

Who, What, Where, Why, When, How Much, Etc.

Who: Charles McDougal

What: FAA Designated Pilot Examiner.

Where: Anywhere in the San Antonio Flight Standards district. This extends roughly from Brownsville, to Dell Rio, to Fredericksburg, to Temple, to Victoria, Corpus Christi, to Brownsville. It's a big area. I travel in my Long-EZ experimental airplane to the locations where I conduct checkrides.

Why: I am passionate about pilot safety and I enjoy the connection with the flight training community that being an examiner affords. I also work as a corporate pilot in McAllen, TX. The two jobs create a good balance and I enjoy both aspects of aviation.

When: Call or email anytime to discuss aviation, and how I can assist you.

How Much: Checkride Fees \$250 Retest \$250, Discontinuance \$125 (Prices slightly higher North of KHYI)



N82VE My Vari-EZE (Now Sold)
A great airplane that I flew 400 hours a year for two years, mostly in support of examining activities.



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FAA Practical Tests throughout The San Antonio Flight Standards District



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How to Pass Your Checkride (and what to think if you don't)

Flight tests or Checkrides, more properly called Practical Tests, can be stressful events for pilots of any experience level. Other than the driving test that we took when we were 16 or so, most of us have not had much experience with performance testing. Unfortunately the stories we hear from our fellow pilots about their flight test experiences may increase our stress and apprehension. My view is that while a little stress might be OK, excessive anxiety interferes with the testing process, so I do what I can to reduce it.



Look, Pelicans!

When I became a designated pilot examiner I made a commitment to myself that I would do my best to lower the stress level during practical tests to wherever degree possible. I decided I was never going to get angry or impatient, and that I would always be fair in my judgments. I often think that my efforts to lower applicant anxiety are in vain. Occasionally I get some positive feedback though, so I'll keep trying.

Let's have a look at the process of testing and being tested by a FAA designee, what to expect, how to prepare, and how to perform your best.

What's On The Test?

The first point is easy. The current FAA Practical Test Standards for the pilot certificate or rating to be tested has all the required areas of operation and tasks that can and must be tested, as well as the objective and tolerances for each maneuver. Read it several times to absorb the essence and detail it contains. The most current versions of all PTS documents are available for download from www.faa.gov and also on my website www.flighttrainingcoalition.com

How to Prepare

The flight instructor is the primary key to getting thoroughly prepared for the big day. The CFI knows what will be on the checkride, and also may have insight into how various tasks will be tested. In addition to assignments from the instructor, it is a good idea to go through the PTS and make a list of all the maneuvers and ground areas to be tested. Consider each task in turn and "chair fly" the maneuver. Work on learning to recite from memory each step and pilot action that is required including pre-maneuver checklists, power settings, visual or instrument references, and the required tolerances for the maneuver. If one can do this from memory while sitting in an easy chair, it will be much easier to perform well in the airplane while being evaluated by the examiner.

How to Perform Our Best

This might be the most elusive element, kind of like "How do I play a perfect game of golf every time?" "I have the required experience, I am ready for the test, but how do perform my best?" It is important to remember that a flight test is not about perfection. Everybody makes a few mistakes when being evaluated and examiners expect this. If mistakes do not result in safety of flight issues and are promptly corrected, they usually are not cause for disapproval. The examiner's job is merely to evaluate the applicant's skills and knowledge according to the PTS. The PTS says that the applicant should take prompt corrective action when tolerances are exceeded. I guess the best advice I can give to an applicant is to never stop trying, always stay confident and in



Landing at Boerne Stage Airport in N97EZ,
My current Long-EZ built by Joe and Della Lacour in New Orleans, LA in 1986. (Photo by Justin Moore)

control of the aircraft, and to correct promptly for any mistake. If you have the skill and knowledge to be a safe pilot, this strategy should carry you through the test with any examiner.

Walk like an Egyptian (Think like an examiner)

The examiner is not just an FAA "traffic cop", an obstacle to be overcome, but is truly on the same team as the applicant, his family, his future passengers, and the entire flying community. Thinking about your examiner as a quality control "partner" may help you to keep in mind that accurate and objective testing is crucial to **your safety and success!** Pilot Examiners test applicants according to the PTS. While it is important to accurately evaluate the required tasks and elements, there is more at stake than plus or minus 100 feet in a steep turn. If examiners pass pilots who show significant shortfalls in knowledge or skill, this does not benefit anyone. If an examiner "fills in the blanks" for his applicants the entire testing process is compromised, as is the safety of the pilot. A pilot who passed the test with deficiencies may move forward without the skills to fly safely or to succeed in subsequent training and employment.

Ready or "Not quite ready yet"

It is no fun to fail a checkride and we all wish to avoid this outcome, but there is an alternative that is even less desirable. To move forward in the world of aviation with deficiencies in aircraft control, navigation, or knowledge is much worse than taking a step back, getting a few more hours of instruction, and then moving forward with the confidence that comes with true proficiency. Perhaps it would be better to remove the terms "pass" and "fail" from the testing process and replace them with "ready" and "not quite ready yet". Not such a big deal, when we look at it that way, perhaps.

The Power of a Positive Attitude

I start every test with a 100% expectation of a positive outcome. I advise each applicant to do the same. It costs nothing to be confident and positive, and it can help greatly in setting the right tone for success. Study diligently, train seriously, and show up for your test with no doubt. Success will follow. Good luck and safe flying to all!