



**N**ot every pilot-controller situation can be handled using official phraseology in the **Pilot/Controller Glossary**. Looking for something special from us? Just ask in plain English.

## When should student pilots let ATC know that they're student pilots?

In my neighborhood, there are an unusual number of driving schools. Everywhere I go, I see cars with "Student Driver" stickers. Sometimes, they're driving great. Other times, they make my daily drive, uh, *entertaining*. I know to give that vehicle some extra attention and a wide berth. I don't know what level of aptitude I'm dealing with.

I bring that same level of extra vigilance and care when I'm working a known student pilot. The only way I know the student's status is if they tell me on the radio.

AIM4-2-4 (c) has this to say about Student Pilots Radio Identification: *"The FAA desires to help student pilots in acquiring sufficient practical experience in the environment in which they will be required to operate. To receive additional assistance while operating in areas of concentrated air traffic, student pilots need only identify themselves as a student pilot during their initial call to an FAA radio facility ... This special identification will alert FAA ATC personnel and enable them to provide student pilots with such extra assistance and consideration as they may need. It is recommended that student pilots identify themselves as such, on initial contact with each clearance delivery prior to taxiing, ground control, tower, approach*

*and departure control frequency, or FSS contact."*

Any time the student pilot makes their *initial* call on a fresh, new ATC frequency, they should check in with "student pilot." This goes for all facility types: Tower, Approach, Center, and FSS.

- ✈️ "Montgomery Tower, N123AB, student pilot, ready for departure."
- ✈️ "Salt Lake Center, N123AB at 3500, student pilot."
- ✈️ "Minneapolis Approach, Skyhawk 123AB, just departed Faribault northbound. Request flight following to St. Cloud at 4500. Student pilot."
- ✈️ "Miami Radio, N123AB, student pilot. I'd like to open my VFR flight plan."

Giving ATC that little bit of extra information goes a long way to providing an extra safety barrier. We all began our aviation career somewhere. A controller's helping hand and vigilance can help the student take those first steps without fear of falling over.



## Student Services

How do I, as a controller, manifest “extra assistance and consideration” for student pilots?

- I’ll speak slower and use plain English if the message isn’t getting across.
- I might give shorter clearances, such as breaking up a long taxi clearance into sections with a stop between each one.
- I won’t ask for anything unusual or that could make them uncomfortable, like making a short approach or a Land-and-Hold-Short Operation (LAHSO).
- I’ll watch for odd changes in course or altitude.
- If I have concerns about the student, I’ll pass those concerns on to other controllers as appropriate.

One student pilot I was working on radar simply failed to descend into his destination airport. I’d noticed he was still hanging it high as he drew closer and kept coaxing him with phrases like, “±**Descent approved**” and “±**VFR descent to pattern altitude approved.**” He read back everything fine. He just arrived directly over the airport, still 4500 feet AGL. Nothing in his voice suggested anything amiss.

After verifying with the student that he indeed intended to land at this airport, I called the tower and informed them this pilot wasn’t getting the message and seemed behind the curve. With the heads-up given, I switched the student to

the tower frequency. The tower controller scooted his other traffic out of the way, so the student could spiral down and finally make his descent.

One day, a student solo had just taken off into my pattern and was on the downwind for his first stop-and-go. I told him to follow a faster aircraft on final. He reported the traffic in sight, read my instruction back—and then proceeded to cut off the other airplane anyway. I had to send the other aircraft around.

If I chose to include the “possible pilot deviation” phraseology on the solo right then and there, it could’ve impacted the new pilot’s mental state in an already intense environment. I want to minimize distractions, not add to them.

Instead, I waited until he’d completed his three stop-and-goes. Having learned my lesson, I made sure to call his base turns myself, not leaving them up to him. Everything else went fine. Only when he was taxiing back did I inform him of the deviation and give him the tower phone number. Our supervisor also called the flight school and informed the instructor of what happened.

Later on in the week, the CFI and student visited the tower. The supervisor pulled up the radar and voice recordings, so he could walk the pilots through the situation, and explain how and why we make our sequence calls. Hopefully, the student learned from the incident and continued to a successful, better-informed flying career.

### How do I coordinate an aerial photo mission with ATC?

Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) and high-res satellite imagery may have taken over a huge amount of aerial photography and survey work, but controllers still handle plenty of aircraft doing these tasks. There are days where I’ve had multiple operations going at once: pipeline inspectors, post-disaster evaluation scans, real estate surveys, and a pilot wanting to overfly a friend’s house. I’ve handled plenty of search and rescue missions as well.

There are three basic questions that ATC needs answered to accommodate such missions: Where are you going next, at what altitude, and how long are you going to be there? The best way to convey that info depends on the complexity of your mission.

An airborne popup request may suffice if it’s

a few minutes and a few sites. Today, you’re photographing a few sites near Centennial Airport (KAPA) in Denver, CO. I’m working that Tower today when you call, “±**Centennial Tower, N123AB with a VFR photo mission request.**”

My job is to deconflict aircraft. As you’re answering each of the where, how high, and how long questions, I’m checking to see if you’re going to *create* conflict. While your photo points should be far enough away from my pattern, you’re going to cut through my pattern enroute to point #2. Your altitude will determine exactly how much of a conflict you’ll potentially create.

Centennial Tower’s elevation is 5885 feet, with a traffic pattern altitude of 6885 feet. Are you requesting 8000 feet? You’re more than 1000 feet above my traffic pattern. Little or no factor. However, if you re-

quest 7000 feet, now you may interfere with my traffic pattern as you transition northwest. I may be required to vector you around the traffic or vector them around you. Alternatively, I may climb you to 8000 feet to go over the top of everyone else and then let you descend once you're clear of the milieu.

These VFR popup-style requests work great for jobs with a few points or SAR missions where their search area is fluid. In my experience, most regular photo missions need only a few minutes over each site before moving on. To prevent any surprises and to keep my plan evolving, I may ask you, ✈️⚡️**“Advise how long you'll need at each position.”** For example,

if you know you'll only need a couple of orbits to get what you need, you may respond with something such as, ✈️📄**“I'll need two 360s per point.”** Per my technique, I'll ask photo flights to advise when complete at each position before moving to the next one, so I can clear the way.

Some survey jobs require hours-long runs at precise altitudes. That's a lot to convey on a busy ATC frequency. For big missions, call the relevant radar facility on the phone, preferably several hours or even a day before launching. You'll likely be speaking to a supervisor or a CIC. Get an email address from them. Send them a PDF of a VFR sectional with all

## Help Desk

Do you have a question about airspace or procedures? Are you seeking permission to do something unusual? Did you encounter something weird? Give ATC a call on the phone.

We would much rather talk things over a regular phone call than take up valuable frequency time. We're more likely to be able to take our time and have a real conversation, get into the details, and make some notes if needed. Also, controllers actively working traffic aren't allowed to be on the Internet or their phones. There's no, ✈️⚡️**“N123AB, standby. Google search in progress.”** (However, a supervisor or CIC can get on the computer or tap other resources, if needed.) If we don't have the

answers you need or the time to get into the details right then (the supervisor or CIC can be busy too), we can give you a better time or a better contact to call, or an email address to submit your questions in writing.

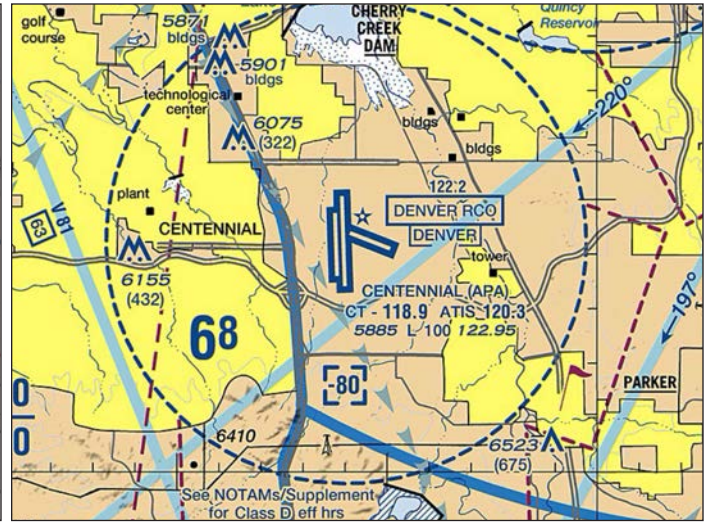
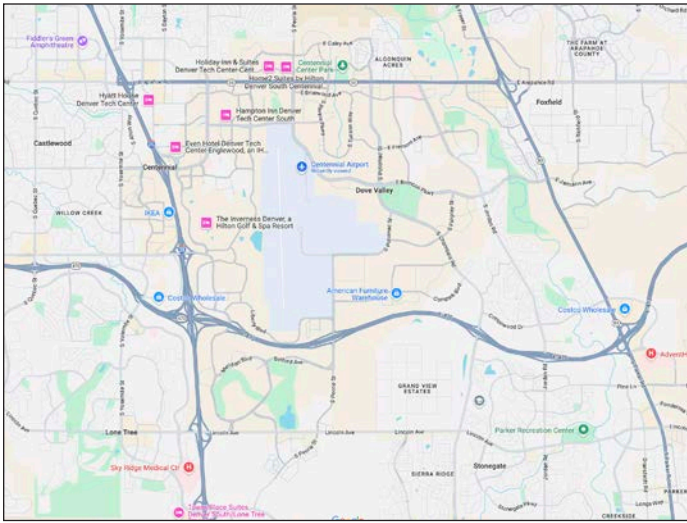
Even ATC facilities that are open 24 hours have the best staffing on weekdays from 9 to 5. Our non-ATC administrative staff, like facility managers, support specialists, and quality assurance people also typically work that schedule. There will be a lot more people available to answer your questions during those hours.

There are various resources available online listing the public-facing phone numbers for ATC facilities, including non-FAA-affiliated websites with searchable databases like 123atc.com/facilities. The Chart Supplement also contains a table of 24 telephone numbers for major ATC facilities nationwide. You can also try listed clearance delivery phone numbers. A Clearance Delivery controller may not have time to answer your question (they're working an active control position too), but they can give you the contact info or phone number for someone who can.

Clearance delivery numbers can be found online using the Chart Supplement search at: [www.faa.gov/air\\_traffic/flight\\_info/aeronav/digital\\_products/dafd](http://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/flight_info/aeronav/digital_products/dafd)

### AIR ROUTE TRAFFIC CONTROL CENTERS (ARTCCs)

ARTCC NAME	*24 HR RGNL DUTY OFFICE TELEPHONE #	BUSINESS HOURS	BUSINESS TELEPHONE #
Albuquerque	817-222-5006	7:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	505-856-4300
Anchorage	907-271-5936	7:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	907-269-1137
Atlanta	404-305-5180	7:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.	770-210-7601
Boston	404-305-5156	7:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	603-879-6633
Chicago	817-222-5006	8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	630-906-8221
Cleveland	817-222-5006	8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	440-774-0310
Denver	206-231-2099	7:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	303-342-1600
Ft. Worth	817-222-5006	7:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	817-858-7300
Honolulu	310-725-3300	7:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	808-840-6100
Houston	817-222-5006	7:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	281-230-5300
Indianapolis	817-222-5006	8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	317-247-2231
Jacksonville	404-305-5180	8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.	904-549-1501
Kansas City	817-222-5006	7:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	913-254-8500
Los Angeles	661-265-8200	7:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	661-265-8200
Memphis	404-305-5180	7:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	901-368-8103
Miami	404-305-5180	7:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m.	305-716-1500
Minneapolis	817-222-5006	8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	651-463-5580
New York	718-995-5426	8:00 a.m.-4:40 p.m.	631-468-1001
Oakland	310-725-3300	6:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m.	510-745-3331
Salt Lake City	206-231-2099	7:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.	801-320-2500
San Juan	404-305-5180	7:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.	787-253-8663



*Stick to aviation geographic references when you say where you want to go. If you say, “Centennial Tower, I’m going to work over the Stonegate Neighborhood, and then head over to the Fiddler’s Green Amphitheater,” you’re making a powerful assumption that I know where any of that is. I might, but it’s illegal for me to check Google Maps while working traffic. Distance and bearing from a major aviation fix like an airport or navaid is better. “Centennial Tower, my first site is 4 miles southeast of your airport, and the next is 3 miles northwest of the airport, working at 8000.” Now I can visualize those points you’re referencing, even if I’m not familiar with the area.*

the points or lines you’re going to overfly marked on it. Include in the PDF your call sign, aircraft type, required altitude, and estimated departure time if you have it. This will likely get printed and posted at any controller position that may be impacted so they have it on-hand when you depart.

We try our best to accommodate photo missions. At one TRACON where I worked, our IFR airliner downwinds ran at 4000 feet. VFR photo flights would routinely request 4300 or 4100 feet, which wouldn’t allow the minimum 500 feet of IFR/VFR vertical separation. Instead, we’d work around them, descending our airliners to 3000 feet or keeping them at 5000 feet.

Be patient and flexible. Imagine you have points A, B, and C to survey. Points A and C are each 5 miles from the airport, but B is 1500 feet off the departure end of our runway. We’re in the middle of our departure rush and allowing you to photograph B may cause major delays. ATC may ask if you can do A and C first, then come back and do B later once things have died down. On the flipside, it may not be busy now, and they may ask if you can do B now and then do A and C afterwards. We each have a job to do, so let’s work together as best we can.

WAYPOINT	ALTITUDE	DURATION	
A	Vue de L'eau	1500'	20m
B	West Shore Rd.	500'	15m
C	Peck	500'	15m

*Here’s a working example of a photo mission document, with various points marked A, B, and C. List what the points are, the altitudes from which each site needs to be photographed, and the estimated time over each location.*



*Throwing phrases like “ENGINE TEST,” “MAINT CHK,” “ADS-B CHK,” “TRANSPONDER TEST,” and others into the remarks section of your IFR flight plan can give ATC a heads-up that your flight may need something special.*

### **I’m doing a maintenance test flight. How can ATC accommodate me?**

Like a photo mission, we essentially need four things: what you’re doing, where you need to fly, how high you need to go, and for how long you need to do it. Leave out the technical details and gee-whiz stuff. Just give us the general idea.

Perhaps, you just got a new engine and don’t want to wander far from a runway in case the “extra” bolt the A&P found lying around wasn’t actually an extra. The call to me on Ground could go: **✈️ “Ground, Skyhawk N123AB, requesting VFR departure for a maintenance flight. I’m testing a new engine and I need to orbit directly over the airport, between 3500 and 5500, for about 30 minutes.”** Awesome. Now I’ll tell the tower controller what you’d like to do, and they can pass it on to the radar controller once you’re ready to depart.

If you’re intending to do this test IFR, add your intentions in the remarks section. One day on radar, I had an Embraer Phenom depart, requesting to do a pressurization check. How did I know? He put “PRESSURIZATION CHK” in his IFR flight plan remarks. (See? We do try to read those! Well, Ground, Tower, and Center can easily read them. For Approach, it’s usually trickier but can be done.)

I radar-identified him and asked his intentions. He requested to do a steady climb up to 12,000 feet, verifying his aircraft was holding pressure appropriately. I climbed him, handed him off to Center, and coordinated his request with the Center controller via landline.

Informing us that it’s a maintenance flight preps ATC in case something goes awry. Working Tower, I cleared a King Air for takeoff. He’d told me it was a VFR maintenance flight in the pattern, but didn’t specify what exactly had been maintained. As he climbed, to my surprise, I noted his nose and right main gear retracted, but his left main stayed down.

I told him, **✈️ “King Air 3AB, it appears your left main gear didn’t retract.”**

Clearly intending it for his copilot and not the rest of the frequency, he blurted out. **✈️ “DAMMIT! I TOLD YOU we left that bolt out.”** Thankfully, the faulty landing gear held up and he was able to land without incident.

Don’t go forgetting those “extra” bolts, people.

### **Can I still fly into or out of an airport when my transponder, or ADS-B Out, is broken?**

You’re almost at the end of your weekend cross country IFR flight, 20 miles from your Class C airport destination. Suddenly, the approach controller says, **✈️ “N123AB, I’m not receiving your transponder anymore. Reset transponder. Squawk 4332.”** Taken aback, you respond, **✈️ “Approach, roger, recycling.”**

You verify the code on your transponder, reset it, and ask ATC if they’re receiving it now. **✈️ “Negative, N123AB. Your transponder appears inoperative.”** You recycle it several times. Same result. *Great. It just up and died mid-flight. This won’t be expensive or anything ...*

However, you have a more immediate problem. Per **91.225(d)**, you need ADS-B Out to fly in certain types of airspace, such as the Class C airspace surrounding your destination. The other airports in its immediate vicinity are tiny strips and who knows what kind of facilities they have. The Class C has the highest chance of an on-site mechanic. You tell Approach, **✈️ “I’d like to continue to my destination. Hopefully, they’ve got a shop that can fix it.”**

Tracking your IFR flight without a working transponder can create increased workload for the controller. We’re missing your altitude information, and relying strictly on skin-paint primary radar coverage and your altitude reports, since you won’t be seen by our ADS-B ground stations. TCAS-equipped aircraft can’t see you either. If it’s too much to handle, ATC could deny your request to enter the Class C, forcing you to deviate somewhere else.

However, right now, traffic is slow and Approach has been able to maintain a good primary radar track on you. He approves your request to continue. He notifies the Class C's Tower of your transponder-less status and you land normally.

Well, good luck continues to elude you. The only A&P takes a look and can't fix it. He, at least, bands the circuit breaker, placards it inop, and gives you a sticker saying as much for the logbook. That satisfies 91.213 about flying with inop equipment but not the requirement to have a working transponder and ADS-B. You're 150 miles from home base and were only out here to pick up a friend, get lunch, and head home. It's one thing having your transponder quit mid-flight and ATC allowing you to continue. Now you'd be departing with it broken.

Fortunately, the FAA has a solution for this exact problem: the ADS-B Deviation Authorization Pre-Flight Tool, or ADAPT. (The FAA never shies away from an acronym, does it?) This online tool enables you to request an ADS-B Out waiver so you can legally depart or enter ADS-B-required airspace. You must file it between 1-24 hours prior to your flight and receive approval via email prior to departing.

As of this writing, ADAPT is available at: [sapt.faa.gov](http://sapt.faa.gov). The site itself does a good job of explaining the steps, including providing a walkthrough with screenshots, a video tutorial, and even adding a full-fledged 125 page user guide, if you're so inclined.

You receive your authorization. At this point, the weather's not VFR friendly and you also want to make sure you've got ATC traffic-spotting for you. You file an IFR flight plan to cover those bases.

The waiver covers you legally, but you still need to inform the controller. Start by putting something like "TRANSPONDER INOP" in the flight plan remarks. When you receive your IFR clearance from the tower's clearance delivery, tell the controller your transponder is inoperative. The tower crew will notify the radar controllers of your transponder-less status.

Note that securing the waiver is only part of the process. As the ADAPT site itself says, "An ADS-B deviation authorization granted using ADAPT does not equal, nor does it guarantee, an ATC clearance into airspace where ADS-B Out equipment is

*The image on the top is how you normally appear on our scope with a call sign (N123AB), altitude ("030" for 3000 feet), speed ("12" for 120 knots), and wake category ("I"). The "A" in the blue circle indicates which sector owns the target. If you're flying around without a transponder, you'll appear as a blue circle with a white diamond, i.e., a primary target with no data at all attached to it. However, if ATC can determine that blue dot is you, then they can manually append your call sign to that target. It won't show altitude, because that data comes from your transponder.*

required." ATC can still deny your departure request, depending on workload or technological limitations. If radar's too busy, they may put you on pause until they've got the bandwidth to handle your flight.

Today, though, there's no need to hold you back. Tower clears you for takeoff and notifies me—working radar approach control—that the next departure is you, allowing me to radar-identify you when your primary target pops up at the end of the runway. I can also manually append your call sign and data to that primary target.

From your end, you really shouldn't see too much difference in service, with the exception of al-

*An example of an ADAPT waiver.*

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION FLIGHT INFORMATION ENTRY					TIME STARTED		SPECIALIST INITIALS
1. TYPE VFR	2. AIRCRAFT IDENTIFICATION ZZV220	3. AIRCRAFT TYPE B737	4. TRUE AIRSPEED 300 KTS	5. DEPARTURE POINT KSSC	6. DEPARTURE TIME PROPOSED (Z) 1045 ACTUAL (Z)		7. CRUISING ALTITUDE 250
8. ROUTE OF FLIGHT OXFRD...HARVY...DORRN...CAVLR3							
9. DESTINATION POINT KIAD	10. EST TIME ENROUTE HOURS 02 MINUTES 00		11. REMARKS C129 ADS-B Position Source TSO <input type="checkbox"/> Baro-Aiding equipment installed 260B (1090ES) ADS-B Link TSO 5.0 Mask Angle				
12. FUEL ON BOARD HOURS MINUTES		13. ALTERNATE ROUTES		14. PILOT'S NAME, ADDRESS & TELEPHONE NUMBER & AIRCRAFT HOME BASE			15. NUMBER ABOARD
16. COLOR OF AIRCRAFT				17. DESTINATION CONTACT/TELEPHONE (OPTIONAL)			

titude reporting. Without a working transponder, I can't tell your altitude. Expect to be asked to report reaching or leaving assigned altitudes many times. When you report leveling off at an assigned altitude, I can manually enter that altitude on your target.

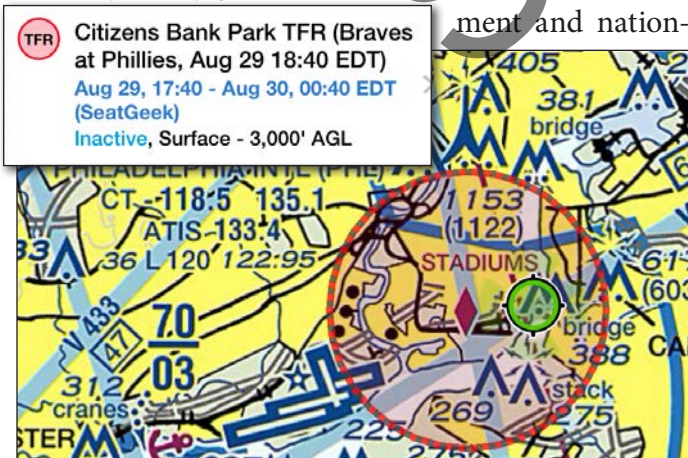
No transponder means a lot of our handoff automation tools also won't work with your target. When it comes time to hand you off to Center, I'll need to call them on a landline. ☒☒ "Center, Approach, IFR manual handoff, primary target only." After they answer, I'll continue. ☒☒ "N123AB, Cessna 172, IFR, inoperative transponder, primary target, 10 miles west of FIIIX, level at 5000, direct FIIIX." On their end, they'll do what I did: append a datablock to your primary target and say, ☒± "Radar contact." That completes the handoff. At that point, I can switch you to Center's frequency.

Every time you get passed to a new facility, the handoff cycle repeats. Once you get close to your destination airport, the radar controller working you will notify the tower that your transponder's inoperative and that you're a primary target only. This is all happening behind the scenes. Even when things aren't going in your favor, the system can bend to accommodate you and get you safely home.

### Can ATC clear me through a TFR?

It depends. The devil is in the TFR's details.

For instance, there are often TFRs over major sporting events like football and baseball games. These typically go up to 3000 feet AGL. Law enforcement and nation-



*If you're approved for flight through a TFR, remember that approval doesn't mean you get to hang out. No lingering. No playing Goodyear Blimp to watch the on-field action. Just get in one side and get out the other.*

al security aircraft are granted access, along with aircraft involved in broadcasting or supporting the game.

What if you, as a civilian, wanted to transition through such a TFR to get to your destination that lies just on the opposite side of it? Let's read the text that would apply for a Minnesota Twins baseball game in Minneapolis:

*"This flight prohibition applies to all manned and unmanned aircraft operations (including training, parachute jumping, and model aircraft flights) unless the aircraft operator meets at least one of the following requirements: A. The aircraft operation has been authorized by ATC for operational or safety purposes, including authorization of flights specifically arriving at or departing from an airport designated by ATC using standard ATC procedures and routes; B. the aircraft operation is being conducted for operational, safety, or security purposes."*

Further on down, it says, *"Pilots must continuously squawk an ATC-assigned beacon code and maintain 2-way radio contact with ATC while operating in the defined airspace."* If you called me requesting a transition to your destination, I could assign you a squawk and grant you the TFR transition as long as we remain in communication while you're inside the TFR.

Other TFRs prohibit aircraft other than those directly involved in the event. If there's an airshow kicking off, you don't want to be anywhere near its TFR unless you're flying in the show yourself or watching it as an audience member. And I emphasize *near*. The high-speed maneuvering of airshow performers often leads them right up to the TFR's boundary, and sometimes spills beyond it if they misjudge their turns or energy.

More of these common-sense restrictions include TFRs protecting spaceflight operations, such as those around Florida's Kennedy Space Center and California's Vandenberg Space Force Base. Mission control recordings often contain concerned mentions of aircraft getting too snugly with the TFR boundary. Aircraft violating the restriction could cause a scrub of the launch.

Major forest fires are also typically blanketed by Flight Hazard TFRs "to provide a safe environment for fire fighting aircraft operations." Water and chemical bombers, and accompanying rescue and



*I've seen unidentified VFR aircraft unknowingly bust VIP TFRs, only to be tracked to their destination and met by law enforcement upon landing. Check NOTAMs before flight. If you know TFRs are in the area, do yourself a favor and watch for changes via*

*ADS-B or ask ATC if there are changes to active times. The controller might think to tell you ... or might not. Don't create a whole lot of heartache for yourself and everyone watching, not knowing if you're an actual threat or just an unwitting aviator.*

support aircraft, can do their thing with impunity.

Controllers don't have wiggle room with these types of TFRs. Give them a wide berth.

### **There is VIP movement in the area. What can I expect?**

We can't talk about TFRs without covering one of the most complex and frustrating examples: VIP TFRs, which cover the President, Vice President, and people of note, such as leading presidential candidates.

Presidential TFRs consist of a 10-mile-radius inner core and a less-restrictive, 30-mile-radius outer ring. That tough nugget at the center is restricted to scheduled passenger and cargo flights that comply with TSA-approved security screening standards, along with approved law enforcement and firefighting operations and air ambulance flights. Military aircraft providing support and overwatch services to the Secret Service are naturally permitted as well.

The outer ring requires all departing, transiting, and arriving aircraft to be on a filed IFR or VFR flight plan, assigned a squawk code by ATC, and in communication with ATC at all times. Only aircraft arriving or departing local airports are permitted. Loitering is expressly prohibited. A variety of flight operations are also prohibited within the entire TFR, such as flight training, surveys, skydiving operations, crop dusting, maintenance flights, and banner towing.

Whenever the VIP aircraft is on final approach, all air traffic on the airport comes to a halt. No one else can taxi or depart. Any other arrivals must be put into holding. Meanwhile, U.S. Secret Service agents are present in the tower and radar room, providing oversight and rapid communication if needed. Once the VIP is offloaded onto ground transport and leaves the airport premises, airport operations can resume. The freeze is repeated when the VIP returns to the aircraft and departs.

It's inconvenient, but it's the national security machine at work. It is simply what it is.

Lower-level VIP TFRs cover the Vice President and significant political figures. They are less restrictive. Aircraft that are squawking and talking to ATC can transit them to meet safety of flight and operational demands. Loitering is again prohibited.

The Veep's TFR typically goes up to 2999 feet AGL and has a 3-mile radius. A presidential candidate's TFR is 4999 feet AGL and 5 miles. That makes them far easier to circumnavigate or overfly than the presidential behemoth.

I've found the most frustrating thing about VIP TFRs is their often-shifting timeline and location. If the VIP is early, late, or makes unscheduled stops or detours, the timeframe and location of the TFR can rapidly change. When you see a TFR NOTAM that may impact your flight, it's vital that you continuously check the time and location for changes.



## I'm a Compassion Flight. What kind of special handling can I expect?

You're doing a good deed today. A local cancer patient needs some specialized treatment at a hospital in the next state. Via the Air Care Alliance, you volunteered your time and airplane to fly him and his wife over there as a Compassion Flight so they can avoid the tedious drive.

Controllers familiar with Compassion aircraft try to treat them with more delicacy than others. No sharp vectors that could put stress on the patient. Climbs and descents get issued well in advance, resulting in smooth altitude changes. If you're encountering turbulence, request a different altitude or routing that may alleviate it.

You're not a Medevac and therefore not officially granted such high priority (unless the patient takes

a turn for the worse in flight, in which case you can declare an emergency just as you would with any serious passenger medical issue). That said, I and other controllers will give a Compassion Flight priority handling and slot it further ahead in the sequence. You and other Compassion Flight pilots are helping someone in real need. If I can, I'll help you too.

Of course, advocate for your passenger if you do encounter a controller who has forgotten or is unfamiliar with the Compassion program and what it entails. We can go months or even years without encountering one. If an unaware controller issues you an excessive altitude change or turn, respond with something like, "Unable due to sensitive passenger." Your passenger's comfort is your mission; amending the clearance to accommodate your special needs is ours.

## Speaking of Special: Special VFR, Contact Approaches, and ATC

VMC is defined as flight visibility of at least 3 statute miles and ceilings of at least 1000 feet. Even so, flying when it's overcast 1000 feet and 3 SM of visibility is effectively scud running.

Special VFR (SVFR) lets you fly in far reduced minima: 1 SM of flight visibility and clear of clouds versus 3 SM and the "500 below, 1000 above, and 2000 laterally" all student pilots memorize. Nighttime SVFR requires an Instrument Rating and your aircraft to be equipped for instrument flight. But it's still a lot of leeway for you to fly VFR in poor conditions.

You, the pilot, must be keenly aware of what you're getting into before attempting SVFR and know how best to use it. Requesting SVFR to get around some pesky low clouds lingering by the airport? Good. Fly a published instrument approach to an airport and then cancel with a SVFR clearance to fly a short distance to another airport? Fair. Using it to scud run in really terrible weather around an unfamiliar airport? Dangerously bad.

The same mentality applies to contact approaches. These IFR procedures also have low minima: 1 SM of flight visibility, reported ground visibility of at least 1 SM, remain clear of clouds, and the pilot bearing full responsibility for obstruction avoidance. I've most often seen them used by pilots landing at their home airport, where they are familiar with the lay of the land.

Other common uses are getting around broken clouds to land when you can't see the airport yet to accept a visual approach, or to land when one side of the airport is obscured by clouds while the other end clear.

There's a lot of judgment involved here, and an unprepared pilot can get into trouble really quickly. To keep ATC from talking pilots into biting off more than they can chew, controllers are forbidden from offering these options. You must request them.



*Flying in these conditions demands a lot from a pilot. To prevent inexperienced pilots from getting into trouble, ATC is prohibited from offering Special VFR. Only you, the pilot, can request it as an option.*