Beyond The Transition

ARE YOU PREPARED?

A Flight Standards Program can provide a road map for your operation and formalize safe practices

by Mike Mikolay

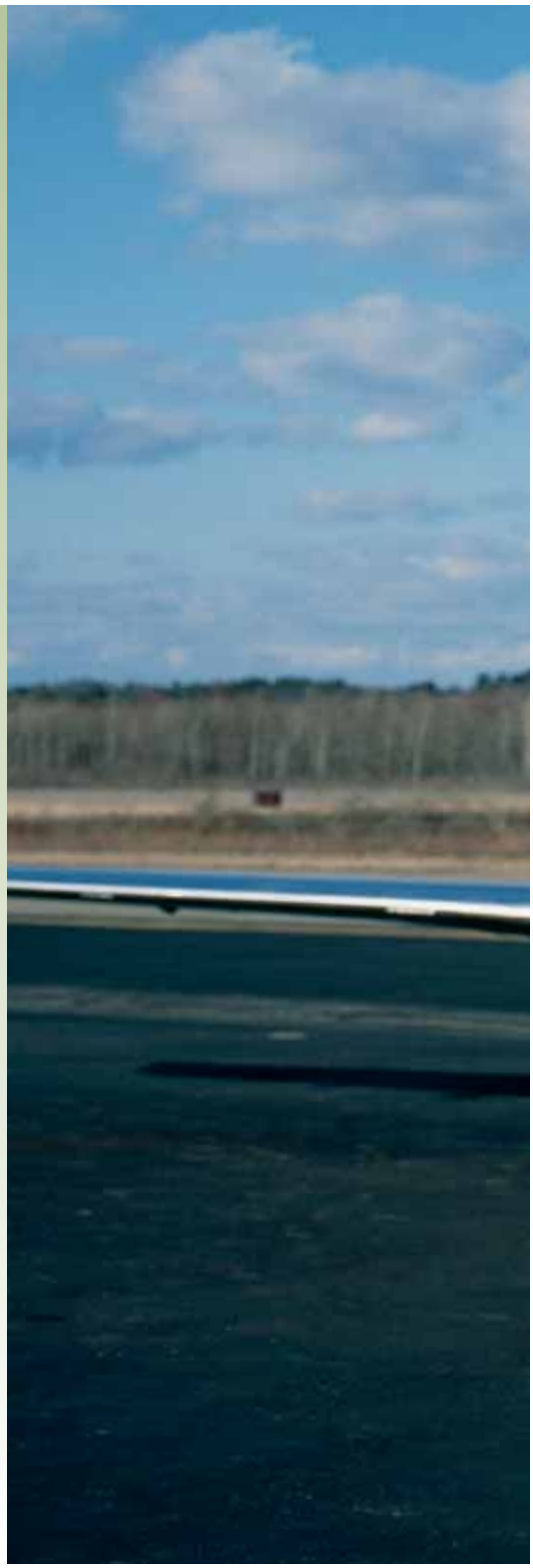
You've purchased that turbine aircraft with the goal of one day flying it solo. You have also learned that your insurance company requires completion of an initial simulator training course, 50 hours of supervised flight with an approved pilot, and annual recurrent training at one of the big simulator training houses.

With your transition pilot arranged and the delivery date nearing, have you stopped to think about how you are going to operate the aircraft beyond the transition period?

You're not alone if the answer is no. With today's focus on transition training and the hype surrounding the pending entry-level jets, many people are stepping into the process and becoming blinded by the restrictions and requirements bestowed by their insurance company. The pure excitement of completing the transition can oftentimes leave an owner-operator waving goodbye to their transition pilot wondering, "Now what?!"

Short of having Chuck Yeager's credentials prior to transitioning into your turbine, you need to look beyond the type rating and temporary insurance requirements. With a focus on adopting ongoing safe operating practices, you should create a criteria-based training solution that complements the annual training you'll receive at one of the big simulator companies and ensures you continually operate to a higher standard.

Quite simply, you need a flight standards program.



Flight Standards Program: New Concept or Seasoned Idea?

The idea of a flight standards program is not something that was developed solely for your entertainment in this article. Think of a flight standards program as a repetitive plan to ensure that pilots and/or crewmembers are meeting or exceeding a set level of competency and safety when operating

their respective aircraft. You probably are already familiar with such an idea if you've spent any time flying in the military, with the airlines, in a FAR Part 135 Operation or part of any large flight department.

Oftentimes such a program is dictated by regulation, as is the case for the airlines or Part 135 operators. Each is regulated by the Federal Aviation Regulations to provide initial and recurrent training, perform line checks, train to an accepted standard and have an established ongoing training program.

Even though they are not required by regulation, large corporate flight departments also make use of flight standards programs and have incorporated them into their overall operations much like the airlines. Usually after creating an expected level of competency and safety (a.k.a. the flight standard) through the use of an operations manual or equivalent, large flight departments such as IBM and Phillips Morris will designate one or more check airman within their pilot ranks. That check airman will fly on an annual basis with line pilots to ensure

each one performs to the level of standard dictated within the company policy and procedures.

This check flight is not intended to replace any type of training flights or recurrent type training received throughout the year but is truly meant to supplement those tools by allowing the check airman to evaluate each of their pilots outside the "check ride" atmosphere. More specifically, this type of flight is intended to highlight positives as well as negatives. It allows the check airman and the pilot to discuss ways in which skills can be improved or encourage the continuation of practices that exceed standards.

Why Do I Need a Flight Standards Program?

Having a mindset toward safety should be paramount in aviation no matter if the operation is an airline or involves a newly minted turbine aircraft owner-operator. If you are a pilot in the latter category, it is important that you establish habit patterns to achieve the highest level of safety and exceed those mandated to you by your insurance company.

Simply stated, don't let the requirements of the initial type-rating session and yearly recurrent simulator training become your only legacy towards operating at a higher standard. Seek to expand your training by making use of the suggestions that follow and keep in mind that this type of program is meant to complement the training that you should already be receiving on an annual basis.

What elements should I include in my standards program?

An excellent flight standards program should have a clearly defined goal. It is imperative that this program is used in conjunction with formalized recurrent training. You should then expect to use this training as an ongoing way in which to constantly improve your skills and hone your operating practices.

It is obvious that the average owner-operator cannot afford to deploy the same amount of resources of a Fortune 100 flight department. However, the average owner-pilot should at a minimum create a program that incorporates the following items:

1. Operations Manual

The first idea you should consider when looking beyond your transition are the ways in which you are going to operate your aircraft. What better way to spell out each situation than with a standardized Operations Manual?

It is no secret that Fortune 100 flight departments all have some type of manual for use by all the members of their organization. Not to mention that Part 135 operators and airlines alike are required to have such an item.

However, don't let that scare you. Having a document in place that spells out items such as duties, responsibilities, flight operations, training standards and risk assessment will allow you to operate the aircraft under a predefined standard that ensures you keep safety as a focus.

Creating such a document can be as labor intensive as you'd prefer. Some will choose to create a document that will rival any airline or Part 135 organization in thickness while others will simply ponder each area of operation and detail a set of standards to live by. Either way, remember to keep it in a format that you will actually use rather than creating something that is going to look nice collecting dust on your bookshelf.

Elements of an Owner-Pilot Standards Program

Element	Description	Purpose
Standardized Operations Manual	A document that spells out duties, responsibilities, training standards and risk assessment. A set of standards to live by.	To go beyond the POH and annual training to define parameters of safety for your specific operational circumstances.
Recurrent Training	A well-defined curriculum to enhance insurance-required training by adding areas of interest specific to your needs.	To round out your training experience by focusing on areas not usually addressed extensively during simulator-based training.
Standards Flights	A flight with a check airman opposite of your annual recurrent training. This flight can be accomplished during the course of a normal trip.	To enhance the overall safety of your operations. To improve operational efficiency by focusing on aircraft performance or avionics functions.

2. Recurrent Training

In today's environment, this piece is more of a requirement rather than an item that you can choose to utilize to help make yourself a better pilot. While many debate the merits of training in the actual aircraft versus "flying the box," few will disagree that reviewing emergency procedures, aircraft systems and safe operating practices is truly worth the three-to-seven days spent at one of the large simulator companies.

There are also ways in which you can increase the benefit of recurrent training. The first would be to add any number of enrichment courses to the training you are going to receive both in ground school and in the simulator. While recurrent training may already feel somewhat compressed, taking on additional topics in areas such as weather, avionics or RVSM can be truly beneficial.

Another way to improve your recurrent training experience is to prepare in advance several areas you would like additional emphasis during your ground school or simulator session. This could be as simple as submitting your Standard Operating Practices to the simulator company ahead of time for use during training or requesting emphasis on certain airports and/or aircraft configurations.

3. Standards Flights

As previously mentioned, airlines and flight departments alike usually have at least one person designated as a check airman to perform routine standardization flights. Incorporating this piece into your flight standards program should be one of your highest priorities since it can provide you with the greatest benefit over time.

When and how often?

At a minimum, this type of flight would occur six months opposite your annual recurrent training. If you attend recurrent training more than once in a year, consider scheduling your flights so that you evenly space your formal training from your standardization checks.

Since the idea is to have someone provide an unbiased and frank insight into your flying habits, you may want to think about using this strategy more often, such as once each quarter. Since this flight is also an evaluation of your skill while operating in your normal environment, it would also seem reasonable that you could accomplish this type of flight during the course of a normal trip.

I am certain you have or you will encounter trips that by simply adding a copilot just makes sense and will allow you to accomplish the standards flight while increasing your level of safety overall.

Who should I enlist to perform these flights?

There are really two types of "check airman" that you should consider when selecting the pilot you intend to use. To determine which pilot you need, contemplate the following: Do I need more help with making my avionics sing and therefore use someone more adept at technology or do I really need the pilot with salt-and-pepper hair that has seen all types of weather, dealt with engine failures and who by just occupying the right seat will leave me with knowledge to make me safer?

My hunch is that you'll find both types to be of use and should plan to make use of both and alternate. Perhaps you can find a blend of the two who can almost be considered an extension of the aircraft due to his or her knowledge and experience.

Either way, find someone that you feel will be honest and who is really willing to impart their experience and wisdom into your flight standards. They also must thoroughly understand their role in this process is not to belittle you with criticism. Rather, they should impart honest and sound advice to help encourage the continuation of the good habits and gently provide solutions towards solving any substandard issues.

What should be included in the flight?

It is imperative that you and your selected pilot thoroughly brief your expectations in order to clearly define the criteria and outcome of the flight. It is up to you how formal or informal you choose to make the criteria that you will cover en route. Those who choose to use a regular flight from point A to point B for the evaluation may simply want the check airman to give an honest representation of each aspect or phase of the flight. There are others that may set up a specific flight to take place in the local area and focus solely on making the flight a review of items that are found in the Practical Test Standards for their particular rating.

Regardless, the goal of the flight should simply allow for the check airman to give both positive and negative feedback toward your overall habits in the aircraft. Therefore, you should not feel any pressure to perform. As with the corporate operators and/or airlines, the outcome should help you keep an open mind toward meeting and exceeding your standards that leads to a higher level of safety.

Benefits Over Time

By repeatedly taking advantage of this tool, you benefit in the long run by the added value of gaining experience and hints from those that you choose to fly with. This piece of your flight standards program should never really end since you have the ability to pick and choose the areas in which you would like to focus. You should also converse with your insurance broker to convince them that your operation is actually made safer by your desire to incorporate this tool into your overall standard of competence and safety.

Lessons From Those Who Do It Best

Think of the airlines, military, large corporate flight departments or Part 135 operators and visions of operations manuals, dispatchers, chief pilots, check airman, maintenance technicians and directors of aviation come to mind. As you start your transition into your turbine aircraft, you should make every effort to think of ways in which you can miniaturize the ideas and practices found within the inner workings of these operators that can be of great use as your strive to "tame the turbine."

Listed within the suggestions made in this article are but few of the many ways to help in the establishment of an overall standards program. In the end, the idea is to exceed the norm and take a more proactive stance toward safety. By having this mindset before making the jump into your first turbine aircraft, you will avoid that sinking feeling or the deer-in-the-headlights look when you wave goodbye to your transition instructor and fly beyond the transition.

Mike Mikolay is the director of operations at Guardian Jet, a consulting and brokerage firm that offers pilot services and maintenance oversight along with an umbrella of services for light jet operators that include RVSM LOA packages, Minimum Equipment List preparation and both standard and customized Operations Manuals. Mike has held positions at Raytheon Aircraft, Cessna Citation and Piedmont Hawthorne Aviation. He is an ATP, CFII, MEI with 1,600 hours and is type-rated in the Raytheon Premier I. For more information on how Guardian Jet can help your organization, visit www.guardianjet.com or call them at (203) 458-2500.