

YOUR PATH TO THE FLIGHT DECK

How to Become a Private Pilot

A practical roadmap from ground school to the FAA practical test

40 HOURS Part 61 regulatory minimum	≈75 HOURS FAA-reported U.S. average	\$11.5K–\$13.5K Typical CTA training range
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The six-step path

- Build the foundation in private pilot ground school**
 CTA strongly advises an in-person ground school course at a flight school. (We provide in-person ground school) This provides live instruction, class discussion with other students and instructor, demonstrations, and immediate feedback, deepening your understanding of aerodynamics, weather, regulations, navigation, aircraft systems, risk management, and performance knowledge used throughout an aviation career. CTA's course provides 40 hours over 10 weeks, with two classes each week.
Regulatory knowledge areas: 14 CFR § 61.105.
- Create an FAA IACRA account, obtain an FTN, and apply for a Student Pilot Certificate**
 Register in the FAA Integrated Airman Certification and Rating Application (IACRA). Registration assigns an FAA Tracking Number (FTN), a permanent identifier used for knowledge testing and certification. Complete the student-pilot application in IACRA; identity and eligibility are verified by a recommending instructor.
Student eligibility: 14 CFR § 61.83. IACRA/FTN: FAA guidance.
- Earn a passing score on the FAA Private Pilot Knowledge Test**
 Obtain the required instructor endorsement or other acceptable authorization, schedule the test with an FAA-authorized testing provider, and bring the required identification and FTN. The FAA passing standard is 70%; **CTA teaches for mastery and recommends a target score of at least 90%.**
Knowledge-test prerequisites: 14 CFR § 61.35; passing score: FAA Airman Knowledge Testing Supplement guidance.
- Obtain at least a Third-Class Medical Certificate**
 Schedule an examination with an FAA-designated Aviation Medical Examiner. For the conventional private-pilot airplane path, at least a third-class medical is required to exercise student/private pilot privileges and to take the practical test in an aircraft, subject to regulatory exceptions. CTA recommends addressing medical eligibility early—before making a large training investment.
Medical requirement and duration: 14 CFR § 61.23; standards: 14 CFR part 67.

From first lesson to checkride

5	Complete flight training and aeronautical experience Train with an authorized instructor, receive the pre-solo aeronautical knowledge and flight instruction required by § 61.87, and obtain the endorsements needed before solo flight. Progress through maneuvers, airport operations, navigation, night operations, instrument-reference training, cross-country planning, emergency procedures, and sound aeronautical decision-making. Training and endorsements: 14 CFR §§ 61.87, 61.107, and 61.109.
6	Pass the FAA Practical Test After meeting experience requirements and receiving the required instructor endorsements, apply through IACRA and take the practical test with an FAA inspector or our in-house Designated Pilot Examiner. The test includes an oral evaluation and a flight portion conducted to the applicable Airman Certification Standards. Practical-test prerequisites: 14 CFR § 61.39; private-pilot eligibility: § 61.103.

Part 61 minimums: airplane single-engine rating

Under 14 CFR § 61.109(a), an applicant must log at least 40 hours of flight time. The minimum is a certification threshold—not a promise that every student will be checkride-ready at 40 hours.

Required experience	Minimum	What it includes
Total flight time	40 hr	At least 20 hr training + 10 hr solo; remaining hours may satisfy applicable training/solo requirements.
Training with an authorized instructor	20 hr	Includes 3 hr cross-country; 3 hr night; 3 hr solely by reference to instruments; and 3 hr practical-test preparation within the preceding 2 calendar months.
Solo flight	10 hr	Includes 5 hr solo cross-country and required cross-country flights, plus three takeoffs and landings to a full stop at an airport with an operating control tower.
Night training detail	Within 20 hr	One cross-country flight over 100 nautical miles total distance and 10 takeoffs/10 landings to a full stop, each involving traffic-pattern flight.

Minimum versus a realistic training plan

The 40-hour requirement is a regulatory floor. The FAA reports an approximately 75-hour U.S. completion average for applicants without a hearing impairment. Frequency, weather, aircraft availability, preparation, proficiency, and continuity affect the final total.

CTA private pilot cost breakout

The following figures reflect the CTA expenses provided for a 40-hour baseline training scenario. Actual completion cost varies because the student must reach the required proficiency—not merely log the minimum time.

Expense	Calculation / scope	Rate	Estimated cost
Dual flight training	30 hr: aircraft + instructor	\$160 + \$40/hr	\$6,000
Solo flight training	10 hr: aircraft	\$160/hr	\$1,600
Ground school course	40 hr / 10 weeks / 2 classes weekly	Package	\$825
FAA knowledge exam	Testing-provider fee	Flat	\$160
FAA practical test	Designated examiner; variable	Variable	\$800–\$1,000
CTA flight training headset	Provided to CTA students	Included	\$0
CTA 40-HOUR BASELINE TOTAL			\$9,385–\$9,585

Budget Realistically

CTA’s average private pilot flight-training range is \$11,500–\$13,500. This is significantly lower than the national average costs. Higher or lower costs are direct results of the student’s ability and commitment to acquiring the required knowledge and skills. The baseline total above does not include the Aviation Medical Examiner’s fee and may not include extra flight/ground instruction, additional solo aircraft time, supplies, retesting, or other costs that arise when more than 40 hours are needed. Examiner fees are variable and will be verified upon scheduling.

CTA RECOMMENDATION

Begin with in-person ground school, fly concurrently, verify medical eligibility early, fly consistently, and prepare beyond the minimum standard.

Authoritative references

- [14 CFR part 61—Certification: Pilots, Flight Instructors, and Ground Instructors](#)
- [14 CFR § 61.23—Medical certificates: Requirement and duration](#)
- [14 CFR §§ 61.83 and 61.87—Student-pilot eligibility and solo requirements](#)
- [14 CFR §§ 61.103, 61.105, 61.107, and 61.109—Private-pilot requirements](#)
- [FAA—Become a Pilot and hourly-requirements FAQ](#)
- [FAA—IACRA and FAA Tracking Number guidance](#)

Regulatory note: Requirements may change, and individual circumstances can affect eligibility. Consult the current eCFR, FAA guidance, and your authorized instructor before acting.