

Choosing a Flight Training Provider

Executive Summary: Key Questions to Ask Before You Enroll

The right school is the one that is best for you: your goals, learning style, and risk tolerance.



1. Your Goals

- **Pro pilot path:** Private, Instrument, Commercial; airline-bound add Multi-Engine and CFI.
- **Full-time or part-time?** Make sure the school fits your schedule, not just "Zero to Hero" students.
- Choose a path that **keeps your options open**; many goals change mid-training.

2. Commitment & Timeline

- Best results come from **3-5 flights per week**.
- Most full-time students finish all three courses in **under 18 months**; 8-month promises leave knowledge gaps.
- Airlines require **1,500 hours** (1,000 via some collegiate affiliations); most graduates build time as instructors for 12-18 months.
- Seniority rewards starting early: earlier hire means better bases, aircraft, upgrades, and furlough protection.

3. Part 61 vs. Part 141

- **Part 141** = FAA-certified school with approved syllabi and ongoing oversight.
- Commercial in about **180 hours** (141) vs. **250** (Part 61); Part 61 adds roughly **\$16,000**.
- 141 also offers financing, VA benefits, college credit, structured check flights, and stronger employability.

4. Safety & Longevity

- Look for **experienced instructors** (military, airline, cargo, fire-fighting), not only new graduates.
- Ask how often **company-wide standardization training** occurs.
- Favor providers in business **10+ years** or led by people who weathered 2001, 2008, and 2020.

5. Type of Provider

- **Certificated schools / collegiate programs:** most structure, least risk.
- **Newer uncertified schools:** no standard syllabus; higher failure risk.
- **Flying clubs:** annual inspections only; surprise assessments.
- **Freelance CFIs:** highly variable; least oversight.

6. Pricing & Payment

- Be wary of **rates well below norms**: deferred maintenance, thin insurance, no engine reserves.
- Avoid **exclusive single-airline** affiliations; they limit your options.
- Prefer **pay-as-you-go** over fixed-price packages that overcharge average students.
- Never lose leverage: avoid large **prepayments** or promissory notes; if required, insist on **escrow or trust**.

7. Insurance

- Hull & liability coverage should be **included in the hourly rate**.
- Check that the rental agreement doesn't make you liable beyond the deductible.
- Cornerstone provides **\$1M liability**, \$10K medical, and full hull value less a **\$10K deductible**.

8. Maintenance & Fleet

- **In-house mechanics** keep aircraft ready; Cornerstone's six cover 12 hours a day, 6 days a week.
- Several **identical backup aircraft** so lessons aren't lost to a single breakdown.
- Engines of **160-180 HP or more** for safety and more practice per billable hour.
- Same aircraft model from Private through Commercial avoids re-learning a new platform.

9. Ground School

- **In-person classroom instruction** led by certified instructors; required for Part 141.
- Instructors turn facts into real-world scenarios, which is how FAA examiners test you.
- Classmates build a support system that carries into flight training.

10. Online Reviews

- Read **comments, not just the star average**; favor recent reviews that mention leadership, safety, and aircraft.
- The same instructor named across several years signals a **stable core faculty**.
- Discount single-visit, one-star complaints that say little about actual training.

11. Remember

- Your school is likely your **first employer** as a CFI; consider who will hire you next.
- Training from a structured, certificated school **stays on your resume for life**.