

## Guide To Becoming A Commercial Pilot by Matt D'Angelo (A multipart series #1)

Back in 2018 it was decided to make a major career change which set me on a path towards becoming a commercial airline pilot. I want to share my journey with you, in hopes it will help you in your future aviation plans. I will be writing a series of short articles which will take you through the entire process of becoming an airline pilot.

A bit of backstory...

As of December of 2017, I had officially been a pilot more than half my life. This is rad! Flying has been a blessing to me. Teaching and mentoring other pilots, even more so. One thing I have always thought about with flying is to never, ever, ever become complacent, or let myself become a "mediocre" pilot. Last year, I thought about this more than ever.

It's easy to keep doing what we know, what's familiar, what's comfortable. It's easy, but has the potential to make us complacent. To keep my skills sharp, I got back into tailwheel flying, which is exactly where I started many years ago! My first flight as an instructor was in a shiny 1951 Cessna 170A - a beautiful, simple and potentially humbling tailwheel machine.

While enjoying the low and slow beauty of flying tailwheel - my favorite kind of flying outside of seaplanes, and while beginning to learn the art and science of banner towing, I realized I also wanted to explore the other edge of the aviation envelope - high and fast, in larger machines, Jets. With the ball now in motion on January 30 2018 I interviewed with and was hired by Piedmont Airlines.

The articles in this series will be as follows: - Deciding if becoming an airline pilot is for you - 121 (airline) vs. 135 (charter)

- The wave (pilot shortage and trends) - Which airline is a good fit? - You've decided to become an airline pilot. Now what?

- Staying healthy and feeling good - You can do this - be confident! - The importance of mentors

- Life experience do's and don'ts - Red flags and cautionary tales - Logbooks and electronic logbooks

- Resources for interview prep - Preparing your airline application - Preparing for your interview: Study habits and discipline

- Preparing for your interview: Being yourself - Preparing for your interview: HR - Preparing for your interview: Technical

- Preparing for your interview: Written Test - How to relax at your interview: Three day checklist - Interview: Day of

- Interview: Do's and don'ts - Interview: It's your time - Interview: Good types of questions for you to ask your interviewer - Interview: Follow up

- How to learn from your interview, whether you got the job this time, or not!

Hope you enjoy this series and hope the articles help you in your journey towards becoming an airline pilot. Even if you have other aspirations, this series will help you succeed! Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions along the way!

Fly safe, have fun & keep learning!

## Guide To Becoming A Commercial Pilot by Matt D'Angelo (A multipart series #2)

Some of us have known what we want to do with our lives for as long as we can remember. For those of you who have known and are doing it...congratulations! You are very likely on a path to happiness and success!

I am very fortunate to have been interested in airplanes and flying for as long as I can remember. For this, I thank my parents for taking my brother and me to watch planes take off and land at Westchester County Airport. Also, thank you George Lucas for creating and releasing Star Wars when I was four years old! I would emulate Han Solo flying the Millennium Falcon, always wondering how amazing it would be to be a pilot.

While I always knew I wanted to fly, I didn't initially know exactly what I wanted to do with flying. I just wanted to get up there and fly! Maybe you've felt this, as well. It really can and should be that simple, especially when you're just beginning to fly! Once I decided how much I loved flying, I was mostly attracted to seaplanes and bush flying - low,

After reading a faded, musty first edition of "Fate is the Hunter" by Ernest K. Gann in 1997, while I was just beginning to learn to fly, I started thinking about potentially flying the line (flying for the airlines) someday. Because of Gann's talent as a writer, however, my perception of flying the line was more old school "Pan Am" than what we think of as modern day airline flying. As often happens, my mind was stuck in one of my three favorite decades...the 50s!

So, the airlines were always in the back of my mind, but never seemed as rewarding as where I decided to take my flying career - instructing full-time. Always open-minded to new adventures and opportunities, over the years I balanced the pros and cons of various flying careers, and couldn't think of a better set up than instructing. If you love working with people and teaching as much as I do, it's a wonderful, rewarding career!

In September of 2017, I was refueling at an FBO in the midwest and received a text from a friend and airline pilot mentor, asking if I wanted to help with a non-profit called Pilots for Kids over the holidays. I responded that I would love to help and thought about the bigger picture. That single text ended up tipping the pro and con balance in favor of the airlines and was the impetus for my career change. Specifically, I realized the time off and compensation I would enjoy with the airlines would give me more ability to give back to the community and mentor future aviators - even more than I could do while instructing full-time. This line of thought opened up a conversation with my wife, Jean, about making a major career change and what it would look like for our family. By October, we had decided it was a "go" and here we are!

Here I want to summarize some of the pros and cons of airline flying and the lifestyle associated with working for the airlines. While this discussion focuses only on being an airline pilot, there are many other rewarding career options which have similar pros and cons. For example, Flight Attendants, Gate Agents, Customer Service Representatives and Baggage Handlers. Don't rule these out if you want to enjoy many of the perks and understand some of the downsides of airline life!

Pros: 1. Sign-on bonuses. 2. Retention bonuses. 3. Excellent compensation. 4. Excellent health and retirement benefits.  
5. Growth potential. 6. Huge responsibility. 7. Working with a team. 8. Working with traveling customers. 9. Flying "cool" aircraft  
10. Lots of days off 11. Lots of learning 12. Travel benefits (This is my favorite benefit and privilege of the airlines - free, unlimited, worldwide standby travel for you, your significant other, your parents or in-laws and your kids! Additional passes allotted for other family members and friends.

Cons: 1. Huge responsibility (I consider this a pro, but it can be perceived as a con, as well).  
2. Working with traveling customers (I'm looking forward to this and also consider this a pro, but it can also be perceived as a con).  
3. Away from home often (Make sure you, your significant other and your kids understand and are willing to adapt to this lifestyle. For Jean & I, the days off balance this.). 4. Mandatory retirement at age 65. (This will most likely increase to 67 or more in next few years.). 5. Often irregular and long hours. 6. First Class medical requirement . 7. Need to get to hub (A huge con if you live more than two hours from your crew base, or if you're commuting via airplane to your base. According to my mentors, commuting via airplane to your base can be one of the most stressful and difficult aspects of the airlines, so try and live within two hours of your base and drive there). 8. Dealing with major airports often. 9. Potential for furlough. 10. Very long and expensive process which requires a ton of focus. (While the airlines are hiring, it's still not an easy path to get there and never will be. What fun would it be if it were easy?!) )

## **Guide To Becoming A Commercial Pilot by Matt D'Angelo (A multipart series #3)**

Part 121 vs. Part 135 — —So, you've decided that becoming an airline pilot is for you...awesome! You're in for a rewarding and fun career with great people and new adventures daily! Before I go all in on the airlines with this article series, I want to make sure you're aware of the wonderfully varied world of Part 135 (Commuter and On-Demand Operations) and briefly compare it to Part 121 (Scheduled Air Carriers), especially in terms of lifestyle.

Deciding to go down the path of Part 121 vs. Part 135 is a big decision. Without going into too much detail, here are a few comparisons. Please keep in mind, most Part 121 air carriers are very similar to one another in terms of the lifestyle they provide. The culture at each individual airline, however, can be very different. This is something we'll go into in a future article.

Part 135, on the other hand, is a very broad category of commercial flying with many different facets and missions. Part 135 includes everything from flying round trips in an amphibious DeHavilland Beaver between Caribbean islands, flying cargo and fuel to remote towns and villages in Alaska in a modified Curtiss C-46 and flying a movie star to Cannes, France in their Gulfstream G650ER on a moment's notice! Very different flying and lifestyles, all operating within the same regulation!

One of the great things about the airlines is most of the pros become even better and most of the cons become less negative as you gain seniority! For example, as you gain seniority, your compensation will increase and you will have even more days off. Because you will have higher priority over the schedule you choose (called "bidding"), you won't be away from home as often and your hours will be more predictable.

You could make an excellent career staying with the regional airlines (such as Piedmont) if you decide that's a better fit for you. The benefit to staying with the regionals over going to the major airlines (such as American) is your seniority will continue to grow and you can bid for the best trips and schedules. Currently with the airline I'm flying with, Piedmont, those top schedules offer 16 days off per month. The downside to staying with the regionals is the pay scale is significantly less than the majors and you won't have the opportunity to fly long-haul routes or "across the pond" international flights. For many of us, this is a better fit, so keep your options open! A regional airline career supplemented with other entrepreneurial interests or other opportunities within the airline, such as ground and sim instructor, check airman or chief instructor, can be a rewarding and fulfilling career option.

If you decide to fly for the majors, there will be a few times during your journey where your seniority will take a dip, such as when you move from Captain with the regionals to First Officer with the majors. So, plan on a few years at that point that schedules won't be ideal. You'll be bidding from the bottom again, but that doesn't last long. Also, your compensation at that time will be significantly higher - normally about double where you started your airline career with the regionals.

I decided later in life to transition from instructing full time to flying for the airlines. My goal is to fly for American Airlines in about five years, but I'm in no rush. I'm learning a ton, having fun and am enjoying the journey! Jean and I are extremely thankful and excited to have the opportunity and privilege to travel the world together and we're happy my parents can do the same. Those perks alone make any other downsides well worth it!

If you're on the fence about becoming an airline pilot, please reach out with questions. I would be happy to help! Never underestimate the value of mentors!

One more thing...if you don't think you can do it, or the airlines seem overwhelming, let me assure you - you can! I didn't have the confidence to think I could be an airline pilot until I completed my indoctrination class two weeks ago. I didn't know how any of it worked...schedules, uniforms, crew bases, unions, terminals, push-backs, jets...I knew very little going in and still have 99% of the learning ahead of me. After that first class and working with my mentors and classmates, I gained confidence that I can do this...and you can too!

It's a wonderful time to become an airline pilot! Why not you? Next time, we'll compare airline and charter careers.

So here are a few differences:

*Flying:* Part 121 flying is generally easier, because you will have a team, including Dispatchers, helping with a lot of the planning and logistics. All of the aircraft will have a high level of automation, as well.

With Part 135, you and the other pilot (if one is required) are often on your own to complete the flight planning and logistics. Larger companies will have a flight department to help, but most of the work is on you. Some pilots love this!

The aircraft themselves vary greatly, but if you want to fly a huge variety of different aircraft, including some of the most interesting and fastest, certain Part 135 operations may be for you!

Both Part 121 and Part 135 pilots have the same level of responsibility, but as an airline pilot, you'll be responsible for more people. A big difference between Part 121 and Part 135 is the interaction between pilots and passengers. Part 121, you're responsible for everyone, but you work with a team, including Flight Attendants, Schedulers, Dispatchers, Gate Agents, Baggage Handlers and Customer Service Representatives. Guess what...as a pilot, you will often wear all of these hats in the Part 135 world! A big part of this is interacting with clients before, during and after the flight. This interaction is much more limited for airline pilots and is more the responsibility of the Flight Attendants.

*Schedule and Lifestyle:* Aside from delays, cancellations and reschedules, you will generally know your schedule a month ahead of time in the Part 121 world. You'll fly to the same airports for the most part. You'll be away from home quite often, but will also have a lot of time off, during most of which you will be free from being called in to work.

Part 135 pilots are often on call with a short window of time to get to where their airplane is based. Depending on the company and clients, many trips return the same day, so Part 135 pilots are often home more at night, even if they worked earlier that day. However, some clients may want to go away for several days or longer, on short notice.

*Compensation:* Part 121 compensation has become very good recently, especially considering the sign-on bonuses most airlines offer. Part 121 salaries will grow consistently as you gain seniority, even more so after you upgrade to Captain and move up to bigger aircraft, if that's what you desire.

Many Part 135 jobs have excellent compensation and benefits. Because of the wide range of careers, starting pay can be anywhere from \$20 per hour with no benefits, to six figures and full benefits, including travel benefits. This depends greatly upon the type of flying and the company you're working for.

With this article, I just wanted to scratch the surface of Part 135 careers, to help you understand some of the big picture pros and cons. Part 135 is an exciting world, with tons of opportunity. The flying can be very fun, challenging and rewarding. The quality of life and time at home can be better than with the airlines, but both get better with time (seniority) at the airlines. This challenging flying and quality of life are often reasons pilots choose Part 135 careers over the airlines.

Like anything, if you're interested or want to learn more, speak with folks who are currently doing the types of flying you're thinking about and learn more. You may just be inspired by someone who is making a living with airplanes in ways you never even knew existed! Talk to people, keep learning and you'll find a great fit for you! It's always an exciting time to be a pilot. Right now is also a very exciting time to start a career as a pilot!

Next time, we'll talk about the wave (pilot shortage and trends)...

Fly safe, have fun & keep learning!

**Guide To Becoming A Commercial Pilot, The Wave** by Matt D'Angelo (A multipart series #4)

Hey aviators and future aviators!

For the past decade, you've probably heard rumors and forecasts of the pilot shortage, as well as heard debates as to whether it is real or not. The past few years and the current hiring needs of the airlines are proving the pilot shortage is definitely real...and it's here!

**Location:** The first thing I would look into is where each airline's crew bases are located vs. where you would like to live. While this can change on your end and theirs, try and set yourself up so you live relatively close (within an hour is ideal) to your crew base, so you're not commuting via airline to get to work. From the many experienced airline pilots I've spoken with, living close to base is one of the biggest keys to happiness. Many of the majors have numerous hubs, so you will have options. Keep in mind, some of the bases are more desirable than others, so you'll need some seniority in many cases to end up exactly where you want to live.

**Culture:** Are your values lined up with the company's? Do the folks working for them seem like people you would want to work with, hang out with, have coffee with? While every team member, flight crew and otherwise, should be professional, there are many different ways to approach it. Think about the third and fourth-largest airlines in the United States (based on passengers flown), Southwest and United. If you've flown both of these airlines, or have researched them, you'll know how different they are culture-wise. As you start learning about Southwest founder Herb Kelleher (I highly recommend the book, "[Nuts!](#)", by Jackie and Kevin Freiberg), you'll quickly realize how different the airline he created is from United and most of the others! The best ways to figure out a good fit culture-wise are to speak with pilots who fly for airlines you are interested in and to research those airlines.

**Growth and Stability:** Things change, but often a long track record, a content team, great leaders and reasonable, responsible growth are decent indicators of a company's health. You can fairly easily research how much growth is expected by looking at planned aircraft acquisition, pilot hiring and base expansion. To determine relative stability, have a look at the airline's history, track record, stock trend over time and leadership changes.

**Compensation:** Most of the majors have excellent compensation, in the form of salary and benefits. For United States carriers, a few of the best out there in terms of compensation currently are cargo carriers FedEx and UPS. They both have outstanding compensation, but are also some of the most competitive airline jobs to get. Go for it if they seem like a good fit, but keep in mind the path to them will take longer as you will need much more experience to be interviewed with them than some of the others. United, American, Delta and Southwest also top the compensation list at the moment.

**Routes:** Do you eventually want to fly "across the pond" internationally and do just a few long trips per month, do you imagine yourself doing shorter flights within the United States, or a combination of these? Look at the route maps for different airlines and find a good fit for you. Remember, to end up with the routes you want most will take time and seniority, but that will happen more quickly than you think!

**Aircraft:** Some pilots just want to fly and aren't as concerned with which exact aircraft they are assigned. Others are "Boeing" or "Airbus" people and want to fly only that metal, sometimes only specific types. This usually isn't a big deciding factor, but it's something to consider.

The most important tips when deciding which airline is a good fit for you are: - speak with other pilots - do your research- keep an open mind and several options- start with the end in mind

This will take time and you may end up changing your mind in the future. That's okay - be flexible! Speaking with pilots is key. If you are interested in an airline, speak with several pilots with various experience levels who fly for them or have in the past.

Once you determine which airlines seem like a good fit, start looking at which regional airlines have relationships with them. Many regionals move pilots into partner major airlines. Some do this without even requiring an additional interview. This is called a "flow" arrangement and is the easiest and lowest friction, but you may spend an extra year or two with the regionals. Ideally, plan on working for a regional airline which has the best chance of success to get you to the major airline of your choosing, even if the regional isn't a perfect fit. I recommend making this sacrifice for a few years early in your career so you end up in your most ideal position down the road.

Hey aviators and future aviators! After hearing about how amazing the airline industry is for pilots at this point in time, you may be considering a new career! Excellent! We'll start getting into the details of setting yourself for success with your airline career in upcoming articles, but first, it's time to start thinking about which airlines you would most like to work for. Being specific with your goal (choosing which airline you would like to be a pilot for vs. simply wanting to become an airline pilot) will help get you on the right path, even if you're just beginning to learn to fly.

More than most industries, aviation rides waves...ups and downs, times to get in and times to possibly wait it out. What are the swells, the systems which drive these waves? For airlines, it's a very long-tailed network involving the world and local economies, political stability or instability which can drive oil (and fuel) costs up and down, a mandatory retirement age for airline pilots and most recently, a pilot shortage caused in part by a significant change in regulations.

Let's touch briefly on that last point. In response to the 2010 investigation of the 2009 Colgan Air Flight 3407 crash, the "1,500 hour rule" for Airline Transport Pilot (ATP) certification was implemented in July of 2013. This is the primary reason so many pilots are out there "building time". This was an important change, because it came at a time when demand for airline travel was accelerating, larger and more efficient aircraft were coming on line, and fuel costs were low, making air travel much less expensive. More planes, routes and affordable seats led to a steady rise in demand for pilots we're still seeing today. Because these pilots need a much higher level of experience (and the associated time and expense) before they can be hired by the airlines, the industry isn't keeping up with the demand for pilots.

According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), there were 3.8 billion air travelers in 2016 and this is projected to nearly double to 7.2 billion passengers by 2035. The primary reasons for this growth are development of nations in the Asia-Pacific region and more of their population transitioning from lower income to middle- or upper-middle income. This gives more of the population expendable income to travel, or replace other means of transportation with airline travel. This is especially true in China and India.

On average, 87 new pilots will need to be hired and trained every single day (one every fifteen minutes) for the next twenty years to meet this increasing demand for air travel. There hasn't been a better "pilot's market" for the airlines since the 1950s! If you're considering becoming an airline pilot, now is the time! Keep moving forward and stay positive, but also remember the dynamic nature of waves and swells...

Next time, we'll talk about how to determine which airline is a good fit...

Fly safe, have fun & keep learning!

## **Guide To Becoming A Commercial Pilot : Which Airline Is Good For You?**

by Matt D'Angelo (A multipart series #5)

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You've decided to go for it and become an airline pilot! Awesome! So, what do you do now? Amongst so much information and noise, how do you even know where to begin on a long journey you've never embarked on before? Follow these steps...

- Start with the end in mind.
- Start lifelong relationships with mentors.
- Start living a deliberate, organized and examined life.
- Take the first step.
- Be persistent.
- Do the work.

We'll never arrive at our destination if we don't know where it is. If you're out driving, you won't know which way to turn if your destination isn't clear. Think very clearly about what your goal is and write it down. If you don't know specifically yet, write down the highest level you know with certainty you want to achieve. Then, you can work towards this goal. Back to the driving analogy, think of it this way...when we're driving somewhere, we rarely can see our destination when we first pull out of our driveway. If that were the case, we would just walk! What we need to know is where that destination is and very clearly the next turn or two we need to make. That's it! This is where the next critical step comes in...

I've enjoyed reading and learning all my life. Both have helped guide me towards new interests and adventures, and shaped who I've become. I am very fortunate to have come across the book, "Think and Grow Rich!" by Napoleon Hill when I was growing up. Of the many valuable lessons in this book, the ones which have influenced me most are the powers of mentorship, persistence, planning and believing in yourself.

The next step in your journey is to find several mentors. At least one mentor should be well ahead of you and where you want to end up. If you imagine yourself as a Captain at a major airline, form relationships with a few current or past Captains at the majors you're most interested in.

Another mentor should be just a few steps and about a year ahead of you, with fresh and current information about the journey. This may be a First Officer at a regional airline. At least one mentor should be just a step or two ahead of you, where you will be in six months or so. These mentors may be new hires in training. They can help you with the very relevant, recent information and trends the former mentors may be slightly out of touch with.

Imagine a mountain with sheer peaks and exposure. You want to be on the summit. The current Captains are on the summit, helping you and the First Officer mentors climb. The First Officer mentors are helping the new hires, who are helping you. You can benefit from all of those ahead of you, if they have the personality and attitude to help you. You'll know a mentor right away, and you'll know someone who is unwilling or unable to mentor you, as well. If someone doesn't have the time or doesn't show interest, don't force it. Guess what? You're going to pay it forward in the very near future and mentor those one step behind you! In a few years, you'll be that Captain on the summit (if that's your goal), lending a hand and mentoring from a new vantage point. This is how life and this industry work and is a big part of the reason you'll often hear that aviation is a "small world." I wouldn't have achieved nearly as much as I have in life and aviation without the generosity and encouragement of mentors. So thankful for this and that I learned early on how important mentors are.

Next is a very broad step: Start living a deliberate, organized and examined life. Don't be obsessively aviation-focused at the expense of family, friends and pursuit of other interests just to impress your interviewer some day. Be yourself! Enjoy life!

The airlines are looking for humans with personalities, relationships, sincerity and interests. They want people who will work well in a crew environment and who would enjoy spending 3-4 days together on trips. They do love folks who volunteer and give back to their communities, even if it has nothing at all to do with aviation.

Be persistent. Aviation is a very, very, very challenging and long-tailed pursuit. There is no "getting by". If you don't really want it and can't commit to it, it simply won't happen. That's part of the reason less than 20% of folks who obtain Student Pilot certificates go on to earn Private Pilot certificates. Flying is very challenging, but extremely rewarding. The other end of this is...don't do too many stupid things, or you'll create huge hurdles for yourself. For example, keep a clean driving record and don't ever get DUIs or any drug-related charges. If you already have, that may be okay, but don't make the same mistakes twice. Keep your social media fairly tame and non-political. You don't have to be perfect, but use common sense!

Take the first step! Think about and write down your goal TODAY! Read the previous articles in this series if you need a little help finding clarity. Start reaching out to mentors and please let me know if I can help - either to mentor or to help find mentors.

Do the work. This is why so much persistence is needed. Aviation, especially in the initial phases, is a LOT of work. If you haven't organized your life and managed your time, you won't have the focus necessary to succeed. If you're unwilling to do the work, very simply, it's not going to happen. There is no coasting through this and the actual flying is only half of it. Do the work. Learn all you can. Practice, practice, practice. I can't emphasize this enough.

This concludes the Airline Prep series. If you have any additional questions, please reach out to me at [matt@flyingjourney.com](mailto:matt@flyingjourney.com). I would be more than happy to mentor and guide you, as well as answer any questions you have!

Thank you for your time and your attention! Best wishes in your airline career! See you out there!

Fly safe, have fun & keep learning!

## Guide To Becoming A Commercial Pilot : Which Airline Is Good For You?

by Matt D'Angelo (#6 Last installment of series)

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