

## Misunderstandings and Omissions by Glider Flight Instructors

by Burt Compton, Designated Pilot Examiner

These suggestions on training and safety are from my 59 years in soaring, watching the happy and tragic events on my family gliderport in Florida, including seeing a friend spin to his death trying to catch a thermal at pattern altitude. I've been fortunate to grow up on a gliderport, travel to fly at 104 soaring sites around the world and offered 77 different types of gliders to fly. So, if you don't agree with my suggestions just "ask me how I know." I'll respond to your e-mail to [burtcompton@aol.com](mailto:burtcompton@aol.com)

**My message to Practical Test ("checkride") Applicants for Private, Commercial and Flight Instructors:** Review the ground and flight training records along with the required entries and endorsements in the pilot logbook. Applicants, ask your Recommending Instructor to conduct a "mock oral" session with you before your checkride day. On your solo flights, practice all maneuvers to "proficiency" not just to the bare minimums of the FAA training requirements.

For your confidence on the checkride, your knowledge and skills should exceed the PTS / ACS standards. Applicants are expected to show a "Mastery of the Aircraft" (FAR 61.43(a)(2)) and "Demonstrate Sound Judgment" (FAR 61.43(a)(4)).

Designated Pilot Examiners (DPE's) evaluate an Applicant's ability to identify environmental conditions, hazardous or unexpected situations and distractions while performing maneuvers. Your Aeronautical Decision Making (ADM) and Risk Management, with appropriate and timely decisions, will be evaluated throughout the checkride.

**A Recommending Instructor (CFI) prepares and endorses an Applicant for a Checkride.** Discussions on the CFI-Airplane internet groups and FAA Seminars have DPE's expressing dismay about inadequate preparation by Recommending CFI's resulting in Applicant gaps in knowledge and skills. DPE's report a trend of some CFI's "glossing over" oral topics or flight tasks. Expecting an Applicant to acquire knowledge on their own time is valid however the Recommending Instructor who endorses the Applicant's logbook and the Applicant's 8710-1 application form must confirm the quality of mandatory ground and flight training. Consider making more than the "minimum" required dual and solo flights. On at least five of the solo flights, practice the required checkride maneuvers not just "pattern tows." Practice and verbalize your collision avoidance methods.

**Applicant Logbook with Incomplete or Missing Endorsements.** Ground Training time must be logged and confirmed by the Recommending Instructor. Solo Endorsements must cite the 19 training requirements. A separate Pre-Solo written test is completed for endorsement for solo in each make and model glider. The CFI's logbook endorsements for training and for taking the Practical Test must reference the applicable FAR part 61 requirements.

CFI signatures must be legible per FAR 61.51(h)(2)(i) and AC-61-65K. The CFI prints the endorsement details, the date, signs and prints their full name, CFI number, expiration or CFI recency date. The SSA/SSF Glider Pilot Logbook includes pre-printed endorsements available at [www.ssa.org](http://www.ssa.org)

Ask your CFI and towpilot for a demonstration of a towplane partial power loss while on tow. Practice aloft at least 2,000' AGL. Read Bob Wander's article on towplane Partial Power Loss in the December 2025 issue of SOARING, page 10. Partial Power Loss on tow is insidious, may occur gradually and is much different than an obvious "rope break."

**The Applicant Meets the DPE.** On the day of the checkride the DPE must first “qualify” the Applicant by checking the 8710-1 application in IACRA, confirming validity of pilot certificates and photo ID. Flights and times must match the pilot’s logbook and 8710-1 application. The DPE will confirm the Aeronautical Knowledge Test (“written test”) missed questions have been reviewed and corrected with the Recommending Instructor and confirm all applicable endorsements are correct and complete. It is the Recommending Instructor’s responsibility to assure everything is correct before signing the 8710-1 application. If the DPE cannot “qualify” the Applicant, then the checkride cannot proceed. Corrections must be made by the Applicant with their Recommending Instructor. The checkride must be rescheduled.

**The Practical Test (“Checkride”) Begins with the Applicant Oral Portion.**

The Applicant and Examiner must review the Glider Logbook for the Annual Inspection and compliance with Airworthiness Directives. 100-hour inspections must be logged if giving passenger rides or flight instruction for hire per FAR 91.409(b). Clubs are not excluded. Weight and Balance calculated for the specific glider to be flown. Preflight tasks per FAR 91.103 are accomplished. NOTAMS, TFR’s checked. Weather forecast updated. Applicant draws the evolution of a thermal, a diagram of wave lift and hazards, explains ridge soaring techniques and safety. On an Aero Chart, perhaps draw a triangular cross-country flight of at least 32 miles. Explain radio contact procedures with an Approach Control or Airport Tower (AIM.)

List aspects of good off-airport landing areas and the importance of a correct altimeter setting per FAR 91.121. Explain how the rudder does not turn the aircraft. It is an adverse yaw damper. Know the dangerous difference between a skidding and a slipping turn. Explain the often-misunderstood danger of exceeding Maneuvering Speed ( $V_a$ ) and how the Flight Manual published  $V_a$  speed changes with the weight of the glider. Explain the hazards between True Airspeed and Indicated Airspeed at higher altitudes. Explain the FAA definition of aerobatic flight in FAR 91.303. Cite why gliders are generally excluded from making only left patterns per FAR 91.126. Explain why a pilot of a pure glider must land before sunset per FAR 91.209.

**The Checkride Flights.** Oral questions will continue as the Applicant conducts a pre-flight inspection with the checklist. Conduct the mandatory briefing with the towpilot per FAR 91.309(5). Use the pre-takeoff checklist. Verbalize the wind direction, strength, gusts and your crosswind takeoff and landing techniques. Maintain proper tow position and explain why “kiting” (pitching) the glider just a little high on tow can be fatal to our towpilots. An Abnormal Occurrence of the simulated “rope break” (PTL) may occur at any altitude. 200 feet AGL is not in the PTS / ACS. Verbalize boxing the wake. Verbalize causes and recoveries for slack line. Understand and memorize the tolerances of speed and bank angles in some of the checkride maneuvers as published in the PTS / ACS.

**Stalls.** “Airshow Stalls” are when the nose is pitched very high and a sudden stall break occurs with a significant loss of altitude. This may be requested but not realistic. FAA likes scenarios. Be able to also demonstrate aloft a scenario of being on final approach and you suddenly “see” imaginary power lines near the runway threshold. Demonstrate how you must control the glider pitch to fly over the power lines with just a beginning of stall buffet (verbalize.) Then pitch the nose down just enough to recover to approach speed. Use a similar scenario for base to final turning stalls. The DPE is looking for “stall awareness” and coordination. Be smooth on the flight controls.

**Glider Patterns and Landings.** Complete the landing checklist before entering the pattern. The Initial Point (IP) is an area up in the sky not some object on the ground. Look outside never losing sight of the runway or off-airport landing field. Just a quick glance at the airspeed and the variometer to check your rate of sink.



Some CFIG's are also airplane instructors and tend to teach glider patterns that may cause the downwind leg to extend far beyond a runway or an off-airport landing field. Note that flying a downwind leg at 60 mph results in 88 feet per second ground speed. Add the tailwind as you continue to fly downwind away from the runway or field at about 120 feet per second! When you turn base and final you may be low and too far from the runway. You may encounter a headwind, sink and a wind gradient in your motorless glider. Strict rectangular patterns are not a FAR. Use the Soaring Safety Foundation "Goal Oriented Approach" in the pattern. Be flexible. Your goal is to touch down and roll to your desired "stop point." Be proficient at accuracy landings, essential if you land in a field or at another airport with a different airport elevation. Don't always rely on AGL altitudes to plan your pattern. The earth is not flat. On your checkride the DPE may cover your altimeter up at altitude to determine if you can later make an accuracy landing without reference to objects on the ground and arbitrary pattern altitudes. Your DPE may ask you to perform an opposite pattern than what is normal at your airport to test if you are using points on the ground as a crutch. The DPE may add slips and turning slips without drag device (spoilers, airbrakes or flaps) in the pattern to test your skills.

The training videos of the more challenging maneuvers include boxing the wake, slack line recoveries, straight slips, turning slips, the SSA Standard Signals (ground and in flight) and more, were produced by the Soaring Safety Foundation (SSF) and found at <https://www.soaringsafety.org/learning/FTvideos.html>

DPE post-checkride observations generated this list of Applicant weak areas. CFIG and Applicant misunderstandings and omissions can be reduced by digging deeper into resources such as the glider flight manual and a current FAR/AIM book. Expand your Aeronautical Decision Making and Risk Management skills. Watch the training materials on the Soaring Safety Foundation website at [www.soaringsafety.org](http://www.soaringsafety.org) These are my suggestions. If you need clarifications or further advice e-mail me at [burtcompton@aol.com](mailto:burtcompton@aol.com)

