

How To Choose A Flight School

Courtesy of Northeast Helicopters

As a prospective helicopter pilot, your *main mission* is to find the right school for your flight training needs. You cannot choose a great flight school just based on where it is located, or only by what you read. Go and visit any school you are thinking of training with, or if that's not possible, at the very least call and ask for a telephone interview.

This guide contains things you should know and questions you should ask when interviewing flight schools. It is based on experiences, (and sometimes mistakes), from students who have come to Northeast Helicopters with their stories. Even if you don't train with us, we truly want you to find and attend a *great* flight school.

1. Type of Flight School

(see [note 1](#))

- Is the school an FAA-Approved Part 141 school or a Part 61 school?
- If the school is Part 61, do they have a syllabus for ground school?
- Is the required amount of ground school taught?

2. School Stability

(see [note 2](#))

- How long has the company been in business?
- How many years of actual helicopter training knowledge do they have to offer?
- How solid is their reputation in the industry?
- Is the flight school primarily focused on helicopter instruction?
- Does student training take priority over commercial operations?

3. Safety Record

- What type of safety record does the school have?
- How many incidents or accidents have occurred throughout their history?
- How difficult is it to get information from the school about their safety record?

4. Accounting Practices

(see [note 3](#))

- Do you have to pay a large deposit to train?
- Do you need to maintain a large balance while training?
- Are you required to sign a contract to train?
- What are the penalties for terminating a contract?
- What is the school's refund policy if you should have to stop training?
- Will you get back any unused money and if so, how is it returned?
- Is the refund policy in writing?

5. Availability

- How many instructors are available for you to train with?
- Are your instructors qualified to teach instrument courses?
- How many aircraft are in the schools fleet?
- How many aircraft are dedicated to flight training vs. commercial flying?
- How available are aircraft and instructors for you to schedule training?
- Are instrument training aircraft available?
- Do you have to do instrument training in a larger more expensive aircraft?

6. Maintenance

(see [note 4](#))

- Does the school have its own maintenance department?
- Do aircraft leave the facility to have maintenance work done?
- Are spare parts available on-site to keep aircraft flying?

7. Ground Training

- Is ground school done one-on-one or are you in a class with many students?
- Are you responsible for your own ground training outside the school?

8. Examination

- Does the school have examiners available for check rides?
- Can you take your flight exam on-site?

9. Pricing

(see [note 5](#))

- Is pricing based on **REAL** flight hours or the FAA minimum requirements?

10. Rental

- Are rental aircraft available after you get a license?
- What are the minimum hours required to rent if available?

11. Career

(see [note 6](#))

- Are you guaranteed a job after completing the program?
- What is the range for starting salaries?

Remember that research is the key. The helicopter pilot community is a great resource and you will find many pilots willing to share their training experiences with you. Please peruse these web sites for additional help in your search for a great helicopter flight training school.

<http://www.justhelicopters.com>

<http://www.verticalreference.com/>

FLY SAFE!

The Northeast Helicopters Team

NOTES:

Note 1: 141 vs 61

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The "Parts" refer to the rules that the FAA established to regulate flight instruction and flight schools.

Part 141 training requires a very structured program that flight schools, students and instructors must follow when preparing for a license. Schools must have established curriculums, periodic quizzes and examinations, and each student's progress is monitored by school management to keep training on track. The FAA must review, oversee and approve all facets of a 141 flight training school. It is then considered an [FAA-Approved flight school](#).

The Part 61 program may be more suitable for a student with previous training experience, or one who needs more flexibility in their training environment. In general a syllabus is not required, and ground instruction can sometimes be de-emphasized. Student progress is generally left more to individual instructor discretion than to the school.

Please make sure that if a flight school tells you they are a Part 141 school, that you actually see proof. Look for certificates or documents on the school wall that certify it Part 141. Don't just take it for granted that the school says they are a Part 141 school, because some schools have claimed to be part 141 certified when they are not. You can also check with the FAA to verify this.

Note 2: School Stability

[\[up\]](#)

Just because a school is large or has many locations in several places, does not mean that the training is high quality.

Note 3: Contract Requirements

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If the school insists that you sign a contract, *please read the fine print!* (Contracts are usually for the protection of the business or person writing the contract, not necessarily for yours.) Make sure you read everything and understand what you are signing. Don't sign anything that you are unsure of and make certain you have time to review it.

Note 4: On-site Maintenance

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Schools that rely on outside maintenance may keep aircraft out of service for longer-than-expected time frames. Weather, scheduling delays, mechanic availability and other complications may cause scheduling problems for the students.

Note 5: Realistic Pricing

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Many schools display flight training pricing based upon the FAA minimum hour requirements. Minimums are unrealistic, but are often displayed to provide a more attractive number. It's important to consider an average student graduate's actual flight and ground time expenses when preparing to train. Make certain you prepare realistically!

Note 6: Salary and Career Planning

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It's important to realize that at any school you train with, there is no such thing as guaranteed employment. Employers simply cannot know what you will be like as an instructor. You *will not* start off in this industry making \$100,000.00, it just simply doesn't work that way. The industry is growing and the market for civilian helicopter pilots is very good. But there are no short cuts. You need to get through good, solid and safe training, build your hours to become employable.

