

A PRACTICAL STUDENT WORKBOOK

Choose your school. Know what to ask.

Bring the same questions to each school. Compare written answers, realistic schedules and the complete cost of reaching your next certificate.



Venture West aircraft at Falcon Field. Photograph from the school's website.

Begin with your goal

A strong fit depends on what you want to do and the time you can protect. An introductory flight, a private certificate and a professional training path are different decisions. This workbook helps you compare the first commitment before making the next one.

My first training goal and the reason it matters:

My available days, target start month and practical travel radius:

How to use this workbook

Take it to two or three schools, request written estimates and record unanswered questions. Blank spaces are for your own notes; examples are planning prompts, not promises of an outcome.

01 / COMPARE THE SAME DESTINATION

Training path & scope

Ask each school to explain its proposed route, the certificate at the end and the assumptions behind its estimate.

Part 61 and Part 141 are training frameworks. Under the usual private single-engine airplane rules, Part 61 specifies at least 40 flight hours; an approved Part 141 private airplane course specifies at least 35. Other requirements and course conditions apply. Neither minimum guarantees that you will finish at that total. [1-3]

Question	School A	School B	School C
School and contact			
Certificate / course proposed			
Part 61 or approved Part 141 course?			
Estimated hours and why			
Weekly lesson availability			
Ground-school method			
How progress is reviewed			

Ask for clarification when schools quote different endpoints. A private certificate, a package through instructor ratings and a college pathway are not interchangeable products. Mark anything that is still an assumption.

The differences I need each school to explain:

02 / PUT THE ESTIMATE ON PAPER

Compare the full cost

Ask what is included, what is billed separately and how a change in training time affects the amount you pay.

Ask how aircraft time is measured, whether fuel is included and when instructor billing begins. Include required items outside the package.

Cost or term	School A	School B	School C
Aircraft rate / billing method			
Instructor flight / ground rates			
Hours used in estimate			
Testing / examiner / medical			
Books / headset / supplies			
Additional training rate			
Quoted total / exclusions			
Deposit / refund / cancellation			

Stress-test the quote

Ask the school to price five additional lessons and explain any pause fees. Obtain an actual lender offer separately if you are considering financing.

Costs or terms still missing from the estimate:

03 / MAKE THE CALENDAR REAL

Instructors & scheduling

A schedule should fit your real week and leave room for preparation, briefing, flying and debriefing.

Ask about continuity

- ☐ Who will normally instruct me, and how are substitutions handled?
- ☐ What days and aircraft are actually available at my preferred times?
- ☐ How far ahead can I book, and what is the cancellation policy?
- ☐ How are weather cancellations, maintenance and instructor changes handled?
- ☐ Can appropriate ground instruction replace a cancelled flight?
- ☐ Who reviews a training plateau, and how do I request a progress discussion?

FAA guidance describes useful assessment as part of learning. Ask to see how objectives, feedback and the next assignment are recorded. A clear debrief should tell you what improved, what needs attention and what to prepare. [5]

My proposed weekly plan	Time I can protect
Airport lesson blocks	
Travel time	
Ground study	
Backup or rescheduling option	

How each school would support this schedule:

04 / LOOK BEYOND THE BROCHURE

Your school visit

Use the visit to understand how people make decisions, teach and keep you informed. You are gathering evidence, not judging an aircraft by paint or a school by a sales promise.

- ☐ Ask which aircraft you would train in and what happens if it is unavailable.
- ☐ Ask how a student reports a concern about the airplane or the lesson.
- ☐ Discuss how heat, wind and pilot experience affect the daily plan.
- ☐ Ask to see a sample syllabus, lesson objective and progress record.
- ☐ Confirm how you access your own logbook entries and endorsements.
- ☐ Ask what "career support" includes and what depends on eligibility, later training or an employer.

Density altitude can reduce takeoff and climb performance, so a hot day needs aircraft-specific planning. A useful answer explains the school's process rather than promising that every booked lesson will fly. [7]

The Private Pilot Airplane ACS combines knowledge, risk management and flight skills. Ask how the school prepares you across all three areas, and how it identifies gaps before a practical test. [4]

What I observed and the explanation I was given:

One question I want answered before paying:

05 / DECIDE WITH EVIDENCE

Your next step

Choose the school whose written plan fits your goal, schedule and resources. If an important answer is missing, make clarification the next step.

Decision point	My notes
Best fit and why	
Unresolved question / person to ask	
Next action / target date	

A useful commitment

Before enrollment, confirm the scope, costs, policies and schedule in writing. Keep copies of agreements and maintain access to your training records. This is a comparison tool, not a school ranking or an assurance of certification. [6]

Sources & further reading

Primary sources checked October 13, 2026. The numbered references support the factual context; the questions and worksheets are Venture West planning tools.

- 01 [FAA: Pilot Schools Information](#)
- 02 [14 CFR 61.109: Private pilot experience](#)
- 03 [14 CFR Part 141, Appendix B: Private pilot course](#)
- 04 [FAA: Private Pilot Airplane ACS](#)
- 05 [FAA Instructor Handbook: Assessment](#)
- 06 [14 CFR 61.51: Logbooks](#)
- 07 [FAA AIM: Potential flight hazards and density altitude](#)

Read the full Start flying collection at flyvwa.com