

Starting Your PPL This Summer? Here's What I Wish I'd Known

Every summer, hundreds of aspiring pilots begin or accelerate their Private Pilot Licence (PPL) training.

For some, it's because they've secured a scholarship and want to make the most of a limited opportunity. For others, it's because they're university students trying to complete as much training as possible before returning for their second year. Many are balancing flying alongside full-time careers and know that the UK weather becomes far less forgiving once autumn arrives.

Having recently completed my own PPL in the UK whilst working full-time, I wanted to share a few lessons that made the biggest difference to my training. These aren't things you'll necessarily find in a textbook. They're the practical lessons that helped me make the most of every opportunity and, perhaps more importantly, enjoy the journey along the way.

Consistency Is Key

One of the biggest misconceptions about learning to fly is that some people are simply "naturally good pilots".

Whilst it's true some students may pick things up faster than others, what really matters is consistency.

The students who progress quickest are usually the ones who fly regularly. Flying once every two or three weeks often means spending the first part of each lesson trying to remember what you learned previously. Momentum is incredibly important, especially during the early stages of training.

The summer months provide the perfect opportunity to build that momentum. Longer days and generally better weather create more opportunities to fly and fewer cancellations.

If you can, book lessons well in advance and protect those dates in your calendar. If you're struggling to get bookings, spend time around the flying club when you can. Some of my flying opportunities came from being available when a last-minute slot opened up due to a cancellation or change in the weather.

Learn Away From The Aircraft

Some of my biggest improvements happened when I wasn't flying. Chair flying became one of the most effective tools in my training, especially when I wasn't able to fly for weeks at a time. Mentally rehearsing checks, procedures, radio calls and circuit patterns before a lesson reduced workload significantly once I was in the cockpit.

I also found that a basic flight simulator setup was useful, particularly before navigation exercises. It helped me become familiar with routes, cockpit flows and procedures before I ever left the ground.

The same applies to theory. One thing that surprised me was how much the theory enhanced the practical flying. Subjects such as Meteorology, Navigation and Flight Planning made far more sense once I could see them being applied in the aircraft.

My biggest piece of advice would be to complete the theory as soon as possible but if you're struggling to understand concepts rather than treating theory and flying as separate tasks, try to learn them alongside each other. I found resources such as EasyPPL invaluable for getting the exams completed efficiently and allowing me to focus more on the practical side of training.

Build Relationships At The Flying Club

One of the best decisions I made during training was spending time at the flying club and building relationships with instructors and other students.

Most students understandably see instructors purely as instructors. In reality, they're often some of the most knowledgeable and well-connected people you'll meet in aviation.

Getting to know them opened opportunities that I wouldn't otherwise have had. There were occasions where instructors found time to help me progress even when their schedules appeared full. I was also fortunate enough to back-seat on flights that weren't part of my own training, including navigation exercises and a night flight. Whilst those hours don't go into your logbook, they provide valuable exposure to different scenarios and ways of operating.

Just as importantly, don't underestimate the value of other students. Some of the most useful advice, reassurance and motivation can come from people going through exactly the same journey.

Talk to people. Ask questions. Share experiences.

That said, remember that everyone trains differently. If you speak to enough pilots, you'll eventually hear conflicting opinions on almost everything. Learn from others, but ultimately trust your judgement and carve your own path.

Many instructors will eventually move on to airline careers, and aviation is a surprisingly small industry. The relationships you build during your PPL may remain valuable throughout your flying career.

Weather Is Part Of Becoming A Pilot

Every UK pilot quickly develops a healthy respect for weather.

At the start of training, weather cancellations can feel incredibly frustrating. You may have booked a lesson weeks in advance only to discover low cloud, strong winds or poor visibility have other plans.

Over time, I realised these cancellations were valuable learning opportunities. Every cancelled lesson became a chance to analyse METARs, TAFs, F214 and 215 charts. Understanding why a lesson was cancelled helped build real-world decision-making skills that are just as important as aircraft handling.

The reality is that understanding the weather is one of the most important skills a pilot develops. There were numerous occasions during my training when a day looked perfect for flying, with bright blue skies and excellent visibility, but the surface winds would have made landings extremely challenging or even exceeded the aircraft's limitations.

Summer undoubtedly provides more opportunities to fly, but the UK weather remains unpredictable. Learning to work with it, rather than becoming frustrated by it, is simply part of becoming a pilot.

Use The Second-Hand Market

Flying training is expensive, so any opportunity to save money without compromising your training is worth taking.

One of the best things I did was make full use of the second-hand market. eBay, Facebook Marketplace and Vinted were invaluable throughout my training, and most of the equipment I bought came from one of those platforms at a fraction of the new price.

My best bargain was a CRP-5, ruler and square protractor for just £10, and there are often similar deals available if you're willing to spend a bit of time looking.

Aviation is expensive enough already, and there is no reason to pay full price for every piece of equipment when many students are selling perfectly good kit after completing their own training.

Don't Rush The Journey

If I'm honest, this is probably the lesson I needed most during my own training.

Like many students, I became focused on milestones. I wanted to solo as quickly as possible. I wanted to keep progressing and avoid falling behind. I found myself comparing my progress to other students and wondering why they seemed to be reaching certain stages faster than I was.

Looking back, none of that really mattered.

Every student learns differently. Some people find radio work easy but struggle with landings. Others are the complete opposite. Some can fly multiple times per week, whilst others are balancing work, family and other commitments.

I eventually realised that comparison was taking away from my enjoyment of the process.

Ironically, once I stopped obsessing about milestones and focused on learning, I actually progressed better.

Most importantly, don't be disappointed if you don't complete your PPL this summer. Weather cancellations, instructor availability, aircraft availability and work commitments all affected my training at various points. There were periods where I felt I wasn't progressing as quickly as I wanted, and that's completely normal.

The purpose of this article isn't to suggest that everyone can complete a PPL in a single summer. These are simply the things I would personally do if I were starting again.

Focus on becoming a competent and safe pilot rather than the fastest pilot.

The licence will come.