

For the new student there can be a feeling of uncertainty flying at night. The best way to calm a student's uncertainty is to have them fully prepared for the flight. Flying at night can become a student's favorite aviation activity, once they become familiar with some of the special considerations. As a flight instructor we have the responsibility to make sure our students are safe and receive the best training. Here are a few items to focus on when preparing a student for night flying.

It can be harder to locate and identify landmarks; fields suitable for an emergency landing during the day become inky spots and on approach the ability to judge speed and height above our touchdown zone can be difficult. During the flight planning explain which landmarks work better at night. Point out forced landing areas en route to help the student learn to identify which areas are better. Knowing runway elevations take the guess work out of pattern heights.

Have your student get a complete weather briefing, plan the flight and then get an update of the weather picture. Ask them to pay close attention to skies forecasted or reported as few or scattered. Tell them about the difficulty in seeing clouds in the dark and that flying in to a cloud, however small, can cause disorientation.

Ask them what the temperature and dew point spread is. Go over the types of fog and how they form. Remind them that the spread between them can close fast at night causing fog to quickly form. Go over the effects of spatial disorientation together. Being familiar will keep you aware of the cause and effects. Effects can be minimized with proper recognition.

Have your student read the AFD to confirm the type of lights at the destination airport including how to activate the pilot controlled

lighting. Have the student mark down the time the tower closes along with the proper CTAF frequency on their flight plan sheet. Have them explain what the airspace at the airport changes to when the tower closes. Have them take along an airport diagram. This can help in negotiating the airport when progressive taxi instructions aren't an option. Call ahead to make sure the fuel island is still operative. Getting to an airport with a broken fuel island when everything is closed can put a damper on the flight!

Schedule a longer flight block to provide more time for the student to perform the preflight. Keep lighting low and take time to let your eyes adapt to the dark. Have lighting available in the cockpit and carry a spare light in an accessible place.

While flying, remind the student to keep monitoring the outside environment. Sometimes the first indication that weather conditions are deteriorating is your ground references gradually disappearing. Lights on the ground will start to get a halo look around them. If you notice this occurring, use caution flying in the same direction. Fog can form very quickly dropping visibility in to or below marginal VFR. In these circumstances get on the ground fast or divert to better weather.

With proper planning comes confidence and with confidence comes success. They will know that flying at night can be a magical time. They will have flown at night when the skies are clear, the lights are bright and they can see forever. They will be exhilarated to see the lights unfold before them as they lift off in to the air and make their way in to the night. It will seem easier to spot traffic, radio chatter is less and ATC has more time for them making the flight easier. After a great flight at night, the look of excitement and accomplishment on your students face will say it all. They will now see the benefits of flying at night!