

Recurrent Training

Keeping It Fresh

by Mike Mikolay

Faced with your annual session in the simulator soon? Do you find yourself split between the excitement of honing your skills contrasted with knowing what to expect because you've memorized the syllabus since you attend year after year? Be it the circling approach into Memphis while trying to stay 50 feet below the cloud layer and not busting the MDA or the V1 cut soon after you push the throttles forward, there are ways in which you can slightly alter your experience while still accomplishing the items on the check sheet.

How about jazzing up your next recurrent with some simple ideas that can both emphasize your typical day-to-day operations and at the same time, refine your proficiency? Before you pack your bag and preflight your aircraft, take a moment to contemplate the following ideas and suggestions.

Kick It Up a Notch

While the following suggestions are merely the tip of the iceberg as far as what ideas or situations you could create to spice up your experience, I would caution you that in the end, you still are going to have to accomplish all of the items required on your particular training vendor's syllabus in order to complete your recurrent training.

Also, these concepts should also only be used once you have proven to both yourself and the training center that you have a mastery of the aircraft you fly. Frankly, you don't want to waltz in during your "initial" or your first recurrent with a top 10 list of things you would like to experience in the aircraft that aren't going to be covered in the course of the scheduled training. Let your first few trips to simulator training



be solely devoted to mastering the procedures and skills as spelled out in the syllabus and checklist. There are many years and recurrent simulator sessions ahead where you can start to incorporate the ideas discussed below.

That being said, however, once you get to that point, there is nothing that should stop you from simultaneously accomplishing their goals while adding to your skill set through the creative introduction of certain situations and or experiences.

Without further adieu, here are five simple ways that you could freshen up your recurrent training experience:

GPS Approaches

Have you spent much time flying GPS approaches in your day-to-day and real world operations? Unless you regularly transit to a field that is only served by a GPS approach, chances are, you are more likely to receive a visual or be offered one of the more conventional approaches such as an ILS or VOR.

However, with the FAA headed toward a more terrestrial-based navigation system and the introduction of GPS approaches at what used to be VFR-only airports, it is to your advantage to keep your GPS skills sharp. Not to mention, are you proficient at the keystroke sequence it takes to load your GPS or FMS to make the approaches sing as you do with a standard ILS or VOR?

Perhaps the best way to incorporate this objective is by planning ahead and bringing along the chart for a GPS approach for an airport that you frequent. Brief the approach ahead of time with your instructor and

discuss the differences in procedures it is going to take to get the approach properly loaded and sequenced into your particular FMS or GPS. If the simulator does not have the approach capabilities for the airport and approach you selected, have the instructor dig one up and get it all loaded in.

My guess is that you will be able to mine a nugget or two worth remembering from your instructor either during the brief or the actual approach in the sim that you didn't already know about your GPS and the way it operates in the approach mode.

Terrain Avoidance

If you are a turbine aircraft operator with greater than six passenger seats, you are well aware of the mandate that is quickly approaching to install a Terrain Avoidance Warning System (TAWS) by March 29, 2005. Those of you who bought new aircraft within the past few years have been flying behind the technology for some time now.

So, do you feel that you have a complete mastery of both the operation and interpretation of the information this powerful piece of equipment provides? Perhaps even more relevant, do you operate in and out of airports in which terrain is a consideration where you could use the practice flying in, out and around the particular environment?

There is a pretty good chance that the regular training syllabus will take you to an airport in which terrain avoidance both in the take-off or landing phase will be emphasized. If not, make it a point to ask your instructor to dedicate some time flying in and out of the airports you frequent that have these terrain considerations. This opportunity will both help you build confidence in operating to this location, but also allow you to familiarize yourself with the visual and audio indications your TAWS



system provides.

Perhaps obvious, but it deserves mentioning, that the worst time to figure out how something works is during the time that you really need it. This of course is the perfect segue into the next emphasis area, Cockpit Resource Management.

CRM Emphasis

For those that make it a habit to fly with co-pilot or co-captain, recurrent is a great time to get an objective opinion from your instructor as to how you interact as a crew. Prior to your first simulator session, ask your instructor to jot a few notes over the course of the training, and during the debrief, make Cockpit Resource Management (CRM) a bullet to discuss openly and honestly among you, your co-pilot and your instructor.

Oftentimes your instructor will be able to pick up nuances that may play a larger part down the road if they are not caught and or discussed. Clearing the air at groundspeed zero is the best time to refine your interaction since the simulator offers you the opportunity to work on these items again and again.

For those of you who fly mainly single pilot, you too can still participate since CRM is not just found in the crew type environment. As the sole pilot aboard your aircraft, it is expected to you have the highest level of proficiency not only in the stick and rudder of flying but in the mastery of your ships systems, equipment and avionics. What better time than in the simulator to have someone give you an honest opinion of areas that need greater attention to detail. In this case, your instructor can help identify the strengths and weaknesses of your single-pilot operation and allow you to note areas in which you want to be a bit more careful when back out in the real world.

Introduce your Operations Manual

Don't be afraid to bring along the binder that contains your Operations Manual and introduce the concepts and procedures you adhere to when operating your aircraft. Doing so will help your instructor tailor your training so that it mimics your day-to-day operation as closely as possible.

A phone call to the program manager or your assigned instructor a few weeks in advance of your

arrival to discuss your intentions will allow the simulator company time to review your procedures and brief those that will be training you on the specifics in which you operate.

Enrichment Classes

In previous articles, I have touched upon the benefits of taking additional classes offered by your training vendor. These can be as simple as a brush-up on your avionics to as complex as taking an International Operations Course. Perhaps the best time to explore your options is during your call to scheduling when you reserve and confirm your training dates and times. Ask your scheduler what courses will be available and see if you can fill up some free time with some new subject areas.

Some may argue that there is already a time crunch since recurrent is typically compressed into a short period of time. Counter that by thinking of how you already blocked this time out of your hectic schedule in life, and this is your

chance to cram as much as possible into this training session. Use the same tack you hopefully took during initial and spend the few free hours in between the class and simulator sessions either reviewing systems (a.k.a. studying) or fill it with an enrichment class. There will be plenty of time for R&R after your recurrent session is complete.

Be creative!

The ideas presented above are but a few of the many things you can elect to do to overcome the predictability of your yearly recurrent training. Don't be afraid to think outside the box and request

to experience new training techniques and situations from your simulator vendor.

Don't forget that the best source for these ideas may be your instructor. Bound by the syllabus he or she needs to cover, they still just may have a trick or two up their sleeve to help blend these additional experiences with the items they need to check off.

Remember, you want your training experience to closely mimic the ways in which you truly operate your aircraft. Go ahead, spice up your recurrent and keep those skills sharp!



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