



SAFETY GRAM

July 2020

The vast majority of general aviation accidents are related to pilot error which means the accident was caused by “improper action or inaction of the pilot.” There are many factors that, when lacking, can contribute to pilot error such as currency, proficiency, competence, and complacency.

Currency

How much currency does the FAA require for a certificated pilot to fly solo? What about with passengers? What are the AFMAN requirements for currency? For pilots with less <200 hours and >200 hours? Is there a requirement to fly with an instructor if a pilot has not flown for many months? Currency is a minimum requirement and should not be the only way you evaluate whether you are safe to fly or not.

Proficiency

Do currency and proficiency mean the same thing? They do not. A pilot can accomplish the minimum and be legal in the eyes of the FAA/AFMAN but not really be proficient. To truly minimize the chance of being in a pilot related accident, make sure you are not only current, but also proficient for the attempted flight operation. Develop and use personal proficiency minimums before flying any aircraft. Don't count on the minimum to keep you out of trouble.

Competence

Competence is related to currency and proficiency. Has the pilot accomplished a particular operation enough to do it well? Will the pilot ever be able to accomplish an operation well? If the answer to either of those questions is no, then the pilot may not be competent for the given operation. It is up to each individual to recognize when they are not competent in a flight operation, and to avoid that operation until regaining competence. In many cases, some extra practice and study will improve competence and more experience can also improve competence, provided it is earned with practice and study. Take the time necessary and always strive to be the most competent pilot possible. When in doubt, never attempt to fly a maneuver you are not positive you can complete safely! Never let experience be a substitute for competence.

Stacey Farland, Aero Club Program Manager, USAF Aero Clubs
Stacey.farland@us.af.mil; DSN 969-7240, (210) 395-7240

Complacency

Complacency is insidious. A pilot may be proficient and competent and still fall prey to complacency. High levels of experience and proficiency can actually lead a pilot down the primrose path. "It has always worked well before, so it will be OK this time."

Remember, every situation is different and pilots must always be vigilant. Never let a subtle difference in situation sneak up on you because you were complacent. Never let the "been there, done that" attitude lower situational awareness, and always be alert for the unexpected. Some easy ways to combat complacency include; always using check lists, always sticking to personal minimums, and always knowing "it could happen to me!"

Don't settle for currency, but strive for proficiency. Don't settle for OK, strive for excellence. Don't think "it can't happen to me." By improving your proficiency through currency flights, you are also improving competence, and avoiding complacency. Pilots can perform the "proper action" rather than the improper action and avoid accidents!

CONTINUE TO FLY SAFE!

**Stacey Farland, Aero Club Program Manager, USAF Aero Clubs
Stacey.farland@us.af.mil; DSN 969-7240, (210) 395-7240**