

ALL ABOUT BFRs

In an unhurried, well-planned, thorough biennial flight review, everyone wins. It's a great opportunity for pilots to hone little-used skills. And instructors can rest easy putting their name to a pilot's licence privileges.

The BFR is a dual instruction flight, not an assessment flight per se.

“What that means,” says CAA Flight Examiner Marc Brogan, “is that the pilot takes the opportunity to learn from their instructor, and improve their technique, until they reach the standard required to renew their flying privileges for another two years.”

And a good biennial flight review, the CAA's manager of licensing and standards David Harrison believes, takes a bit of time to complete.

“It needs planning ahead with an A-cat or B-cat instructor,” he tells pilots, “so you know what to expect, and what is expected of you. It can be tailored to suit your individual flying needs, and there's no better chance to practise things you haven't been able to perform much over the preceding two years.”

Unfortunately, David says, it's not uncommon for someone to try to organise a BFR with two days' notice, and to attempt to get it done and dusted in 40 minutes.

“If a BFR like that comes across our desk, we know that it cannot have covered all the things it's supposed to cover, and that something almost certainly has been left out.

“In that case, we would look to the instructor conducting the BFR to explain what went on.”

David says a biennial flight review could take up to three flights to complete, maybe over three weekends,

to avoid fatigue, and to make sure all exercises are properly achieved.

“You could brush up on your crosswind landing technique,” says Marc, “practising it one weekend, then demonstrating to the instructor that you know what you're doing, during the next weekend's flight.”

The BFR doesn't need to be conducted by the one instructor.

“For instance, you might fly advanced exercises with one instructor to upskill,” says Marc Brogan. “And those exercises may count towards some of the BFR exercises. So you could get your instructor to sign that bit off.

“All the instructors involved in your BFR need to communicate as to what is satisfactory and what is still to be completed. Once they do that, and they've completed their relevant parts of the BFR form, then one of them can sign off the form and complete the logbook entry.”

That signing instructor is ultimately responsible for the BFR so they need to have confidence in all aspects of the BFR.

To instructors, Marc says that while a good BFR has to meet the standard requirements of the licence to be exercised, it can be tailored to the individual pilot's needs.

“Let's say the pilot does most of their flying in a certain environment. Get them to show you how they fly within that region and give feedback and instruction as required. You use it as a teaching opportunity.



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“Some pilots, who have a plane in a shed at the back of their property, may not see much of other pilots. Between BFRs, they have no-one to discuss things worrying them or how they can improve their flying.

“So it's easy to settle into bad habits and then get a surprise when the BFR falls due.

“A good instructor has a conversation with that private operator about how and where they fly. Together they can plan a schedule that meets the pilot's training requirements and also meets the required BFR standards.”

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Pilots who don't need a BFR

Commercial pilots and instructors have a different form of competency check.

Every year, an instructor has an annual instructor check, and every year, a VFR commercial pilot has an operational competency assessment, or OCA.

That means they don't also need to do a BFR every two years.

“The problem is,” says David, “that when a commercial pilot leaves the organisation they're working for, their OCA is terminated due to it being a company standard.

“They therefore need to do another OCA at their next company.

“If an instructor stops being an instructor and returns to recreational flying, they must do a BFR when the validity of their instructor check expires. They also need to remember the instructor check lasts only one year, not two.”

Marc says another important, but often forgotten, feature of the OCA or instructor check is that when it expires, the pilot becomes a student pilot again, with only student pilot privileges – unless they undertake a BFR.

“That BFR then reinstates the operational privileges that may then be exercised, once the OCA or flight instructor renewal is undertaken.

“Lastly, note that an IFR renewal doesn't count as a BFR”. ➤