

Pilot tips and tricks

How pilots can support controller trainings & exams

This bulletin discusses how you, as a pilot, can support the training of our ATCOs, mainly at the TWR and APP stages. Of course, we welcome any traffic during training – but especially the rarity of VFR traffic means that many controllers lack sufficient experience in handling VFR traffic, phraseology and procedures. Conversely, the more comfortable ATCOs are with VFR, the more likely they will staff our many beautiful GA fields - much to your benefit!

Thus, consider supporting our next generation of controllers during:

- **Trainings** - from introductions to over-the-shoulder mentoring
- A controller's **solo sessions** between mentored sessions and the exam(s)
- **Exams** and **checkouts**

VFR traffic is important because mentors can give direct feedback, while VFR during a controller's solo sessions gives them more experience and practice outside exam-like situations. That is, confidence with VFR does not solely come from experiencing complexity during mentored sessions, but also when they have to work on solutions themselves.

If you are an ATC trainee, consider learning how to fly VFR yourself. This will not only support your fellow controllers in their path, but will also help you in your own training, especially ahead of S2 training. Knowing procedures and experiencing the other side is highly beneficial. The PTD trainers are more than happy to show you the ropes - see the VFR tutorial (PTD Bulletin 08/2025).

If you would like to learn how to fly VFR, check the PTD Bulletin 08/2025 and/or contact the PTD for assistance and training options.

1. Background

The basics: VATSIM controllers require ratings and endorsements. Controllers with an S1 rating can staff GND/DEL, S2 can staff up to TWR, S3 up to APP and C1 up to CTR. To achieve these ratings, controllers must pass several lessons and exams. The S2, S3 and C1 ratings are awarded after a successful practical exam – the so-called **Controller Practical Test (CPT)**. All our rating training takes place in **LSGG**. To be allowed to staff **LSZH**, controllers need to pass separate training after achieving their S2 or S3 ratings; LSZH training concludes with a **Checkout** – a practical exam similar to a CPT, just more advanced and without being awarded a new rating.

During the rating training in LSGG, controllers are granted temporary permission so they can practice on a station for which they do not yet have the required rating. Thus, if you see an S1 on LSGG TWR or an S2 on LSGG APP, they are in their so-called *Solo Phase*, a limited time between over-the-shoulder trainings (OTS) and the CPT.

The progression explains why you see different names for trainings and exams – they indicate a trainee's experience on a station, broadly:

- Introduction/Mentoring (no experience, first 1 or 2 sessions on frequency)
- Training/OTS (some experience)
- Controller Practical Test/CPT or Checkout (exam)

You can identify an ongoing training or exam when you see several controllers logged in on the same frequency. Mentors or examiners usually have M, X, Y or Z in their callsign (e.g., LSGG_M_TWR).

2. What can you do to support our controllers?

2. A. When?

We advertise CPTs and Checkouts on the website, the forum and Discord as vACC events. In addition, we also advertise all trainings on the forum and on Discord. Trainings are announced in the **forum 2 days in advance** ("Mitflugbörse") and **on Discord on the day of the training (#traffic-ping)**. If you don't want to miss out on announcements, you can subscribe to the forum post to get notified via email. If you want to be pinged on Discord, head to **#user-roles** and react with the aircraft emote to get access to the #traffic-ping channel.

2. B. How?

Needless to say, low-traffic situations have no training effect – the goal is to give trainees adequate traffic levels and appropriately complex situations to learn from and get mentor feedback. During rating training (loosely, on any station in LSGG), trainees need to practice and master **standard procedures**:

- **GND:** correct ground movements and differences in the handling of IFR and VFR traffic.
- **TWR:** departure instructions, departure sequence with mixed traffic and between intersection/full length departures, circuit management, traffic information, handling of helicopters, CTR entries, exits and crossings.
- **APP:** TMA crossings, IFR pickups & IFR cancellations.

These procedures are what is expected of the examinee during a CPT and Checkout. If you request or perform advanced procedures that are not part of the curriculum, examiners will take positive note if examinees handle them correctly, but else will not consider them in their evaluation.

Reminder: consider flying such procedures during a controller's Solo Phase without a mentor.

3. The small print

3. A. VFR and the weather

What if the weather is too bad to fly VFR during training or an exam? The VATSIM Code of Conduct B13 requires you to fly with current winds, pressure, and temperature. It is

therefore permissible to fly on preset weather as 'CAVOK', provided (at least) the QNH and the winds are real-world. As far as we can tell, the effects of temperature are either not or not accurately simulated in all sims and/or their effects for VFR in the VATSIM-context are negligible. Thus, you can support us as VFR even if the weather is not strictly speaking VMC - advise the controller on initial contact that you are 'CAVOK' or put it in your flight plan remarks.

3. B. VFR and the flight plan

As per Code of Conduct B10, VFR pilots are not required, but encouraged, to file a flight plan. In general, filing a flight plan helps controllers as it adds to the workload if you do not file one (so we strongly recommend filing one for TMA transits). On GND and TWR, controllers are trained to create a flight plan for you and request required information if not provided by the pilot. GND and TWR controllers usually have the time, although you can expect minor delays if they are busy.

3. C. Conduct

As mentioned above, the goal is neither to stress or overwhelm a trainee. However, we do appreciate and welcome appropriate complexity and the odd curveball, both during training and during exams.

We would ask you to respect the following:

- Respect and live Vatsim's Learning Environment philosophy.
- No "showing off", no deliberate and/or malicious "confusing/stressing the trainee".
- Be proficient in VFR procedures in the CTR and, if applicable, in the TMA.
- Be patient. IFR traffic has priority (but trainees are expected to handle VFR even if busy).
- No military movements of any kind.
- As a rule, do not perform abnormal procedures, especially during a CPT. If mentors/examiners would like to see the candidate handle a particular procedure, they will contact you via DMs as they see fit, contingent on the progression of a session.
- For VFR, we highly recommend using aircraft designed for slow flight (e.g., C152/172, PA28, DA-42/-50/-62, helicopters). Avoid jets. If you fly fast-moving GA aircraft (e.g., PC-12, TBM-850), please remember that their performance will likely be beyond what a trainee is used to, so they should be avoided at least during CPTs.
- Retain situational awareness and patience and cooperate with mentors/examiners should they contact you via DM for whatever reason.

And last but not least - if you have questions or feedback, feel free to reach out to atc-td@vacc.ch.

Thank you very much & see you in the skies!