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# CFI to CFI

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# CHECKRIDE

## BE *THERE* FOR YOUR STUDENTS

BY JASON BLAIR

**PRACTICAL TEST DAY IS STRESSFUL FOR THE STUDENT BUT IT CAN BE EASIER IF A GOOD FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR DOES HIS OR HER JOB WELL. PREPARING THE STUDENT FOR A PRACTICAL TEST IS A BIG PART OF A CFI'S JOB, BUT THE FINISHING TOUCHES REQUIRE THAT THE INSTRUCTOR FOLLOWS THROUGH RIGHT TO THE END.**



**THERE ARE A FEW KEY THINGS YOU CAN DO TO MAKE THE PRACTICAL TEST GO SMOOTHLY FOR YOUR STUDENT AND GIVE THE DESIGNATED PILOT EXAMINER (DPE) A GOOD IMPRESSION OF YOU AS AN INSTRUCTOR AT THE SAME TIME.**

**MAKE SURE ALL ENDORSEMENTS ARE COMPLETED**

Nearly all practical tests (except the ATP) require that an instructor has “signed the applicant off” for that particular test and conducted the required flight instruction within the preceding two calendar months (three hours).

At a minimum, these endorsements need to be provided. If the practical test requires an FAA knowledge test, instructors must additionally endorse that they have “reconciled the areas found deficient on the knowledge test (unless the applicant scored a perfect 100 percent). For most ratings and certificates, instructors need to also endorse that they have covered and found the applicant proficient in required ground knowledge and the applicant meets the flight experience requirements. Beyond this, especially for sport, recreational, and private pilot applicants, solo endorsements must be present and current. *A current solo endorsement is an easy item to miss and is commonly forgotten, resulting in grounds for not starting a practical test.*

Missing any or all of these (yes, people show up at tests like this) means that the practical test will be delayed. Make sure all the endorsements refer to the proper sections of the FARs that are applicable for the particular test being taken. If you don’t sign off large numbers of students and aren’t certain on what the endorsements need to be, consult one of the numerous online resources or reach out to the AOPA Pilot Information Center (800-USA-AOPA; Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Eastern time or email [pilotassist@aopa.org](mailto:pilotassist@aopa.org)) for additional help. It is always better to ask ahead of time and get it correct when sending your student off to test day.





**IF YOU DON'T GO THROUGH THE IACRA PROCESS OFTEN, MOST EXAMINERS WILL GLADLY HELP YOU AND YOUR STUDENT AHEAD OF TIME TO AVOID ANY POTENTIAL DELAY OR FRUSTRATION ON THE DAY OF THE TEST.**

**PROPERLY PREPARE THE PRACTICAL TEST APPLICATION**

In most cases, the FAA's Integrated Airman Certification and Rating Application (IACRA) is what will be used to process any rating or certificate for a student. Don't wait until the day of the practical test to try to get this done.

Preparing the application package requires students to sign into IACRA and complete an application that they submit to their instructor, who then signs into IACRA, reviews the application, associates a knowledge test (for most certificates and ratings), and digitally signs the application for the examiner's review. After reviewing this package, the examiner sets the application for signature by the applicant before beginning the practical test. This all takes time and attention to detail. Do it ahead of time to make sure it is done correctly. If you don't go through the IACRA process often, most examiners

will gladly help you and your student beforehand to avoid any potential delay or frustration on the day of the test. So ask for help early on to avoid problems on the day of the test.

Providing the applicant's FAA tracking number (FTN) to the examiner a day or so before the test can allow an examiner to preview the application and ferret out any potential errors that may not be able to be fixed on test day.

Some common errors I see in IACRA applications include:

**Not filling in all required experience blocks of flight times**—For many ratings and certificates, minimum flight times are required. If the flight times are not listed in the experience blocks of the application, the DPE will not be able to process the application without it resulting in a returned application package.

**Name mismatches**—Misspelling or mismatching spelling of first, middle, and last name (using a full middle name in one place and a middle initial in another is a common example), name not matching the government issued photo identification, or a name mismatch with the FAA knowledge test, FAA medical, or the FAA IACRA application.

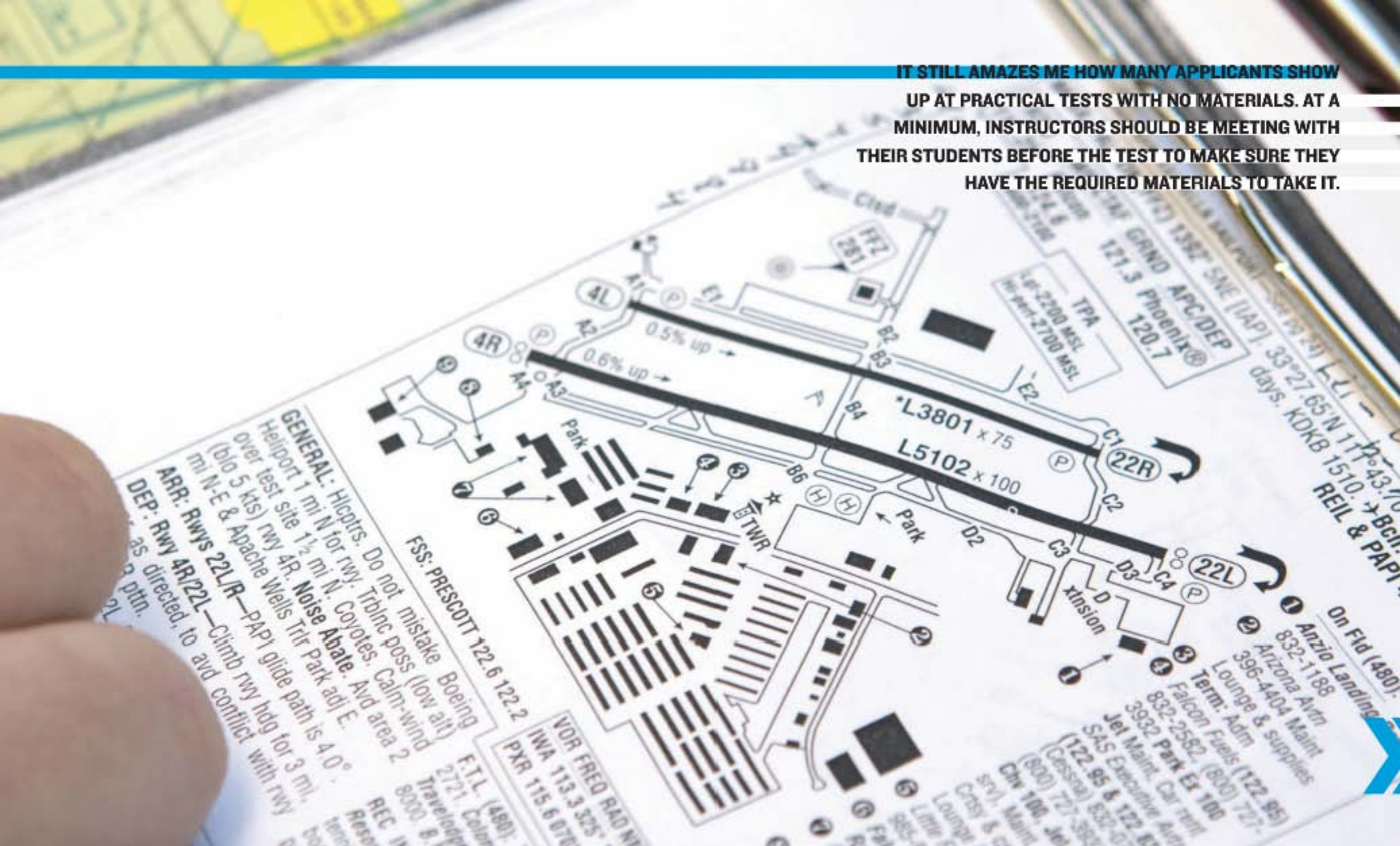
**Incorrectly listed citizenship**—I know this sounds like one item people shouldn't mess up, but the IACRA system automatically selects "USA" as citizenship and therefore any non-U.S. citizen will have to select their correct citizenship.

**Incorrectly listed certificate or rating information**—It is easy to click "single-engine seaplane" instead of "single-engine airplane" when setting up the application. Make sure to carefully review the certificate information prior to submitting the application or signing it as the instructor.





IT STILL AMAZES ME HOW MANY APPLICANTS SHOW UP AT PRACTICAL TESTS WITH NO MATERIALS. AT A MINIMUM, INSTRUCTORS SHOULD BE MEETING WITH THEIR STUDENTS BEFORE THE TEST TO MAKE SURE THEY HAVE THE REQUIRED MATERIALS TO TAKE IT.



**GENERAL:** Hicpots. Do not mistake Boeing Heliport 1 mi N for rwy. Trblnc poss (low alt) over test site 1 1/2 mi N. Coyotes. Calm-wind (blo 5 kts) rwy 4R. Noise Abate. Avd area 2 mi N-E & Apache Wells Trlr Park adj E.

**ARR:** Rwy 4R/22L—PAPI glide path is 4.0°

**DEP:** Rwy 4R/22L—Climb rwy hdg for 3 mi. as directed, to avd conflict with rwy

**FSS: PRESCOTT 122.6 122.2**

Boeing  
2721, Color  
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**VOR FRED RAO**  
INWA 113.3 325°  
PXR 115.6 070°

- 1 Anzio Landing 832-1188
- 2 Arizona Avtm 396-4404 Maint Lounge & supplies
- 3 Term: Adm 832-2562 (800) 727-3932
- 4 Falcon Fuels (800) 727-3932
- 5 Jet Maint. Car rent 3932 Park Ex 100
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- 8 Jet Maint. Car rent 3932 Park Ex 100
- 9 Jet Maint. Car rent 3932 Park Ex 100
- 10 Jet Maint. Car rent 3932 Park Ex 100

On Fld (480) 832-1188



It is a good idea to print out the application once it is completed and send the student to the test with the printed copy and the copy of their FAA knowledge test (if needed for the particular test) just in case there is a problem in the LACRA processing. The system does go down for maintenance periodically. Also, if an error is found, it may be the difference in whether a test will continue forward or not on a particular day.

Make sure your student knows their LACRA FTN, login, and password—this is mandatory. If they can't provide these on test day, they won't be able to sign the application and the test will be a no-go. Obviously, you need to know yours also to sign off the applicant in LACRA.

### **SEND THE STUDENT WITH REQUIRED MATERIALS**

It still amazes me how many applicants show up at practical tests with no materials. At a minimum, instructors should be meeting with their students

before the test to make sure they have the required materials to take it.

Basic required items include a current FAA chart supplement U.S. (formerly airport/facility directory), sectional and/or IFR navigational charts (digital is fine for most examiners), current practical test standards (PTS) for the rating or certificate sought, a pilot's operating handbook (POH) or airplane flight manual (AFM) for the aircraft to be used, and the aircraft maintenance logs.

No, the "oral exam guide" or some "cheat sheets" that students have purchased or compiled shouldn't be considered FAA reference materials usable on a test, but it wouldn't be out of the question to also have additional materials such as the *Airplane Flying Handbook* or the *Pilot's Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge* in the pile. As a good guide consider anything referenced in the PTS as fair game to bring on test day.

When it comes to aircraft maintenance logs, the FAA does require that the actual logbooks be present

for the test. Copies of the last inspections should not be considered enough even if some examiners have allowed it in the past. An added note here: Instructors should take the time to work through the logbooks with their students before the day of the test. I commonly see students fumbling through the logbooks looking for the most recent inspections, telling me they never looked at them until their instructor showed them on the day of the test. This demonstrates that the instructor has put no focus on regularly checking logbooks with their students during training to ensure they know where to find required inspections and that the aircraft is airworthy. Tabbing out the most recent inspections is also fine, but do it ahead of time to make your student's test day better.

### **BE THERE ON TEST DAY**

I know that instructors want to keep flying. Although it is easy to send your student off to do the test on their own, any hiccup in the process might mean that your student's test gets put on hold.



**BE THERE—SIMPLE. IF YOU ARE THERE, YOU CAN HELP FIX IACRA ERRORS, CORRECT ENDORSEMENTS, FACILITATE AIRCRAFT ACCESS, OR HELP YOUR STUDENT FIND ANYTHING FROM TRAINING RECORDS TO A LOST SECTIONAL CHART.**

Be there—simple. If you are there you can help fix IACRA errors, correct endorsements, facilitate aircraft access, or help your student find anything from training records to a lost sectional chart. This doesn't mean you have to sit in the lobby of the airport like a brooding chicken while the entire test is administered, but be there and be available until the examiner and student are comfortable enough with the paperwork that they have decided to at least start the test. If the test is scheduled for 8 a.m., it is a good idea to have nothing else planned in your day until 9 a.m., arrive a little early, and be generally available. It is a terrible idea to be five states away on a charter trip with your phone turned off. Yes, I have seen that

happen multiple times to the detriment of those students.

All of these are things that I (as an examiner) see missing on multiple practical tests every year. When not addressed properly, they add to the applicant's stress level and serve to make the practical test process take longer, lead to a higher failure rate for applicants, and waste a significant amount of time for the applicant and the examiner. I must add, it reflects poorly on the professionalism and capability of the instructor who is signing off the student for the test.

Providing the ground and flight training for an applicant is just part of the job. Being a good mentor and guide through the training

process includes professionally making the process successful in the best way possible. A little extra follow through can make the pilot certification process easier for your customers, and as an added bonus, probably increase the pass rate of your students.

*Jason Blair is an active single and multiengine instructor and FAA designated pilot examiner with 4,900 hours total time and 2,850 hours instruction given. As examiner, he has issued more than 800 pilot certificates. He writes for multiple aviation publications, actively works within the general aviation industry, and is the Air Safety Institute's CFI renewal program project manager.*

