description of the skills and techniques you'll be working on the following day. This puts students in the right mindset before their lesson, and can help prevent no-shows.

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## PERSONALIZATION

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### INDIVIDUALIZE YOUR APPROACH

- Create a personalized lesson plan based on your student's learning style and individual hurdles.

### CREATE MILESTONES

- Meet with your student to listen to and discuss particular challenges and milestones they'd like to focus on. By working towards these intermediate goals, your student will have a stronger sense of progress—as well as purpose.

### TEACH IN STAGES

- If your student gets stuck on a particular skill, think about alternate teaching approaches that might help them through plateaus and rough spots.

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## CONNECTION

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### LET THEM RIDE

- When appropriate, invite students to ride along during other flight lessons to expand their knowledge, reinforce what they've learned, and connect with other students.

### MAKE AN INTRODUCTION

- Introduce current students to those further along in flight training. Having a flight training “buddy” creates solidarity and encourages progress.

### SHARE THE SUCCESS

- Share past student success stories as you help your current student visualize their own flight training success.

## ADDITIONAL IDEAS

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WORKSHEET

# STUDENT MOTIVATIONS

GET TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER

*Use this worksheet to uncover your student's core motivations and concerns. Equipped with this information, you can guide your students towards flight training methods and resources that fit their learning style. You can also begin to tailor your training methods to their needs and aspirations.*

Begin by asking your student a series of fundamental questions.

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## WHY FLY?

### INSTRUCTOR OVERVIEW

What is your student's core motivation for beginning their flight training journey? Whether flight training is a personal challenge, a social endeavor, or a lifelong dream, it's important to uncover what inspired your student to become a pilot. Refer back to that motivation throughout their training.

### STUDENT WORKSHEET

Name.....

When did you decide that you wanted to learn to fly?.....

What inspired you to take this step?.....

What excites you about flying? .....

Is there a particular image, memory  
or moment that brings you back to this core motivation?.....



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## WHAT IS YOUR STUDENT'S LEARNING STYLE?

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### INSTRUCTOR OVERVIEW

Begin by exploring the ways that your student chooses to learn in his or her daily life. Then use this information to think about unique ways you can tailor the training experience to fit your student's needs.

Maybe you suggest online ground school for one student, and in-class training for another. Perhaps you point students towards books or resources that resonate with their personality, or start structuring your lessons around particular modes of reinforcement.

This conversation is the beginning of a collaborative effort that can continue to evolve throughout each student's training experience.

### STUDENT WORKSHEET

Do you learn better in groups, or by studying alone? .....

How often do you usually need to hear information before it sticks? .....

What's the last skill you learned? .....

How did you acquire this skill? .....

Why did you choose that method? .....

What would you have changed about the experience? .....

---

## WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE?

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### INSTRUCTOR OVERVIEW

Emotional support is an important part of the instructor-student relationship. For students who prepare to tackle the technical aspects of flight training, fear and frustration can often play a role in their flight training experience and expectations. Encourage your student to be open about the areas of flight training that concern them, and then provide additional support around these areas of their training.

**STUDENT WORKSHEET**

Are there any parts of the flight training experience that you think are going to be challenging?.....

.....

Can I offer you any information or details about aspects of flight training that you're uncertain about?.....

.....

Below is a list of resources and other instructors you can utilize if I am not available, or if you need additional assistance with your flight training.

**RESOURCE**

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

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“We who fly  
do so for the  
love of flying.  
We are alive  
in the air with  
this miracle  
that lies in  
our hands  
and beneath  
our feet.”

-CECIL DAY-LEWIS, POET

# CREATE MILESTONES

FROM SMALL ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO BIG PICTURE SUCCESS

Flight training can feel like a long process, so it helps to provide students with frequent feedback as they progress towards the goal of pilot certification. In addition to the standard flight training milestones, sit down with your student to create a series of individualized accomplishments based on their particular challenges or passions.

CHECKLIST

# IDENTIFYING MILESTONES

FROM SMALL ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO BIG PICTURE SUCCESS

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## STEP 1: CREATE

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### INSTRUCTOR CHECKLIST

*First, consider the big picture training milestones that most flight schools and instructors recognize.*

- First flight
- Student pilot certificate
- First solo flight
- FAA knowledge test
- Solo cross-country flight
- Practical test

### STUDENT CHECKLIST

*Then sit down with your student and discuss what they are most excited about in their flight training. Begin by asking students to mark the moments that feel important to them, and then fill in additional milestones that are relevant to the student's goals and challenges.*

- First landing
- First "hands off" flight
- First night flight
- First time making an independent decision to perform a "go around"
- 10th hour of flight time logged
- First flight with a friend or family member riding along.
- First "fly out" lunch at another airport.
- Overcoming a specific fear.
- .....
- .....

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## STEP 2: CELEBRATE

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*Choose methods of celebration that feel natural and appropriate for you and your student. Peruse the list below—and write in your own traditions. Then begin implementing small moments of celebration throughout your training.*

- Take a photo of your student each time he or she completes an important milestone. Post these photos on the bulletin board at your flight school or social media platforms.
- Share student achievements, milestones, or memorable flights on Facebook, Twitter or another social media platform. The [AOPA Flight Training Advantage](#) platform awards “badges” at certain milestones. It’s a great motivator!
- Print a list of your student’s milestones, and ask them to post it somewhere visible in their house. This sheet will offer daily encouragement—and help the student visualize their progress.
- Keep your eye out for moments when your student faces an unforeseen challenge. By providing impromptu recognition for overcoming these challenges, you can keep your student motivated and inspired.
- .....
- .....
- .....

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## STUDENT PROGRESS TRACKER

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Use this progress guide to keep track of each student's contact information, flight training progress, and schedule. Be sure to track and congratulate students on their accomplishments, and check in if their flight training frequency lapses. Looking for an easier way to track and share student progress? Check out the [AOPA Flight Training Advantage \(AFTA\)](#) platform.

STUDENT NAME	LESSON #/DATE								
	1	2	3	4	5	6			
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**STUDENT NAME**

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**ADDRESS (STREET)**

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**EMAIL**

.....

**CITY**

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**PHONE**

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**ZIP**

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**LESSON #/DATE**

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**LESSON #/DATE**

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**NOTES**

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# FOCUS ON THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

FLIGHT TRAINING WITH A CUSTOMER SERVICE APPROACH

At its core, flight training is a customer service experience. Every student wants to feel that his or her time and money are well spent.

As an instructor, you can improve your student's experience by providing a clearly organized, personalized, and practical training experience. When it comes to organization, transparency is key. Make sure that your students clearly understand where they are in the process, shed light on what they can expect next, and explain how each lesson fits into the larger scheme of their training.

Remember, the overall cost of flight training isn't the number one reason students drop out. Value for the money spent, however, is!

## CHECKLIST

# CREATING A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

Use this sheet as a guide to ensure that your students have a professional, efficient training experience. Check off the areas that you'd like to focus on, and write in your own methods for improving the student experience.

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## STEP 1: MAKE IT EASY TO ENGAGE

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### PLAN AHEAD

- Meet with your student at the beginning of their flight training. Ask what training times work best for them. Compare your schedules to find a consistent time that works for each of you.

### GET IT ON THE BOOKS

- Schedule lessons in advance, whenever possible. *Suggestion: Don't let the student leave without having the next lesson scheduled! Be flexible.*

### BE FLEXIBLE

- Offer a variety of times for flight instruction to accommodate different schedules.

### BE ACCOUNTABLE

- Make sure that you are on time for each of your lessons. Keep your student's phone number and email address on hand and contact them well in advance if you need to cancel a lesson.

### ADDITIONAL IDEAS

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## STEP 2: CREATE A WELL-ORGANIZED TRAINING PROGRAM

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### FOLLOW A SYLLABUS

- Whether you use your own guides or a syllabus provided by your flight school, create a long-term plan for your flight training. The [AOPA Flight Training Advantage \(AFTA\)](#) platform is an excellent way to accomplish this.

### BRUSH UP

- Before each lesson, review your notes from the student's last lesson. Plan out what you'd like to cover so that lessons are as organized and efficient as possible. The [AOPA Flight Training Advantage \(AFTA\)](#) mentioned above makes this easy!

### ADD VARIETY

- Vary your flight routes and destinations to bring some freshness to your student's flight training experience.

### SEND A REMINDER

- Contact your student the evening before a flight lesson with an overview of the next day's lesson plan via email, text, or phone. This will help put your student in the right mindset, and prevent no-shows.

### LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- Finish each lesson by reviewing the skills your student learned. Then spend a few moments explaining what you'll focus on during the next lesson—and provide resources or websites that reinforce this training.

### OBSERVE AND ADJUST

- Every three or four flights, sit down with your student to discuss what is or isn't working in their flight training, and to get a sense of where they are feeling challenged or overwhelmed. Then adjust your training methods based on what you hear.

DATE .....	OBSERVATION .....
DATE .....	OBSERVATION .....
DATE .....	OBSERVATION .....

---

## STEP 3: FOCUS ON CUSTOMER SERVICE

---

### TIDY UP

- Make sure the flight training environment (classroom, plane, simulator) is clean and well-maintained.

### KEEP UP APPEARANCES

- No matter what anyone says, appearances do matter. As an instructor, your students look up to you, so be sure to present yourself in a way that inspires confidence and professionalism—whether this means you wear a button down-shirt or your well-worn aviator jacket.

### SAFETY FIRST

- Share your approach to aviation safety, and encourage your students to voice any concerns.

### PLACE IT IN CONTEXT

- Emphasize the skills and benefits of flight training—from confidence-building, to navigation, to mathematical skills. These skills will play a role in the student's life beyond the cockpit.

### STAY COMPETITIVE

- Research local flight training costs in your area, and set your rates accordingly.

### SET EXPECTATIONS

- Give your student a clear sense of your hourly rate, as well as your methods for calculating “billable hours.” Many students don't realize that they might be paying for flight instruction when they're not actually flying the plane, so it's best to be clear about costs up front.

---

## STEP 4: PROVIDE A THOROUGH, PRACTICAL EDUCATION

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### PREPARE FOR THE CHECKRIDE

- Give students the opportunity to meet with a designated examiner at some point during their training. This will alleviate stress during the actual checkride.

### FOCUS ON SKILLS

- Training a safe pilot requires developing skills beyond the Airman Certification Standards (ACS). Remember, those are minimums! So, make that extra effort to assure that your student is equipped with the concrete skills they need to earn their certification.

### TRAIN ON THE GROUND

- Avoid covering material in flight that could be covered more economically on the ground.

### USE SIMULATORS

- Think about areas where you can integrate simulator use into your training, and encourage students to reinforce and develop skills in between flight lessons.

*In the space below, make a list of helpful student resources, tools, and flight planners. Share this list with your student, and encourage them to reinforce their training on their own time.*

### WEBSITES

.....

### ONLINE LEARNING RESOURCES & GUIDES

.....

### FLIGHT PLANNERS

.....

### ADDITIONAL IDEAS

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.....







# CONTRIBUTE TO THE COMMUNITY

CONFIDENCE, CONNECTIONS, AND STUDENT SUPPORT

For experienced and well-connected pilots, the aviation community provides a powerful support network. But for many flight students, this community can be intimidating to enter. As a flight instructor, you have the unique role of introducing your flight students to the people who will help define their aviation experience beyond the cockpit.

Community involvement is a great way to support your students, while also setting them up with alternate modes of connection and support. Students who feel included in the community are more likely to complete their certification, offer instructor referrals to other students, and log more hours in the air.

And, you'll benefit in other ways, too. Community involvement is an effective way to achieve your goals more quickly!

# COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

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## STEP 1: MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE

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*Make yourself available to your students outside of your flight lessons. Use the checklist below to identify ways that you can make time for your student, and explore your own methods of engagement.*

- Hold “office hours” each week, either before or after your training rides, or work with your flight school to establish set times for a “tutor lab,” so that all of the CFIs can share the workload.
- Days that work for me/times that work for me .....
- Share your email address or phone number with your student, in case they have questions or concerns between lessons.

---

## STEP 2: BE A CONNECTOR

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*Enable connections between students and other members of the aviation community. The stronger the student’s connection to the world of aviation, the more likely they are to stay engaged with training. Use the list below to uncover new ways of providing a community connection.*

- Create peer-to-peer connections by forming a “buddy system” with your flight students.
- Introduce students to other pilots at the local airport. This will give students additional perspectives on how they can engage with flying and the aviation community.
- Team up with another instructor and organize “fly out” events, or participate in a local group activity if it already exists.
- Form relationships with flying clubs at local high schools and colleges. This will allow you to connect with young people who are interested in aviation, even though they may have never flown in a small aircraft.

- Talk to your local flight schools about volunteer opportunities, and share this information with interested students. (For example, Civil Air Patrol, youth outreach programs, and charitable flying organizations.)

### LIST VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES IN YOUR AREA

.....  
.....

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### STEP 3: STAY INVOLVED & ENGAGED

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*Participate in flight school activities, open house nights, airport events, and seminars that will continue your learning as a pilot. Consider inviting your students along to these events. In the space below, make a list of dates and events that you plan to attend in the local aviation community such as, AOPA Air Safety Institute Seminars and FAA Safety Team (FAASTeam) Seminars.*

**DATE** ..... **EVENT** .....

**DATE** ..... **EVENT** .....

**DATE** ..... **EVENT** .....

### ADDITIONAL IDEAS

.....  
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.....  
.....

# GIVE BACK & TAKE FLIGHT

As a pilot, you know the thrill and reward of getting up in the air. And as an instructor, you have the chance to share this passion on a daily basis. Every member of the aviation community—from new pilots to old hands—started with a yearning to get up in the sky. This guide is intended to enable you to help more students connect with this feeling, and we hope you'll continue to revisit these tools throughout each student's flight training experience.

Regardless of your long-term aviation goals, we encourage you to keep your passion in mind, pass it on, and contribute to the future growth of general aviation.



## STAY CONNECTED

Encourage your students to sign up for [AOPA Flight Training Advantage](#) (AFTA), where they can track flight training progress, log hours, work towards milestones, and connect with the larger aviation community.

AOPA works every day to make flying more fun, affordable, and safe. Visit our website at [aopa.org](http://aopa.org). It's an excellent source of information for all pilots, regardless of experience level. For continuing education, the [Air Safety Institute](#) offers dozens of online courses, quizzes, safety videos and more

Our [Flight Training magazine](#) contains helpful articles that do a great job of demystifying some of the things your students may encounter during their training.

And, finally, if you have any aviation-related question, our Pilot Information Center (PIC) is standing by to help. Just call 800.USA.AOPA (872.2672) or available [online](#)

## REGARDING YOUR STUDENT'S MEDICAL EXAM

Some health issues can be sensitive to discuss, but it is important to help our student understand the process. Medications for some conditions are acceptable to the FAA while others can cause deferrals or denials. Your students should understand this BEFORE visiting an AME (Airman Medical Examiner). AOPA members may call 800-USA-AOPA (872-2672) for additional information.

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AOPA FOUNDATION

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