

Frequently Asked Questions About Helicopter Flight Training

This page highlights questions and answers related to helicopter flight training at AIRO. The FAQs are organized under a general section, and then according to each specific flight training course. From the helicopter flight training pages, the questions and answers are listed under each course, along with additional information related to the training program. If you have additional questions, please contact us and we will gladly answer any questions that you may have.

AIRO provides helicopter flight training in Northwest Arkansas, Kansas City, and Tulsa, Oklahoma. We are headquartered in Springdale, Arkansas. We are a full-service helicopter training facility. We provide all levels of helicopter flight training. Our helicopter flight training programs include:

- Private Pilot – Helicopter
- Commercial Pilot – Helicopter
- Instrument Rating (IFR) – Helicopter
- Certified Flight Instructor (CFI) – Helicopter
- Certified Flight Instructor Instrument (CFII) – Helicopter

In addition to our standard helicopter flight training programs, we can customize a training program for you or your organization. We can also provide flight reviews. Please view a specific course for more information about our helicopter flight training programs.

I. General Helicopter Training Questions

What type of helicopter does AIRO use for flight training?

Our primary flight training helicopter is the Robinson R-44. This helicopter is an extremely safe training platform.

How long does it take to get my helicopter license or rating?

To get your Private Pilot Certificate, the FAA requires a minimum of 40 flight hours. How long this will take depends on how frequently you are able to fly.

The FAA has set minimum hours required for flight training, is this all that is required?

In theory, yes. However, some people are not able to become proficient enough to be a safe and competent helicopter pilot with only the regulatory minimum hours of flight training. So, when comparing schools, consider the pricing options when people quote the minimum, but anticipate that it will take more.

How much does it cost to get a helicopter pilot's license?

We take the guess work out of the cost to obtain your helicopter certificates. The minimum costs of our various helicopter training courses are listed on our pricing page.

Do you accept the GI Bill?

Thank you for your service. However, we do not accept the GI Bill at this time. We are looking into getting approval as we would like to allow our veterans the opportunity to use their benefits to receive helicopter flight training.

How do I pay for flight training?

We provide several different payment options: cash, check and credit card. You can pay as you go or deposit a lump sum on your account with us.

Does AIRO rent the helicopter if I have a helicopter rating already?

For insurance and liability reasons we do not let people rent the helicopters for solo or personal flights.

What are the biggest hurdles you see for people completing their training?

The biggest hurdle for people for student completing their helicopter flight training is lack of funds. It is expensive and a big commitment to do flight training. Doing flight training for airplanes may be a more affordable alternative to consider, or using financing or scholarships. We do have financing options available for our flight training.

Am I too old to learn to fly helicopters?

Probably not. It is like planting a tree, the best time was 20 years ago, the next best time is today. If you are able to drive a car and have no major medical issues, you are most likely physically capable of learning to fly a helicopter.

What are the steps to becoming a helicopter pilot?

Although these steps are not set in stone, we recommend the following:

1. Take an introductory flight to ensure that learning to fly helicopters is something you would like to pursue.
2. Select your school, consider key aspects of selecting a school are location, equipment, quality of training, pricing, and more.
3. Obtain an FAA medical. To obtain a helicopter private pilot certificate (or above) the pilot needs at least a third-class medical. You do not want to invest a lot of time and effort into flight training only to find out that you have a medical condition that prevents you from achieving your flight training goals. We require students to have a valid FAA medical.
4. Start your flight training!

How do I obtain an FAA Medical Certificate?

The first step is to find an Aviation Medical Examiner (AME) in your area. Once you contact them and set up an appointment, you will need to go to medxpress.faa.gov and complete an application for a medical certificate. When you complete the application, you will obtain a code that you must bring to your appointment with the AME.

Note: Do your research about the FAA's criteria for medical certificates. If you think you have any risk of disqualification for a medical certificate, do a consultation with the AME first before you apply for the certificate. There are many conditions you can still obtain a medical and fly with, but it may take extra time and money to prove you are fit to fly.

II. Introductory Helicopter Flight Experience

General Information

This introductory helicopter flight lesson is a great experience. It is the recommended first step for anyone that is considering learning to fly helicopter. No prior flight time is required. Prior to the flight, your flight instructor will go over key aspects of the helicopter controls. AIRO uses a Robinson R-44 helicopter. During the flight, you will be on the controls. You will actually fly the helicopter. The lesson starts with some air work in the helicopter where you will perform such items as climbs, descents, and turns. After the air work is completed, you will return back to the airport and will spend some time practicing hovering the helicopter.

What can you expect with this helicopter flight?

You will be introduced to how the helicopter controls work. Then, shortly after the flight begins, you will get to try your hands on the controls. You will even get to try to hover the helicopter.

How long is the introductory flight?

This flight time you choose will be discussed with the pilot prior to the flight. The flights are normally 30 minutes.

Will I get to fly the helicopter during the intro flight?

Yes. You get to fly try your hands at the controls under the supervision of a helicopter flight instructor.

Do I have to be on the controls?

No, but most people enjoy trying to fly the helicopter.

How much is in the introductory flight lesson?

The cost for the intro flight is \$450 for 30 minutes of flight time and an hour of on the ground training and discussion.

III. Private Helicopter Certificate

Obtaining your helicopter license is very rewarding. With a helicopter private pilot license you are able to fly the helicopter as pilot-in-command. The helicopter private pilot course is intended as the starting point for new pilots that want to start flying as a career or for people that want to fly as a hobby or for personal business.

Eligibility Requirements for the Helicopter Private Pilot rating

The following items are a summary of the eligibility requirements listed in 14 CFR Part 61.103 for obtaining a Private Pilot Helicopter license.

- Be at least 17 years old
- Be able to read, speak, write, and understand the English language.
- Pass a written knowledge test
- Receive flight training
- Meet the aeronautical experience listed below
- Pass a practical test (i.e. a Checkride)
- Hold a student pilot certificate, sport pilot certificate, or recreational pilot certificate.

Aeronautical Experience for the Helicopter Private Pilot rating

The following items are a summary of the aeronautical experience requirements listed in 14 CFR Part 61.109 for obtaining a Private Pilot Helicopter license.

- At least 40 hours of total flight time
- At least 20 hours of flight training
- At least 10 hours of solo flight time

There are specific flight requirements to complete, such as cross country, night flights, that will be required during the hours listed above.

Limitations of the Private Pilot Helicopter rating

The following is a list of key limitations, but is not an exhaustive list. Review 14 CFR 61.113 and 14 CFR 61.117 for all the specific limitations related to the private pilot helicopter license.

- With some minor exception, cannot operate as pilot in command for compensation or hire
- May not pay less than pro rata share of expenses related to a flight
- Cannot act as a second in command that is type certificated for more than one pilot
- Cannot act as a second in command for an aircraft that is carrying passengers or property for compensation or hire

FAQ's

How long does it take to get a private helicopter license?

The primary factor is the amount of flying you do. The regulatory minimum is 40 hours, but expect the training to take longer than that. We recommend being on the schedule and flying three to four times a week.

How much does it cost to get a private helicopter rating?

This is going to depend largely on the student, specifically the time devoted to flying. The longer between flights and the less frequently you fly, the longer it will take and the more money it will cost.

Will I be able to fly at night?

Yes, the private pilot certificate requires 3 hours of training at night.

IV. Helicopter Instrument Rating

General Overview

A helicopter instrument rating is beneficial for any pilot. The instrument rating allows pilots to operate IFR equipped helicopters in weather conditions with little visibility. The IFR training is often included during a portion of the commercial helicopter training. Although you can obtain a commercial helicopter license without an IFR rating, most employers prefer to hire an IFR qualified pilot.

Eligibility Requirements for the Helicopter Instrument rating.

The following items are a summary of the eligibility requirements listed in 14 CFR Part 61.65 for obtaining a helicopter instrument rating.

- Hold at least a current helicopter private pilot certificate, or be concurrently applying for a private pilot certificate
- Be able to read, speak, write, and understand the English language.
- Pass a written knowledge test
- Receive flight training
- Meet the aeronautical experience listed below
- Pass a practical test (i.e. a Checkride)

Aeronautical Experience For A Helicopter Instrument Rating

The following items are a summary of the aeronautical experience requirements listed in 14 CFR Part 61.65 for obtaining a Helicopter Instrument rating.

- At least 50 hours of cross-country pilot in command flight time, with at least 10 hours in a helicopter
- At least 40 hours of actual or simulated instrument time
- At least 15 hours of instrument training with an authorized instructor

During the training, there are specific flight requirements to complete, such as cross-country flights, specific approaches, etc.

FAQ's

What aircraft will we use for the helicopter IFR training?

Our Robinson R-44 helicopter is equipped as an IFR trainer.

Will we fly the helicopter in actual instrument conditions?

No, the Robinson R-44 is not certified for actual IFR conditions. The IFR training will occur in the helicopter, but the student will be wearing a view limiting device (often referred to as foggles) while flying the helicopter, which simulates IFR conditions.

What type of approaches will we fly with during the IFR training in the helicopter?

Our Robinson R-44 is equipped to fly VOR, LOC, ILS, and GPS approaches. We also have a helicopter with a glass cockpit setup using the Garmin 750 and 500 that you may have the option to use during your instrument training.

If I have a fixed-wing IFR rating, will I have to take a written exam to add-on a helicopter IFR rating?

No. If the pilot already has a fixed-wing IFR rating, they do not need to take a written exam to add a helicopter IFR rating.

Do I need to have an IFR rating in the helicopter to become a helicopter flight instructor?

No, a helicopter flight instructor does not need to have their IFR rating to perform non-IFR instruction.

I have some airplane instrument time, will this time count towards the helicopter instrument training?

Yes. You need at least 40 hours total logged instrument or simulated time. Only 15 hours of this time needs to be in a helicopter. However, it is difficult to complete all the requirements, such as the approaches, cross-country flights, etc. within 15 hours.

I am a helicopter CFI without a helicopter instrument rating, can I take the helicopter IFR and helicopter CFII at the same time?

No. You must take two separate checkrides. A requirement for the CFII is to have an instrument rating in the appropriate category and class of aircraft.

V. Helicopter Commercial Pilot Course

General Overview

The commercial helicopter license is a must for anyone that would like to be paid for flying. The commercial helicopter course is the second step in flying helicopters as a career. Parts of the commercial helicopter course can be completed at the same time as Helicopter Instrument Rating (IFR) course. Although you can obtain a commercial helicopter license without an IFR rating, most employers prefer to hire an IFR qualified pilot.

Eligibility Requirements for the Commercial Certificate

The following items are a summary of the eligibility requirements listed in 14 CFR Part 61.123 for obtaining a Commercial Helicopter Pilot license.

- Be at least 18 years old

- Be able to read, speak, write, and understand the English language.
- Pass a written knowledge test
- Receive flight training
- Meet the aeronautical experience listed below
- Pass a practical test (i.e. a Checkride)
- Hold at least a private pilot certificate

Aeronautical Experience for the Commercial Certificate

The following items are a summary of the aeronautical experience requirements listed in 14 CFR Part 61.129 for obtaining a Commercial Helicopter Pilot license.

- At least 150 hours of total flight time
- At least 100 hours of total flight time in powered aircraft
- At least 50 hours in helicopters
- At least 100 hours of pilot in command time
- At least 35 hours of pilot in command time in a helicopter
- At least 10 hours of pilot in command in cross country flight in a helicopter
- At least 20 hours of flight training

During the training, there are specific flight requirements to complete, such as cross country, night flights, etc.

FAQ's

What type of work can I do with a commercial helicopter certificate?

With a commercial certificate you can be compensated for flying a helicopter. You can be paid to be a company or personal owner. The most common first job is conducting helicopter tours and/or being a flight instructor, assuming you also get your helicopter flight instructor rating. As you get flight hours, there are additional job opportunities, at 500 hours you are eligible to fly VFR charter under part 135, at 1200 hours you are eligible to fly IFR charters under part 135, assuming you have your IFR rating.

Will you help a new commercial helicopter pilot get a job?

If you trained with us, we will assist you in getting a job. However, we cannot guarantee a job.

To be eligible for a commercial certificate, it states 150 total hours, I have some fixed wing time, does this flight time count?

Yes. The helicopter commercial certificate requires 150 hours total time, with 50 hours minimum in a helicopter, among a few other requirements. The specific aeronautical experience for becoming a commercial helicopter pilot is outlined in 14 CFR 61.129.

VI. Certified Helicopter Flight Instructor (CFI)

General Overview

Becoming a Helicopter CFI is often the first step in the career of a professional pilot. Many initial flight jobs are as a CFI. Being a CFI can be extremely rewarding. As an instructor, your skills will increase significantly and it is fun to see students progress at achieving their goals. Through the CFI training course, you will learn how to instruct helicopter students in a safe and efficient manner.

Eligibility Requirements for the Commercial Helicopter Flight Instructor certificate

The following items are a summary of the eligibility requirements listed in 14 CFR Part 61.183 for obtaining a Commercial Helicopter Flight Instructor rating.

- Be at least 18 years old
- Be able to read, speak, write, and understand the English language
- Hold a commercial helicopter pilot certificate or a helicopter airline transport pilot certificate
- Pass a written knowledge test
- Receive flight training
- Meet the aeronautical experience listed below
- Pass a practical test (i.e. a Checkride)

Aeronautical Experience for the Helicopter Flight Instructor Certificate

There are no regulatory hour minimums for obtaining a helicopter flight instructor certificate. However, in order to instruct in the Robinson R-44 helicopter specifically, regulations require 200 hours in helicopters with 50 hours in the R-44 helicopter.

FAQ's

I am a fixed-wing flight instructor, do I have to take a written test to become a helicopter flight instructor?

Yes. You have the option to limit the instructor written to the difference (25 questions) or the entire examination (75 questions). We recommend that you take the entire test. If you get a few wrong when dealing with only 25 questions, it can dramatically affect your overall score.

Do I need an instrument rating to be a helicopter flight instructor?

No, you do not need to have an instrument rating to be a helicopter flight instructor.

VII. Helicopter Certified Flight Instructor Instrument (CFII)

General Overview

The Helicopter Certified Flight Instructor Instrument (CFII) is often referred to as a Helicopter Instrument Instructor. As a Helicopter CFII, you will be able to conduct flight and ground lessons for eligible helicopter pilots working towards their helicopter instrument rating.

Helicopter Instrument Instructor

During the Helicopter Instrument Instructor Course you will learn concepts of helicopter instrument flying but will do these actions from the flight instructor seat. You will also learn the techniques to teach IFR flying concepts to students working on their helicopter instrument rating.

Eligibility Requirements for the Helicopter Instrument Instructor rating

The following items are a summary of flight instructor requirements listed in 14 CFR 61.183.

- Be at least 18 years old
- Be able to read, speak, write, and understand the English language
- Hold a helicopter pilot certificate or airline transport pilot certificate
- Hold a helicopter instrument rating
- Pass a knowledge test (if not an add-on rating)
- Pass a practical test (i.e. a Checkride)

Aeronautical Experience for the Helicopter Instrument Instructor rating

Although there are few aeronautical experience requirements, the following is the only requirement listed in 14 CFR 61.183. To obtain a commercial helicopter rating, this PIC requirement is already met.

- Log at least 15 hours as pilot in command in a helicopter

FAQ's

Does the FAA set a minimum number of hours for training to become a helicopter instrument flight instructor?

The FAA does not set a minimum number of training hours to become an instrument instructor in a helicopter (same for airplanes).

Can I take the helicopter IFR and helicopter CFII checkride at with only one checkride?

No. You must take the helicopter IFR and helicopter flight instructor instrument as two different checkrides. One of the prerequisites for an instrument flight instructor is to have an instrument rating in the appropriate category and class of aircraft for the rating sought. As such, the paperwork for your helicopter IFR rating needs to be completed before being eligible for the helicopter flight instructor instrument rating. The Helicopter CFII could be scheduled as soon as the day after passing the Helicopter IFR rating.

VIII. Helicopter Add On Rating

General Overview

For most people adding a helicopter rating, it will be the addition of a new category as they are likely fixed-wing or airplane pilots. The requirements for getting a helicopter add-on for a pilot that already has their airplane certificate are detailed below. The regulation that addresses add on ratings is 14 CFR 61.63.

Requirements for Adding a Helicopter Rating to a Fixed Wing Certificate (other than ATP)

- Complete the training and have the applicable aeronautical experience. The aeronautical experience is included under each applicable course on our site, with Private Helicopter and Commercial Helicopter being the most common.
- Must have a logbook or training record endorsement from an authorized instructor attesting that the person was found competent in the appropriate aeronautical knowledge areas and proficient in the appropriate areas of operation.
- Must pass the practical test.
- DOES NOT NEED to not take an additional knowledge test, provided the applicant holds an airplane, rotorcraft, powered-lift, weight-shift-control aircraft, powered parachute, or airship rating at that pilot certificate level.

Adding an Helicopter Instrument Rating to an existing Pilot Certificate

Most people performing a helicopter instrument add on are adding to a fixed wing rating. The majority of the requirements have already been met, with the exception of 15 hours with a helicopter instructor. Although there is no minimum hours for training, most will need at least 15 hours to meet this requirement. During this time, the required proficiency should be able to be met.

Adding an Additional Helicopter Class Rating to existing Pilot Certificate

If you already have a Rotorcraft: Gyrocopter Rating, and would like to add Helicopter privileges, things are a little easier.

- You need to complete training, and receive an endorsement. There is not specific training time required.
- Must pass a practical test (i.e. checkride)
- YOU DO NOT need meet the specified training time requirements prescribed in 14 CFR 61 that apply to the pilot certificate for the aircraft class rating sought
- DOES NOT NEED not take an additional knowledge test, provided the applicant holds an airplane, rotorcraft, powered-lift, weight-shift-control aircraft, powered parachute, or airship rating at that pilot certificate level.

FAQ's

I have an existing fixed-wing commercial rating, can I add a commercial helicopter rating without getting a private helicopter rating first?

Yes. You can add a helicopter commercial rating without getting a private helicopter rating first. As 14 CFR 61.123 points out, you must have at least a private rating (any category) to obtain a commercial rating, it does not state the category or class. However, there is some benefit to obtaining a private helicopter rating prior to a commercial rating. One of the requirements to obtain a commercial rating in the helicopter is to have 35 hours of pilot in command time. Without a rating in the category, the pilot cannot log all 35 hours of PIC time unless they are the sole occupant of the aircraft. If the pilot has a rotorcraft – helicopter rating, they can receive training and count that time as PIC. As such, the pilot can perform more advanced maneuvers during these 35 hours and often become better pilots than pilots that just fly solo. The pilots that fly solo for 35 hours often tend to get bad habits, or they don't do much other than cross country flight or those with little or no challenges.

If I add on a rating, do I need to take another written test?

No if you add on a rating, an additional written test is not required as stated in 14 CFR 61.63. However, an exception is the flight instructor rating. To add on a flight instructor

rating, the pilot must take a written test on the differences, or the entire helicopter flight instructor knowledge test.

IX. Helicopter Flight Review

General Overview

Flight reviews are conducted in our Robinson R-44 helicopters. For all flight reviews, we will customize the flight review to meet your particular circumstances. As regulation 14 CFR 61.56 states, the flight review must include at least 1 hour of ground (with some exceptions) and at least 1 hour of flight time.

Unless people are familiar with flying the Robinson R-44, we find that the flight review can take significantly more time to prove proficiency. If you are not PIC endorsed in the Robinson R-44 under SFAR 73, you will still be able to complete the flight review, but we may not be able to give you a PIC endorsement unless additional training requirements are met.

We address the required topics within the flight review as outlined in 14 CFR 61.56, which are pretty generic:

- A. A review of the current general operating and flight rules of part 91 of this chapter; and
- B. A review of those maneuvers and procedures that, at the discretion of the person giving the review, are necessary for the pilot to demonstrate the safe exercise of the privileges of the pilot certificate.

Although we will tailor the flight review to your specific needs, we always include emergency procedures such as autorotations and stuck pedal.

I am a dual-rated pilot, do I need to do a flight review in both categories?

Flight reviews count for all categories in which you hold your certificates, however Robinson helicopters are the exception to this. If you do your flight review in an airplane, you will still need another flight review for the Robinson R-44 helicopter specifically. However if you do your flight review in the Robinson R-44, you will be current in the airplane as well without having to take another flight review.