

FAA Safety Team WINGS Pilot Proficiency Program

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During our training at OU, we are drilled on the fundamentals of safe airmanship. In the air, we tirelessly practice stalls, steep turns, slow flight, and short and soft field takeoffs and landings. On the ground, flight instructors and check airmen unremittingly go on about things like aeronautical decision making and IMSAFE checklists. That's all just for training - we don't have to be able to do any of those things in the "real world", right?

The FAA would seem to disagree! Over a two year period, the FAA conducted a review of all aircraft accidents in the United States, resulting in a list of causal factors which appeared most often in accident reports. The FAA came to the conclusion that pilot skills in fundamental areas such as aeronautical decision making, performance and limitations, preflight planning, positive aircraft control and takeoffs and landings were the leading causes of aviation accidents.

To address these fundamental deficiencies, the FAA developed a voluntary pilot continuing education and proficiency program called "WINGS". The WINGS Program consists of targeted learning activities and flight tasks selected to address the documented causal factors of aircraft accidents.

So how does the WINGS program work? The WINGS Program consists of two areas: knowledge areas and flight activities. Within a 12 month time period, you must complete 3 credits of knowledge based activities and 3 credits of flight activities in order to complete one "phase" of the program. Knowledge activities include free online AOPA courses, FAA Safety Team seminars, 3rd party online training courses such as King Schools, ASA and Gleim, or even advanced aircraft recurrent training at companies like Flight Safety, Cirrus, or Cessna. Each course or seminar is worth a different amount of credits, and may or may not be free.

Flight activities must be accomplished in flight with a qualified instructor. Once a flight activity is accomplished, WINGS credit can be requested from the flight instructor through the FAA Safety Team website. Flight tasks are taken straight from the PTS and involve activities such as short and soft field takeoff and landings, stalls, slow flight, and go-arounds. Additionally, the program is divided into BASIC, ADVANCED, and MASTER levels. The Basic level consists of private pilot level knowledge areas and flight activities. The Advanced level is targeted toward the instrument-rated commercial pilot, and the Master level is targeted toward the ATP level pilot. You may participate at any level you feel inclined.

In addition to maintaining personal proficiency, one of the biggest advantages to the WINGS program is that completion of one "phase" (3 knowledge credits / 3 flight credits) within a 12 month period actually meets the requirements for a biennial flight review! As pilots, whether our aspirations are professional or recreational, we should strive to maintain our personal proficiency through recurrent training in the fundamental knowledge areas and skill sets that we learned in our training. I encourage you to use the WINGS program as one way to keep up that proficiency. Furthermore, I encourage you to seek out and attend local FAA Safety Team seminars, which can be found at the FAA Safety team website.

If you'd like to learn more about the WINGS program, visit the FAA Safety Team website at http://www.faasafety.gov/WINGS/pub/learn_more.aspx.