



THE FLIGHT REVIEW GUIDE

Back in command.

§ 61.56 and § 61.57 as written · medical and documents · inspections and equipment · part 91 · airspace · airport operations · weather and ADM · performance, W&B and fuel worked · flying again · instrument recency · scenarios · self-check · printable tools.

NINETEEN SECTIONS. EVERYTHING INSIDE. VERIFY BEFORE FLIGHT.

01 Compliance · currency · proficiency — three different things

DIRECT ANSWER
A **flight review** (§ 61.56) is a condition on acting as PIC at all. **Recent experience** (§ 61.57) is a condition on carrying passengers, flying at night with passengers, or flying IFR. **Proficiency** is skill and is not defined by any regulation. Meeting one does not satisfy the others.

TERM	WHAT IT IS	GOVERNED BY	CONSEQUENCE IF LAPSED
Flight review	1 hr ground + 1 hr flight + endorsement, every 24 calendar months	61.56	May not act as PIC of any aircraft
Passenger currency	3 T/O & 3 ldg, 90 days, sole manipulator, same cat/class/type	61.57(a)	May not carry persons; may fly alone
Night currency	3 T/O & 3 full-stop ldg, 1 hr after sunset–1 hr before sunrise, 90 days	61.57(b)	May not carry persons at night
Instrument currency	6 approaches + holding + intercept/track, 6 calendar months	61.57(c)	May not act as PIC under IFR or below VFR minimums
IPC	Required once instrument currency has lapsed > 6 further calendar months	61.57(d)	Only way back to instrument currency
Checkout	Operator / insurer requirement for a specific aircraft	not FAA	May not rent or be insured
§ 61.31 endorsement	Complex, high-performance, tailwheel, pressurized, type	61.31	May not act as PIC of that aircraft

TRAP
Time away from flying creates **no** regulatory requirement by itself. A pilot who has not flown in 5 years but whose review is 20 months old and who has no passengers is legal to fly solo VFR. Legal is not the same as wise — see Section 15.

02 The flight review — 14 CFR § 61.56

What it consists of 61.56(a)

- Minimum **1 hour flight training + 1 hour ground training**. Both are floors, not targets.
- Ground must include a review of the **current general operating and flight rules of part 91**.
- Flight covers the maneuvers and procedures that, **at the discretion of the person giving the review**, are necessary to demonstrate safe exercise of the certificate privileges.
- Given by an **authorized instructor** in an **aircraft for which the pilot is rated**. 61.56(c)(1)
- Gliders: three instructional flights each to pattern altitude may replace the 1 hr of flight. 61.56(b)

When it is required 61.56(c)

No person may act as PIC unless, **since the beginning of the 24th calendar month before the month in which that pilot acts as PIC**, that person has (1) accomplished a flight review and (2) holds a **logbook endorsement** from the instructor who gave it.

CALENDAR-MONTH MATH

Review 14 Mar 2026 → valid through 31 Mar 2028

Review 31 Mar 2026 → valid through 31 Mar 2028

Review 2 Apr 2026 → valid through 30 Apr 2028

The day of the month is irrelevant. Count 24 months from the month after the review; you are good through the last day of that month.

What replaces it 61.56(d)–(g)

WITHIN THE SAME 24-CAL-MONTH WINDOW, THIS ALSO SATISFIES § 61.56	REF
Pilot proficiency check or practical test by an examiner, approved check airman, or U.S. Armed Force — for a certificate, rating or operating privilege	(d) (1)
Practical test for a flight instructor certificate or an additional instructor rating; or to meet CFI recent experience (§ 61.197(b)(1)) or reinstatement (§ 61.199(b)(2))	(d) (2)
One or more phases of an FAA-sponsored pilot proficiency program (WINGS)	(e)
CFI who has met § 61.197 recent experience or reinstated via approved refresher course: the ground hour is not required (flight hour still is)	(f)
Student pilot in training with a current solo endorsement under § 61.87: no review required	(g)

- May be **combined with § 61.57** recent experience at the instructor's discretion — the usual way an instructor handles a pilot who is out of both. 61.56(h)
- **FFS / FTD** allowed only under an approved course at a part 142 training center, representing an aircraft the pilot is rated in; unless the device is approved for landings, § 61.57(a)/(b) T/O and landing requirements must still be met in the aircraft. 61.56(i)

There is no failure

The regulation contains no provision for failing a flight review. If the standard is not met, the instructor logs the **training given** and issues **no completion endorsement**; there is no logbook entry reflecting a failure.
AC 61-98E

The endorsement AC 61-65K A.69

SAMPLE WORDING (AC 61-65K, APP. A, A.69)

I certify that [First name, MI, Last name], [grade of pilot certificate], [certificate number], has satisfactorily completed a flight review of § 61.56(a) on [date]. — followed by instructor signature, date, CFI number and recent-experience (RE) end date or certificate expiration date.

- WINGS phase completion: A.70. IPC completion: A.71. AC 61-65K
- If the pilot does not meet the **Aviation English Language Standard** during a review or IPC, the instructor does not endorse completion, logs the training received, and contacts the FSDO. AC 61-65K 11.4.2
- Instructors: since 1 Dec 2024 the CFI certificate carries a 24-calendar-month **recent-experience** (RE) date instead of an expiration date. 61.197

TRAP
“Biennial Flight Review” is obsolete language. The FAA dropped “biennial” because it implied training only every 24 months. The regulation is a floor; AC 61-98E encourages currency training as often as the pilot needs it.

TRAP
Out of compliance does not ground you. You may still fly **with an instructor** — you simply may not act as PIC. The review flight itself is legal for that reason.

Basic VFR weather minimums

91.155

AIRSPACE	FLIGHT VISIBILITY	DISTANCE FROM CLOUDS
A	N/A	N/A (IFR only)
B	3 SM	Clear of clouds
C	3 SM	500 below · 1,000 above · 2,000 horizontal
D	3 SM	500 below · 1,000 above · 2,000 horizontal
E, below 10,000 MSL	3 SM	500 below · 1,000 above · 2,000 horizontal
E, at/above 10,000 MSL	5 SM	1,000 below · 1,000 above · 1 SM horizontal
G, ≤ 1,200 AGL, day	1 SM	Clear of clouds
G, ≤ 1,200 AGL, night	3 SM	500 below · 1,000 above · 2,000 horizontal
G, > 1,200 AGL < 10,000 MSL, day	1 SM	500 below · 1,000 above · 2,000 horizontal
G, > 1,200 AGL < 10,000 MSL, night	3 SM	500 below · 1,000 above · 2,000 horizontal
G, > 1,200 AGL and ≥ 10,000 MSL	5 SM	1,000 below · 1,000 above · 1 SM horizontal

- **Surface areas (B/C/D/E to the surface):** to take off, land or enter the pattern VFR, ceiling at least **1,000 ft** and ground visibility at least **3 SM** (flight visibility if none reported). 91.155(c), (d)
- **Class G, night, traffic pattern exception:** an airplane within ½ mile of the runway at night may operate clear of clouds with 1 SM if the airport is in Class G. 91.155(b) (2)
- **Special VFR** in B/C/D/E surface areas: ATC clearance; 1 SM flight and ground visibility, clear of clouds; at night only with an instrument rating and an IFR-equipped aircraft. Not available at airports listed in part 91 App. D §3. 91.157
- Above **10,000 ft MSL but below 1,200 AGL** (high terrain) the 1,200 AGL rows apply, not the 10,000 MSL rows.

Special use and other airspace

AIM 3-4, 3-5

TYPE	ENTRY
Prohibited	No entry (P-40, P-56). Charted blue hatched
Restricted	Contact controlling agency; if “cold” you may enter; if active, clearance required. Charted blue hatched with R-number
Warning	Offshore, from 3 NM out; hazardous activity; entry not prohibited
MOA	VFR may enter; exercise extreme caution; check activity with FSS/ATC. When a MOA is in use, nonparticipating IFR may be cleared through if ATC can provide IFR separation ; otherwise ATC reroutes or restricts it AIM 3-4-5
Alert	High volume of training or unusual activity; no restriction, be vigilant
Controlled firing	Not charted; activity suspended when aircraft approach
TFR	Entry prohibited unless the NOTAM allows; check NOTAMs every flight. 91.137–91.145
National security areas	Voluntary avoidance; may become temporary prohibited
MTR	VR/IR routes; four-digit routes are flown at/below 1,500 AGL, three-digit routes have segments above
ADIZ	Flight plan, two-way radio, transponder, position reports. 99

TRAP

Dashed magenta marks a **Class E surface area** — controlled airspace down to the ground, normally to protect instrument approaches, and it triggers the 1,000 / 3 surface-area rule for VFR. It does **not** tell you whether a tower exists: some are at non-towered fields, some are surface **extensions** to a Class C or D area, and where a tower is part-time the Class D reverts to E or G when it closes. Check the Chart Supplement and NOTAMs for tower hours. Class E at 700 ft (shaded magenta) means Class G below it — and G rules apply there.

10 Airport operations and runway safety

Traffic pattern

91.126 • AIM 4-3-3

- Uncontrolled: all turns to the **left** unless the airport indicates right traffic (segmented circle, chart supplement “RP”, sectional). Helicopters avoid the fixed-wing pattern. 91.126(b)
- Standard pattern altitude **1,000 ft AGL** (large/turbine 1,500 ft) unless otherwise published. Enter at pattern altitude on a **45° to downwind**; depart straight out or 45° from the departure leg after reaching pattern altitude. AIM 4-3-3
- Towered field: two-way radio required; obey tower instructions and clearances; a clearance to “enter the pattern” is not a clearance to land. 91.129
- **CTAF calls** (recommended): 10 NM out, entering downwind, base, final, clear of runway; before taxi and before takeoff. Use the airport name at the start and end of each call. AIM 4-1-9

Light gun signals

AIM 4-3-13

SIGNAL	ON THE GROUND	IN FLIGHT
Steady green	Cleared for takeoff	Cleared to land
Flashing green	Cleared to taxi	Return for landing (to be followed by steady green at the proper time)
Steady red	Stop	Give way to other aircraft and continue circling
Flashing red	Taxi clear of the runway in use	Airport unsafe — do not land
Flashing white	Return to starting point on airport	Not applicable
Alternating red / green	Exercise extreme caution	Exercise extreme caution

Acknowledge in daylight by rocking wings (in flight) or moving ailerons/rudder (on the ground); at night by flashing landing or navigation lights. Lost comm: squawk **7600**, remain outside/above Class D, observe traffic and light signals. AIM 4-2-13 • 91.129(d)