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# When it Comes to Checklists, Go with the Flow

By Stephen Pope / Published: Jul 13, 2011

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Just like boaters can be perceived as rank amateurs if they make the rookie mistake of leaving their bumpers and lines hanging in the water after they've pulled away from the dock, pilots can assume that same aura of cluelessness if they turn off the runway after landing and then taxi all the way to the tie-down area without retracting their flaps.


It can be easy to miss checklist items when you're busy or distracted. The consequences in some cases could be far worse than merely appearing as though you flunked out of flying kindergarten. Taking off without setting flaps in some airplanes or forgetting to turn on the carb heat in others can be deadly. And if you forget to pull the gear down before landing, the consequences will be worse than just looking dumb.

That's why, in addition to using checklists, it's a good idea to know in advance all the times when checklist items will need attention and precisely what these items are. This is an area where GA pilots would be well advised to take a page from the pros. At the airlines, checklists are actually used as *checklists*, not do-lists. You first configure the airplane for the appropriate segment of flight and then read the checklist to *verify* that the listed items have been accomplished.

Professional pilots use these flow patterns as a logical pathway across the panel that will guide them to the systems that need reconfiguring for each phase of flight. For pilots, mnemonic devices can be helpful for accomplishing checklist flows, especially at those times when you might be too busy to read the checklist but still need to be sure you haven't missed important items.

During training for my instrument rating in a 172, for example, I made up my own before-takeoff mnemonic called SHTT (as in the you-know-what I had to make sure I did after lining up on the runway just before departing into IMC). It stood for: Suction (making sure the all-important suction gauge was in the green), Heading (making sure the heading indicator agreed with the magnetic compass and departure runway), Time (noting the takeoff time) and Transponder (flipping the dial from STBY to ALT).

It's also helpful to be aware of how many checklist items need to be performed during the flow. If you know five things must be done to complete the after-takeoff checklist, for example, and you count only four that you've actually accomplished, that's a good clue you've forgotten something. Reading down the checklist you'll soon be reminded of what it was, but it's so much more satisfying (and makes you look like a seasoned pro, to boot) when you can run through a checklist flow without missing anything.



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