

Personal Minimums

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Do you have a set of personal minimums?

Many times we have been in situations where our personal minimums are tested. Often it is all too tempting to be coerced into pushing those minimums even though you know the risks and dangers associated with doing this.

Imagine flying in unfamiliar terrain working on the last day of a survey job.....

Visibility is dropping....

You are only 4 miles away from the airport and you have been on the road for three weeks. You are ready to get home and see your family. It starts raining, visibility is dropping; the local station reports ½ mile visibility and heavy rain. You have been in weather like this before but it was in the pattern at the airport you were familiar with. As you continue you find you are reducing speed and altitude, instead of the horizon for a vertical reference you start looking vertical to maintain the helicopter level. This flight just dropped below your personal minimums, using whatever references you can see, you choose to land the helicopter in an open field below you and wait for the cell to pass.



All too often situations like these get pilots in trouble. They are tempted to push the elements of the flight a little further in an attempt to complete the mission, which often results in very serious consequences. Luckily one of the greatest tools to prevent this situation is easily within the reach of all pilots.

How do I start?



Hopefully you have a set of personal minimums already. If you do not, here are some basic guidelines to start. Think about your experience as a pilot and based on that come up with realistic minimums that you feel comfortable with. The weather is only part of it. We should include **minimums** for us as pilots, **our aircraft**, and **the environment**. Personal minimums should help the pilot make decisions based on abilities, **not external pressures**. "It is important to remember that these minimums are something you feel comfortable with.

This first step should not be taken during a flight or when you are trying to make a go-no go

decision. Your personal minimums should be developed prior to that flight and then used as a measurement to help you determine if today is a good day to fly. The card created by the USHST is designed to be a quick reference for you to keep with you alongside your pilot certificate. Writing these minimums down makes them more than just an idea or "ballpark" figure, they become hard numbers, which cannot be ignored.



What is next?

After the creation of your minimums you will continue flying and using those minimums for your decisions both before and in flight. As you gain experience and fly closer to your minimums you will start to feel confident and comfortable. Often this experience closer to your minimums is best achieved by flying with a more experienced pilot. It is also a great idea to always leave yourself a good escape strategy (**an OUT!**) for times when you fly in weather near your minimums.

If your personal minimum is three statute miles of visibility and today the visibility is one statute mile you likely would not fly. However it is a perfect opportunity to find a mentor or more experience pilot to go out with you and help you obtain more experience and reduce your minimums. If another pilot is not an option you could go out on a day the visibility is three statute miles and stay at the airport to give you a good escape option if you become uncomfortable. Either way after this flight is a good time to re-evaluate your minimums.

Re-evaluating your minimums.....

Re-evaluation should never occur prior to or during a flight. The pressures we feel to complete or take these flights can have a great effect on our decision-making abilities. By making these changes with no pressure we will

use the clearest mind and have the greatest chance for a successful outcome.

What are the right personal minimums?

This will be different for every pilot at every experience level and should not necessarily be initially dictated by regulatory or OEM minimums. A great mentor once shared that our goal should be to eventually work our minimums down to company minimums. While this mindset gives us a goal it allows us the chance to build experience at our own pace and adjust our minimums when we see fit. As we continue to build experience it is critical that we make proper adjustments to our minimums at the right times.

When deciding if the best choice is to take a flight or cancel, continue or land, our personal minimums can help us decide the best course of action in a logical and emotionless way. Using these set numbers will help pilots make the right decisions when lives are on the line and ensure the safe successful outcome of their missions.



Please take a few minutes to write down your minimums. Don't forget to continue adjusting them and most importantly fly safe!



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