

Ground Training for your Private Pilot's License

To obtain your PPL, you will need to learn about aircraft, flying, flight rules, and many other topics. You'll need this knowledge so you can be a safe, professional pilot once you complete your training. You'll also need to know it so you can pass the required FAA aeronautical knowledge test. You can **start** studying anytime – preferably as soon as you know you're going to begin flight training. You should plan to **complete** your knowledge test during your flight training, sometime around your solo cross-country. You can take your test sooner, even before you begin flight training, but getting some flights in prior to taking the test will give you some “operational experience” to help understand and internalize the concepts you've learned in the books. You shouldn't delay the test much longer, however, as you are required to complete it prior to your flight checkride.

How to study for your aeronautical knowledge requirements:

1. Best option: Initial self-study, with follow-up as needed from your instructor (CFI) (**recommended**): Self-study gets you into the source material straight from the FAA. This method is also the most economical, because it uses free resources (provided by the FAA, which used those same resources to write the test), and whatever you learn on your own you don't have to pay an instructor to teach you. (You can also purchase printed copies for fairly reasonable prices, if you prefer a hardcopy.) Once you read the material, you can then speak with your CFI about questions you have. This path is more challenging for those who may be less self-motivated or don't learn well by reading a book. Study material you can start with includes:
 - a. Pilot's Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge:
https://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/handbooks_manuals/aviation/phak/media/pilot_handbook.pdf
 - b. Airplane Flying Handbook:
https://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/handbooks_manuals/aviation/airplane_handbook/media/airplane_flying_handbook.pdf
 - c. The Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM) is also available free online as a PDF. It's a reference book, not a narrative, so use the Table of Contents to go directly to relevant sections (traffic patterns, etc.). Your CFI can channel you to sections that are relevant to your training: https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/
 - d. Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR) is also very relevant. You should review 14 CFR Part 61, which covers what you have to do to earn your license, and Part 91, which covers what you're allowed to do once you have your license. There is no need to read it all; you can check the contents to skip to the relevant paragraphs. Again, your CFI can help, but it is also helpful to have a basic understanding of these CFRs even before you start training.
 - i. Part 61
<https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=26d76b3aa3cd762557b37cd339c39011&mc=true&node=pt14.2.61&rgn=div5>
 - ii. Part 91
<https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=672008aeb2ed16b69aa013f972170ef3&mc=true&node=pt14.2.91&rgn=div5>
2. Online/DVD Courses.
 - a. Online courses walk you through what is essentially a formal ground school program, except you do it at your own pace and on your own time. These courses also help with practicing for the test itself, as most include practice exams. Depending on the company you choose, you may spend upward of \$200 or more for the course. In some cases, your access to the online course material may be time-limited (i.e., a year after the purchase date).
 - b. Try to avoid online resources that essentially teach you the test. You need to actually learn the material, not just the test questions.
 - c. The following courses are reasonably popular and will probably all be satisfactory:
 - i. Gleim (**Recommended**):
<https://www.gleimaviation.com/shop/ogspp/>
 - ii. Sporty's:
<http://www.sportys.com/pilotshop/learn-to-fly-course-online-private-pilot-test-prep.html>
 - iii. King Schools:
<http://www.kingschools.com/ground-school/private-pilot/courses>

3. **Formal Ground School.** You can attend a physical, classroom-based ground school, generally taught either by a freelance CFI or a flight school. If you can do this with the CFI/school you plan to fly with, it's not a bad choice, particularly if you need the structure of a classroom to help you learn. However, you will also pay for those hours of training, some of which you could probably have done on your own.

If you have questions or issues at any time, talk to your CFI. The amount of material available to you can be intimidating. Your CFI can help focus your study areas, answer your questions, and provide general guidance on what you need to know. Ultimately, your CFI will help you put your knowledge into practice in flight, and that will be the true reward.