Pilot Career Solutions

The written test

A playbook for the FAA Private Pilot knowledge test:
how it works, how to study, what to do with a bad question,
and how to turn your score report into checkride prep.

November 2026 edition

Understand it first. Drill it last.
Then make the score report work for you.

Free. Use it with the Private Pilot syllabus, the drill book, and the free practice page.
Pilot Career Solutions teaches in ground and simulator settings only, never in a real aircraft.

Practice online, free
pilotcareersolutions.com/practice

THE TEST

What you are walking into

60	2.0	70%	24
questions, multiple choice, three options each	hours allowed	to pass: 42 of 60 right	calendar months your result is good for

Where	A PSI testing center. PSI runs FAA knowledge testing and is moving scheduling to its online test-taker portal; the FAA says the content and standards do not change with the move.
What to bring	Your instructor's endorsement that you finished the ground training or home-study course and are prepared (14 CFR 61.35). Identification with a photo, signature, and date of birth; if your mailing address is a post office box, your residential address too. Check PSI's current list before you go.
Figures	The private test shows charts and figures inside the question, on the screen. The FAA says on-screen measuring tools will be provided where a question needs them, and the printed supplement (FAA-CT-8080-2H) stays at test centers until a removal date the FAA has not set (Airman Testing Community Advisory, September 2026 Special Edition, p. 4; checked on October 26, 2026). Practice reading figures on a monitor.
Questions that do not count	FAA guidance: five unscored validation questions are mixed into the private test, so the screen shows 65 questions of which 60 are scored; they are not identified, they do not count toward the score, and the allotted time includes them (Airman Testing Community Advisory, February 28, 2023; Airman Knowledge Testing Matrix, September 25, 2026).
Your result	The Airman Knowledge Test Report (AKTR) lists an ACS code for every question you missed. Keep the original; you need it for the checkride, which must be finished within 24 calendar months (14 CFR 61.39). A lost report for a test taken on or after January 13, 2020 can be reprinted from the PSI website (ACS Companion Guide, p. 6).
If you fail	Get additional training from an authorized instructor, who endorses that you are proficient; then retest (14 CFR 61.49). Bring the failed report and the 61.49 endorsement to the test center (ACS Companion Guide, Section 2, p. 5).
What you may use	The ACS Companion Guide (p. 4) prints the current table of acceptable and unacceptable materials. A plotter and a flight computer, manual or electronic, as long as an electronic one has a screen that shows its memory is erased; the proctor can refuse any device that cannot show it, takes any printout at the end, and has the final say on what comes into the testing area (AC 60-11C, paragraph 5).
What it costs	PSI sets the fee; about $175 in 2026. Check the price when you book.

The Private ACS itself (Appendix 1, p. 66) still prints 2.5 hours; the FAA's October 2024 knowledge test table corrects it to 2.0. The minimum age to take the test is 15. Checked on October 26, 2026.

THE PLAN

Understand it first. Drill it last.

Memorizing a question bank used to get people through. It works less well now: the FAA updates its questions every quarter, moves figures onto the screen, and asks more scenario questions. A student who understands density altitude can answer any version of the question; one who memorized a version can only answer that one.

1. **Learn each area from the syllabus and the handbooks first.** The ground lessons in the Private Pilot syllabus follow the ACS. Do the reading, then answer the lesson questions in the workbook in your own words.
2. **Two weeks out, start drilling.** The whole question bank behind our ground school is free at pilotcareersolutions.com/practice: by module, the most-missed drills with the figures on screen, and a full 60-question, two-hour mock drawn in the FAA's proportions, with the reason and the page to read after every answer. Sporty's Study Buddy is another free source of timed tests. Take full-length timed tests, not just short quizzes.
3. **Every miss is a reading assignment.** Look up why the right answer is right in the handbook, not just which letter it was. Write the reason in one line.
4. **Ready means repeatable.** The syllabus's bar for the endorsement is two practice tests at 80 percent or better, then 80 percent or better on the course final, and the review call. Take each practice test full length and timed, on a fresh draw, with time to spare. That bar is ours, not the FAA's (the regulation asks only for the instructor's endorsement, 61.35), and the real test passes at 70. One good score can be luck; two practice tests and the final, each on a fresh draw, show knowledge.
5. **Work the most-missed areas on purpose.** Nationally, the codes students miss most are pilotage and dead reckoning, how the flight instruments work, and airspeed in an emergency descent. The drills cover all three, with the figures on screen: online at pilotcareersolutions.com/practice, or printed in the drill book.
6. **Get the endorsement.** When you meet the bar, your instructor reviews your weak areas with you and signs you off to test.

READ THE SCREEN

Practice the chart and figure questions on a monitor, not just in a printed book: sectional excerpts, weather charts, the airspeed indicator, performance charts. Find the legend, the scale, and the units before you read the question. The FAA recommends visiting PSI's site to see sample questions in the new format; our practice page shows every figure with its question, the way the test does.

TEST DAY

When a question is bad

Some questions are poorly written. Most students see one or two. Plan for them, so one bad question costs you one question and not your confidence.

1 **Answer the FAA's question.**

Pick the answer the handbook text supports, not what your friend at the airline does. The test grades the handbook.

2 **Eliminate, then choose.**

With three options, crossing off one wrong answer turns a guess into a coin flip. Crossing off two gives you the answer.

3 **Read every word of the stem.**

"Not counting the climb", "true" versus "magnetic", "statute" versus "nautical": the wrong answers are often the right number for a different question.

4 **Flag it and move on.**

Two hours for 60 questions is two minutes each. Answer what you know first, flag the hard ones, and come back. Never leave a question blank.

5 **It may not count.**

A strange question may be one of the unscored trial questions. Give it your best answer and let it go.

6 **Change an answer only for a reason.**

A later question that reminds you of the rule is a reason. A nervous feeling is not.

A PACE THAT WORKS

- First pass, about 60 minutes: answer every question you are sure of, flag the rest.
- Second pass, about 40 minutes: work the flagged questions, the calculations, and the figures.
- Last 20 minutes: check that nothing is blank, then review only the questions you had a real reason to doubt.

AFTER THE TEST

Your score report is a study list

Passing is not the end of the written test. The FAA says it in two places. The ACS (Appendix 1, p. 66): the examiner must test any elements in which the applicant was shown to be deficient on the knowledge test. The ACS Companion Guide for Pilots (FAA-G-ACS-2, Section 2, p. 5): the test center prints an Airman Knowledge Test Report that lists a code for every question answered incorrectly; keep the original; during the oral the evaluator reviews it and assesses the noted areas of deficiency. Your codes are the first page of the examiner's plan.

- **The report lists an ACS code for each question you missed**, such as PA.VI.A.K1. The code points to one element of one Task in the Private Pilot ACS: Area of Operation VI (Navigation), Task A (Pilotage and Dead Reckoning), Knowledge element 1.
- **The examiner must test those elements.** The ACS requires the examiner to include "any elements in which the applicant was shown to be deficient on the knowledge test." Expect questions on every code on your report.
- **Your instructor retrains you on them.** The ACS asks instructors to use it and its references when retraining you on any subject missed on the knowledge test. Bring the report to your next lesson, look up each code, and be able to explain it out loud.

THE MOST-MISSED PRIVATE PILOT CODES, NATIONALLY

ACS code	What it covers	Missed	FAA report	Drill set
PA.VI.A.K1	Pilotage and dead reckoning	86.83%	CY24 Q3	C
PA.VIII.C.K1c	Flight instruments: function and operation (Area VIII, Basic Instrument Maneuvers, Task C, Constant Airspeed Descents, ACS p. 47; the same element appears in every Area VIII Task)	77.24%	CY24 Q3	B
PA.IX.A.K3	Emergency descent: airspeed, including airspeed limitations	73.33%	CY25 Q2	A

From the FAA's Frequently Missed Knowledge Test ACS Codes reports; percentages checked against the reports on October 26, 2026 (3rd Quarter CY24 covers October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2024; 2nd Quarter CY25 covers July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025). The FAA does not publish how codes are chosen for the list; treat it as a pointer to where students struggle, not a ranking.

FOR YOUR INSTRUCTOR

- Sign the knowledge-test endorsement (14 CFR 61.35; AC 61-65K, A.36) when the student meets the bar: two practice tests at 80 percent or better, then 80 percent or better on the course final, and the review call (the syllabus's bar; the FAA sets no score for the endorsement).
- After the test, go through every code on the report with the student before the checkride, using the ACS references for each Task. The retraining ends with the AC 61-65K A.2 endorsement in the student's logbook (14 CFR 61.39(a)(6)(iii)); the examiner looks for it.
- On a failure, give the additional training and the retest endorsement (14 CFR 61.49), aimed at the codes on the report.

EVERY WRITTEN ON YOUR ROUTE

- The loop is the same for every knowledge test on the way to the airlines except the multiengine add-on, which has no knowledge test (14 CFR 61.63(c)(4)): instrument rating (IRA) 60 questions in 2.0 hours; commercial (CAX) 100 in 2.5; fundamentals of instructing (FOI) 50 in 1.5; flight instructor airplane (FIA) 100 in 2.5; flight instructor instrument (FII) 50 in 2.5; airline transport pilot multiengine (ATM) 125 in 3.5; all pass at 70 percent (FAA Airman Knowledge Testing Matrix, September 25, 2026).
- Each test report carries ACS codes the same way, and the FOI codes are identical in every instructor ACS (ACS Companion Guide, Section 4, p. 9).

SOURCES

Where every fact comes from

Checked on October 26, 2026. Test rules and numbers change: if anything here disagrees with the FAA or PSI on the day you test, the FAA and PSI win.

Revision log. November 7, 2026: November 2026 edition; the endorsement bar is now the syllabus's 80-percent rule (two practice tests at 80 percent or better, then 80 on the course final, and the review call); the Pilot's Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge is named in full; the drill keys are spread across A, B and C, and the book prints the options in the same order as the practice page; the cover states that Pilot Career Solutions teaches in ground and simulator settings only. October 26, 2026: dead links replaced with the live FAA addresses; the unscored validation questions and the on-screen figures attributed to the FAA's own advisories; a Read more line (book, folio, PDF page, link) under every answer; four risk-scenario drills added; "checked on" wording throughout.

Source	Where
FAA: ACS Knowledge Test Table, allotted times (Oct 2024): PAR, 60 questions, 2.0 hours, passing score 70	faa.gov/training_testing/testing/acs/acs_knowledge_test_table.pdf
FAA: Airman Testing Community Advisory, September 2026 Special Edition (figures embedded in questions; PSI portal)	faa.gov/training_testing/testing/September_2026_Special_Edition.pdf
FAA: Airman Testing Community Advisory, February 2026 (embedded images; PSI sample questions)	faa.gov/training_testing/testing/Community_Advisory_February_2026.pdf
FAA: Frequently Missed Knowledge Test ACS Codes, 3rd Quarter CY24 and 2nd Quarter CY25 (percentages checked on October 26, 2026)	faa.gov/data_research/aviation_data_statistics/test_statistics
FAA: Airman Certification Standards Companion Guide for Pilots, FAA-G-ACS-2 (Section 2, p. 5: what the knowledge test report is and how the evaluator uses it)	faa.gov/training_testing/testing/acs/acs_companion_guide_pilots.pdf
Private Pilot for Airplane Category ACS, FAA-S-ACS-6C, Introduction and Appendix 1	faa.gov/training_testing/testing/acs
14 CFR 61.35 (knowledge test prerequisites), 61.39 (24 calendar months), 61.49 (retesting), 91.159 (VFR cruising altitudes)	ecfr.gov
Pilot's Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge, FAA-H-8083-25C, Chapters 8 and 16	faa.gov
Airplane Flying Handbook, FAA-H-8083-3C, Chapter 18	faa.gov
AC 60-11C (April 26, 1999), Test Aids and Materials That May Be Used by Airman Knowledge Testing Applicants; the Companion Guide table on p. 4 is the current restatement	faa.gov/documentLibrary/media/Advisory_Circular/AC%2060-11C.pdf
AC 61-65K (November 14, 2025), Certification: Pilots and Flight and Ground Instructors, endorsements A.2 and A.36	faa.gov/documentLibrary/media/Advisory_Circular/AC_61-65K.pdf
PSI, the FAA testing vendor: sample tests for registered users; the FAA does not release the questions on the test (Companion Guide p. 3; Airman Testing Community Advisory, February 2026)	faa.psiexams.com
Pilot Career Solutions: the whole question bank, free, with the reason and the page to read after every answer	pilotcareersolutions.com/practice
Sporty's: free online practice tests (Study Buddy)	sportys.com/pilotshop/study
FAA: Airman Testing Community Advisory, February 28, 2023 (five unscored validation questions; the private test shows 65 questions, 60 scored) and Airman Knowledge Testing Matrix, September 25, 2026	faa.gov/training_testing/testing

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