

ROTORCRAFT CHECKRIDE Training Musings

By Matt Johnson

HE IS A PERSON TOO!

Undoubtedly, the “checkride” can be stressful for anyone, be it the private pilot or ATP applicant; everyone suffers from notorious “checkride-itis.” I get it! I’m evaluated multiple times per year and have been for years. While I have admittedly come to somewhat “embrace” it, I don’t think anyone truly becomes fully inoculated to the checkride and all of the emotions that go with it.

In more than a decade of being an examiner, I have seen numerous applicants who have let checkride anxiety get the best of them. That is very unfortunate. Here is a little secret to help ease some of that anxiety. There are at least *three* people who want to see you succeed on the day of your big event: you, your CFI and the examiner!

Many years ago, I was administering a private pilot exam to a young man who had some obvious signs of checkride anxiety. After exchanging pleasantries and going through the administrative phase to ensure his eligibility (and the aircraft’s), the exam began. The young man did an overall great job and was proficient in all areas of operations in the PTS, but it was apparent his nerves were still on high alert. After a short break, I would meet the applicant at the aircraft for the preflight portion of the exam. On my way out to the aircraft, I could see the applicant walking around the aircraft, and he appeared to be talking to himself. With the distance between us and one of those pesky airplanes taxiing by, I couldn’t hear him talking and he couldn’t hear me walking up. As I got closer, I was able to decipher what he was mumbling to himself, and it stopped me in my tracks as I listened to confirm what I thought I was hearing. This young man was repeating a mantra to himself: “Remember, he is a person too; he is a person too...” Once our presence was known to each other, the examination resumed, and this young man ended up doing a great job considering his checkride anxiety.

While this checkride ended up being a success (for all three of us), that is not always the case. Unfortunately, I can think of too many instances where anxiety got the best of the applicant, and the outcome was less than desirable. So, while keeping my examiner hat on, I want to be father Matt or big brother Matt for a few moments and offer some advice to those seeking a certificate and/or rating.

This should come as no surprise, but preparation and organization are essential! Sure, you need to know the subject matter, but what I’m talking about is the preparation and organization of what is necessary for the exam even to begin. When you show up, know your necessary IACRA login credentials. Have your logbook, whether traditional or electronic, tabbed or marked so you can easily find and show the examiner the flights needed to meet specific requirements, as well as the necessary endorsements

from your CFI. Have all of your official resources readily available: your aircraft flight manual, maintenance records to show airworthiness, a current FAR/AIM, and the necessary FAA 8083 handbooks such as the Helicopter Flying Handbook, etc. Just like your logbook, have these resources organized and tabbed so you can quickly find clarification on something you need to look up. In this day and age, there is a lot of information available, and the problem with so much information is that it’s hard to make sense of it all. So stick to the “official” publications, as having too much extraneous information is like being in a maze. Too much information hinders you from seeing the “big picture.”

I recently learned from one organization that surveyed designated pilot examiners that 20% of flight exams don’t even get started because something is missing: a logbook endorsement, incorrect maintenance entry, lack of aeronautical experience hours for the certificate, etc. I’ve personally seen this many times, and each time it turned into a cascade of anxiety-ridden events that often did not end well for the applicant. Remember, I and all other examiners are “a person too.” Come prepared and organized, and all three of us are more likely to have a good day.



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