



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Office of the Chief Counsel

800 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20591

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Daniel Murphy
5050 Hibbs Drive Apt D
Columbus, OH 43220-2669

Dear Mr. Murphy:

This is in response to your requests for a legal interpretation that were postmarked on January 29, 2009, and February 4, 2009. In your letters you requested clarification regarding three issues: (1) whether 14 C.F.R. § 91.126(b)(1) allows a pilot to conduct a circling approach with turns to the right to an uncontrolled airport in instrument meteorological conditions (IMC) if the pilot determines that turns to the left are undesirable; (2) whether a pilot may log pilot-in-command (PIC) flight time under 14 C.F.R. § 61.51(e)(1) during a practical test when 14 C.F.R. § 61.47(b) requires that the pilot act as PIC; and (3) to what point must an approach continue to constitute an instrument approach under 14 C.F.R. §§ 61.65(d)(2)(iii)(B) and 61.57(c)(1)(i).¹

Your letter requested clarification of the requirements in section 91.126(b)(1) using the following example. A pilot, flying an aircraft under instrument flight rules in IMC, executes a circling approach to an uncontrolled airport. The airport, by operation of section 91.126(b)(1), has established turns to the left for the approach. However, the pilot determines that turns to the left are undesirable because they are not in the interest of safety (for example, the wing of the aircraft blocks the view of the runway during turns to the left). You ask whether that pilot can make turns to the right on the approach.

Section 91.126(a) states, in relevant part, that each person operating an aircraft on or in the vicinity of an airport in Class G airspace area must comply with the requirements of section 91.126 “[u]nless otherwise authorized or required.” Section 91.126(b)(1) states, in relevant part, that when approaching to land at an airport without an operating control tower in Class G airspace, “[e]ach pilot of an airplane must make all turns of that airplane to the left unless the airport displays approved light signals or visual markings indicating that turns should be made to the right, in which case the pilot must make all turns to the right.”

The use of “must” in sections 91.126(b)(1) and 91.126(a) do not permit a pilot’s discretion in determining in which direction to make turns when approaching the airport. Section 91.126(a) provides an exception to the requirement to make turns to the left if authorized or required by air traffic control (ATC). This exception permits a pilot to request clearance to

¹ Although the incoming request cited “61.67(c)(1)(i),” we believe that the Mr. Murphy intended to cite section 61.57(c)(1)(i) because that section requires six instrument approaches for the purpose of recent instrument experience.

make right hand turns under these circumstances. However, the regulation does not obligate ATC to grant such a request.

Secondly, you inquired about the interplay between section 61.47(b), which states that the examiner is not the PIC for a practical test in the absence of a prior agreement, and section 61.51(e)(1), which governs logging of PIC time. You ask first whether a private pilot certificate holder taking a practical test for an additional rating may log PIC time for the practical test. Additionally, you ask whether a student pilot taking a private pilot practical test may log PIC time for the practical test.

Section 61.47 states, in relevant part, that an examiner is not the PIC of the aircraft during a practical test unless there is a prior agreement with the applicant or a person who otherwise would act as PIC. The practical effect of this section is that the person performing the practical test acts as PIC. As previously stated by the FAA, there is a distinction between logging PIC time and acting as a PIC. See Interpretation to Jason E. Herman (May 21, 2009). 14 C.F.R. § 1.1 defines a pilot in command as the person who has "final authority and responsibility for the operation and safety of the flight." The PIC must be designated before or during the flight and hold the appropriate category, class, and type rating for the conduct of the flight. *Id.* Section 61.51(e) governs the logging of PIC time and, in relevant part, allows logging under three circumstances: (1) when a person is the "sole manipulator of the controls of an aircraft for which the pilot is rated or has privileges"; (2) when a person is the sole occupant of the aircraft; and (3) when a person is acting as PIC of an aircraft on which more than one pilot is required. Section 61.51(e)(4) allows logging of PIC time for student pilots when the student pilot is the sole occupant of the aircraft and has a current solo flight endorsement or is undergoing training and when the student pilot is undergoing training for a pilot certificate or rating.

In your example, the pilot taking a practical test does not meet any of the circumstances for logging PIC time in section 61.51(e). The pilot is neither the sole occupant of the aircraft nor acting as PIC of an aircraft on which more than one pilot is required. That pilot is the sole manipulator of the controls but is not rated and does not have privileges for the aircraft. Under the section 1.1 definition, a pilot must be rated in the aircraft to act as PIC. An exception to this rating requirement has existed since the FAA issued section 61.47 (then as 14 C.F.R. § 61.26) on July 3, 1965. 30 FR 8515. In that final rule, the FAA explained that an unrated pilot is qualified to act as PIC during a practical test because that pilot possesses the appropriate experience prior to the practical test for the particular certificate or rating. Though there have been multiple changes to Part 61 in the intervening years, this exception never has been withdrawn. No similar exception has been made with respect to logging PIC time under section 61.51(e). It is inconsistent that a pilot is permitted to act as PIC but not log PIC time when both sections 1.1 and 61.51 require that the pilot be rated for the aircraft, and the pilot must possess the appropriate experience prior to the practical test. Therefore, a pilot may log PIC time for the practical test. With respect to the student flight referenced in your letter, the student pilot may log PIC flight time for the practical test for the same reason even though the student pilot does not meet any of the section 61.51(e)(4) circumstances.

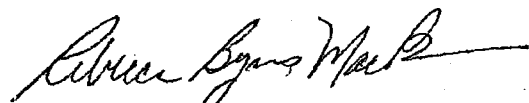
Finally, you asked to what point must an instrument approach continue, whether under actual or simulated conditions, to constitute an instrument approach under sections 61.57(c)(1)(i) and 61.65(d)(2)(iii)(B).

Section 61.57(c)(1)(i) prescribes the recency of instrument experience requirements to act as PIC under IFR or in IMC and states, in relevant part, that a pilot must perform six instrument approaches in the preceding 6 calendar months in the appropriate category of aircraft for which instrument privileges are sought. Section 61.65(d)(2)(iii)(B) establishes the requirements for an instrument rating and states, in relevant part, that an applicant for an instrument rating must complete 40 hours of actual or simulated instrument time that includes at least one cross-country flight in an airplane that is performed under IFR and consists of an instrument approach at each airport.

The FAA previously has interpreted section 61.57(c)(1)(i) to mean that a pilot must follow an instrument approach procedure to the minimum descent altitude or decision height. *See Interpretation to Timothy Slater (Jan. 28, 1992)*. The FAA has not previously interpreted to what point an instrument approach must be followed under section 61.65(d)(2)(iii)(B). However, because of the similarities between the two instrument approach requirements, an instrument approach under that section also must continue to the minimum descent altitude or decision height.

This response was prepared by Robert Hawks, an Attorney in the Regulations Division of the Office of Chief Counsel and coordinated with the Airspace and Rule Group of the Air Traffic Organization and the Certification and General Aviation Operations Branch of Flight Standards Service. We hope this response has been helpful to you. If you have additional questions regarding this matter, please contact us at your convenience at (202) 267-3073.

Sincerely,



Rebecca B. MacPherson
Assistant Chief Counsel for Regulations, AGC-200