

Me and My Check Ride

By: Scott McHarg

I've told the story to several people and the odd things that happened to me on my check ride. I hope that maybe this can help someone or help the school to be more prepared. This is just meant to be a story about my experience and is not meant to reflect anything on any one particular person or the school that I was fortunate enough to learn from. I feel very blessed to have learned from Brazos Valley Flight Services. Some folks to be praised in particular are Tom F., Christian B., and John B. Again, this is only my story and my opinion from my experience with a particular DPE.....

I began flying in February of 2014 after waiting 44 years to be able to complete my lifelong dream. I eat, sleep, and live for aviation whether it be models, UAV, sUAS, or the real thing. Finally, I was able to work on getting my pilot's license.

My training went very fast. I chose the self-paced Cessna ground school training offered through the flight school and completed the whole thing online. Although this is meant to last you throughout your training, I couldn't get enough information and just kept going. I wanted to take my Knowledge Test as soon as possible and wound up finishing the class in two weeks. I was able to take that Knowledge test about 3 weeks into my training and did very well scoring a 95. I was on my way to becoming a pilot.

I finished my training within 3 months and had all of the necessary requirements to take my check ride. My flying was pretty good and I had confidence in those abilities. I was concerned about the oral portion of the check ride but was ready to start the "mock" check rides to prepare. So, we are at the end of April and I'm ready to go. Through a misunderstanding between myself and my instructor, I wound up not flying for a month. In hindsight, I really can't blame anyone other than myself. I let my instructor drive and I should have been on top of my training and set up my own schedule. In the end, this cost me an extra period of time when I could have been done.

Finally, we get my exam scheduled. My instructors and I worked really hard preparing for this. I was confident but nervous all at the same time. No matter how much you think you're prepared, you still will not know until you go through your ride. No one check ride is identical to another. Go in prepared, go in confident but know your material. The cool thing about the ride is that it's pretty much open book. Open book meaning you can look at official publications i.e. FAR/AIM, PoH, Sectional legends etc. but not necessarily notes. Take the time to "prep" in this regard. Grab sticky notes to mark important pages and sections in your books. If you do this properly, you won't have any need for notes because all of the exact same information is in your books.

The big day is finally upon us. My exam is scheduled for 12:30PM on a Thursday. I wake up, I'm ready. I feel prepared. I begin the task of getting all information together pertaining to my cross-country flight that the DPE wants me to fly. I get the weather, NOTAMS, TFR's, etc. It's 8:30AM and I plan to be at the school at 10:30 to make sure I have all last second questions answered and I'm there ready to go. At 8:39AM, I receive a call from my instructor that he just heard from the DPE. His morning

flight was a “no go” and he would be up here in 2 hours. Wait, what!?!?! My instructor says, take your time, your exam is at 12:30 but get up here as soon as you can. There’s no way I’m going to make the guy that holds my certification in his hands wait for me for two hours! When I got the call, I was pretty much done printing all of the information and I just needed to fill out my log, shower and head up to the school. I got there at 10:15 and the DPE showed up shortly thereafter. I like to think he was happy that I was there and he didn’t have to wait around for me but I’m definitely glad I didn’t have to find out!

We both sat down and introduced ourselves. My DPE was a friendly fellow with a good demeanor from what I could see in all of 5 minutes. This did help relax me a little bit and I was ready to go. Remember, the oral portion of the practical is all scenario based. You already have proven your ability for ROTE learning and now it’s time to apply that knowledge through real-world scenarios.

We dove right into it. We started with the DPE presenting the scenario of getting ready to make my cross-country flight as previously planned. He asked me what I would do to prepare for this flight and what things I would look at to do so. I answered as if this was my first time making this flight by explaining that I’d check weather, weight of the persons going for CG and max weight, the amount of fuel, and all other information pertaining to this flight. I went into showing that we could make this flight with this airplane because the airplane met all the requirements needed in the log books. That went fairly well. We discussed some weather and what we would expect on this flight and whether or not I would actually make this flight today based on all of the information at hand.

Then he asked me what the “H” was for above one of the VORs on the sectional. I explained to him that this was HIWOS and could be listened to for hazardous weather which led into the discussion of the three types of information that could be obtained i.e. Convective Sigmet, Sigmet, and Airmet. My instructor said when able, put a little cherry on top by explaining. I did, I said “Convective Sigmet involves severe weather such as thunderstorms, hail, tornados, etc while Sigmets pertained to all pilots and Airmets usually only apply to smaller GA aircraft. THAT, was a mistake. My DPE yells out “OH NO! WHY DID YOU SAY THAT?!?! YOU’VE BEEN LISTENING TOO MUCH TO THE KING SCHOOLS VIDEOS HAVEN’T YOU?”. Trying not to show the panic I felt in my chest I said, “What did I say wrong?”. The DPE told me to open my AIM to 7-1-6 and read....aloud....the exact phrasing in the book. I did. Guess what it says. Essentially Airmets apply to ALL PILOTS. Read it and you’ll see why. After my heart started beating again, he said not to worry as most people answer the exact same way. He wasn’t busting me for getting something wrong, he was making sure I understood this very important point.

The rest of the oral was pretty much as expected although, admittedly, I did refer to the Sectional legend frequently as well as my FAR/AIM and PoH to make sure I was giving the proper information. The point here is to not necessarily have everything memorized but to make sure if you don’t, you know where to go get it. Above all, make sure you know where to go find the information if you don’t know or aren’t 100% sure. Keep in mind that the DPE is not there to foul you up, he’s there to make sure you are as safe as possible and know where to find the information if you don’t know it. He isn’t there to teach you but he wants you to pass and wants you to do well in your aviation career.

Next came the flying portion of my exam. As prepared as I thought I was, nothing seemed to happen right. This is where the story gets interesting and I hope this is where you can learn from my mistakes as well as learn from my successes. My DPE told me to go prep the airplane for our flight. We

discussed the basics of what we'd be doing and the basic order in which we would do the maneuvers in. I headed out to the plane to start the preflight and he followed me out shortly thereafter.

Once I finished prepping the aircraft, we both got in and I started my normal procedure. I briefed him on safety such as making sure he could fasten and unfasten his seatbelt, how to lock the seat in place, how to open the door in case of emergency and about the flight controls as well as positive aircraft controls. He seemed to be impressed and I started the plane and prepared to taxi.

After obtaining taxi clearance, we started heading out and my DPE said that he would like me to do a Soft Field Takeoff. Now, I'm the kind of guy that repeats back what I've been instructed to do, primarily to keep me out of trouble making sure that I know exactly what either the DPE or even my instructor wants. I repeated back to him, "Soft Field Takeoff, flaps 10". He said nothing and I received my takeoff clearance. As you know, with a soft field takeoff, we pull full up elevator during taxi and continue the roll making sure to not come to a stop. I was never very good at being able to raise the nose wheel all the way off the ground and just rolling on the main gear. I was definitely keeping the weight off the nose wheel but had trouble mastering the technique of riding with the nose off the ground on the mains. Well, on my ride, I finally did it. It was amazing! The nose wheel came straight off the ground and I was on my takeoff roll just on the mains. The main gear lifted off the ground and I leveled off immediately. I couldn't have been more proud of myself. I must have been 1 or 2 feet off the ground! Then....it happened. The airplane started to settle back to the runway. I fought to stay on centerline while airborne and keep the plane from landing again. The right main touched and I mean just barely touched and I saved it. WHEW! I sped up to V_x and initiated my 50 foot climb to clear the obstacle and then lowered the nose to accelerate to V_y and then retract the flaps. My DPE looked over at me and I saw him out of the corner of my eye. Thinking he was going to praise me, I was looking forward to his words. "Scott, is that how we do a Short Field Takeoff?", I heard come blare through my headset. "No sir, you asked for a Soft Field Takeoff and I put in flaps 10. We don't use flaps in this airplane on a Short field take off and certainly don't try to stay in ground effect". "Scott, I asked you for a Short Field Takeoff and that's not what you gave me". My mouth was on the floor. I repeated his instructions prior to takeoff and I wasn't corrected. My confidence...right there on my departure leg....was no longer in existence. I asked him if he wanted me to just take him back to the airport. He said, "No, let's continue".

We navigated through my first few checkpoints. Thanks to my instructor, I knew that once I could prove that I could navigate, my DPE would give me a diversion. I was prepared! I knew, by heart, every frequency, runway, runway length, current ATIS for every airport he could possibly divert me to within 50 miles from where we were. Expected diversions from an exam out of KCLL could be Caldwell, Hearne, Navisota, Coulter and a few others. Yeah! Let's divert baby! My turn to impress you!

"Scott, there are thunderstorms ahead. I'd like you to take me to Mexia". MEXIA!! That airport was 80 miles away and almost 90 degrees from our current heading and a long ways away from anything that I expected. Leave it to my check ride to also have to use 2 sectional charts. My flight was from KCLL to KAUS. KCLL is on the Houston sectional while KAUS is on the San Antonio sectional. Well, at the time of diversion, I was on the San Antonio sectional and Mexia, of course, is on the other sectional. I know approximately where Mexia is but I wasn't at all prepared for that diversion. I turned to a NE heading, marked my time and was trying to obtain all of the information necessary. I drew my line, found I needed almost a due North heading (015), turned and began to figure distance, time and

fuel. I gave him my numbers by saying “We’re approximately 75 miles away, I expect 50 minutes with winds aloft and I expect us to burn 7 gallons”. His response was “Actually Scott, we’re 74 miles away, 47 minutes and you’ll burn 6 gallons. Very nice!”. Finally, a good thing! I was even impressed. Maybe the rest of the ride will be better.

It was then time to do my steep turns. I’ve been getting pretty good with these and definitely staying within PTS but left was much better than right. My DPE said left steep turn first then a right. I was happy because doing left first would help my confidence. I began the turn and wound up losing right at 80 feet. Still within PTS but close and this is supposed to be my better side! Right next. Oh boy! I did my right turn paying extra attention to everything because I knew this was my worse side. Nailed it! Thank goodness.

We then proceeded to do hood work and I felt as though I breezed through that. Nothing really to report. Then we did unusual attitudes which I also felt really good about. Let me just say that the unusual attitudes were significantly more “unusual” from what we’ve been practicing. The nose down attitude had to be at least 45 degrees. I recovered fine but I was not prepared for the steepness.

We went straight in to slow flight, approach stall and departure stalls, all of which went fairly well. On my departure stall, I fought to get the airplane to actually stall. When it finally came over, the left wing dipped more than anticipated. I danced on the rudder but really had to make sure I didn’t correct with ailerons. Let me say that again. Do not correct with ailerons!! They are stalled too and all input does is make it worse. I was fine and did a good job but it was extremely hard to fight that desire.

When we get back to straight and level, I’m slightly disoriented not knowing exactly where we are. After under the hood work (I didn’t have to track a VOR because I had used one in my cross-county on the first leg hoping to knock out that bird there vs. actual under the hood time), I must say you stop thinking about where you are exactly when being critically judged by a DPE. You tend to concentrate on the task at hand. Trying to get my bearings before he throws something else at me, I see a body of water and begin to figure out where I am. The DPE says “Turn to a heading of 150, maintain 2500”. I repeat it back to him and initiate the turn. As I’m coming round to 150, I see an airport ahead and I’m trying to recognize what airport that is. Nothing is coming to mind but I know he’s about to pull an emergency engine out on me.

I finish the turn and he pulls the engine. “OK Scott, your engine has failed. Get me on the ground”. Of course, I know where I’m going to land but I have no idea where I’m at. I look down and see “15” on the runway. “Oh no”, I thought to myself. I look at the approach end of Rwy 15 and see a water tower. “OH NO”, I screamed inside my head, “I’m over Caldwell!”. Now, for those that don’t know, Caldwell is not one of any student’s favorite airports. It’s usually turbulent on approach and departure, narrow, and fairly short but not scary short. The problem is, it’s difficult enough to where not many students are signed off to go “practice” there solo. Now, I’m a little nervous! I have to go through my ALERTS, make calls in the pattern since we’re at an actual airport and fly the plane. My biggest fear was winding up short of the field. In hindsight, I could have easily continued downwind a little further to bleed off altitude but this boy was not going to miss that runway period! I made my turn to base then turn to final. I was high but I was fully prepared to make that runway. Having been told a little about my DPE, I knew he didn’t like forward slips with more than 10 degrees flaps. I just happened to have 10 degrees flaps in the plane and told him I was high and would begin a slip to the runway. Everything was OK but I had a little more speed once I went back to a coordinated landing and floated

down the runway before finally settling the airplane down and coming to a stop. Nailed it! On centerline, plane, passenger and pilot safe! Yeehaw!

Wrong! My DPE was not happy with me. As we back-taxed Rwy 15, I was given the 3rd degree about how I landed so long and where was my aiming point and that there was no reason I should have landed that long. I explained to him that anything that I said is just an excuse and that my aiming point was the numbers in the slip but to get coordinated and bleed off speed, it took me more runway. He pointed out that if I had used more flaps, I wouldn't have landed so long. I told him that I agreed 100% but I was told that he didn't like forward slips with more than 10 degrees. He said, "Scott, that's crap. The PoH says you can use 20 degrees and you should have done that". Mistake number.....number....heck I've lost count.

He then asks me to do a Short Field Takeoff which I feel I did very well. He asks me to stay in the pattern and do a soft field landing. OK, I can do that. All set up with my aiming point set for the numbers, I come in to land just like if I were setting down on a baby's backside; light, smooth, and no wheel screech. I'm set up and I round out concentrating on SMOOTH. I get about to the wind sock which is not quite half field before the airplane settles and he says, "Here we go again! Why are you landing so long?" Needless to say, that broke my concentration and the landing was a little hard for a soft field landing. Not terrible but certainly not graceful and certainly long.

The point here is to prioritize. Is it important on a soft field landing to make sure you absolutely don't land long or is it important to be a smooth and soft as possible? I think the jury is still out but what should have happened is that I should have simply done a "Go Around". Turns out the DPE would have given me brownie points if I had of done so. When in doubt, Go Around! The school does a great job teaching this. Do not take it for granted. That's not to say that you should always go around if it doesn't look absolutely perfect but a go around or two during your ride is not a bad thing at all. Defending myself, there was no time during the check ride where a go around was necessitated but I could have done better if I remembered that. Believe me when I say that I will go through the rest of my aviation career under the premise that each landing is simply a set up to Go Around! If everything is looking good and all is well, then I will land.

After the soft field landing, he had me take off right away and stay in the pattern. This time, I had my flaps fail. This landing, on a runway that I was not overly familiar with, was going to be interesting. In actuality, it was probably one of my better landings. I hit my marks both on aiming and touchdown and was fine. He had me take back off and exit the pattern.

Next was my ground reference maneuvers. Hoping for "Turn Around a Point", he said "Scott start heading back towards CLL and find a road where we can do S Turns". Alright, here we go. I explained to him what I was going to do. I said that we would be heading back towards the Class D airspace but not into it where there are fields in case we have an emergency situation since we would already be low to the ground. He said that was fine and we began cruising over to the open fields. Near Caldwell, there are a lot of trees in the fields and it was definitely more comfortable to head back towards home. Again, hoping to have the proverbial cherry, I thought he would be impressed. Yet again, this was not the case.

After a few minutes he said to use the railroad tracks for my S Turns. I explained that this was not the safest place due to the surrounding fields not really being available for a place to land in case of

an emergency. He said that I could easily land on Hwy 21 if needed. Now, this is not what we are taught. Sure, you can use a road if you must but in essence, you should pick a field in order to keep others out of harm's way. Feeling his readiness to get back to the airport, I complied and did some really nice S Turns. He said very well, take me home and altitude your discretion.

I climbed to 2500 feet MSL, obtained my new ATIS which said winds variable at 5. He said he would like me to do a Short Field Landing on this final landing to a full stop. Now, keep in mind I felt like this check ride did not go well. Certainly, I'm a better pilot than I just showed to the DPE and I was resigned to the fact that I was going to fail. I did some parts really well and others, not to the best of my abilities. I actually agreed with this made up assessment in my own head and was OK with it. I knew I could fix what I thought were my short-comings and do it better next time. I guess I knew in the back of my mind that if, at any point, I failed a portion, the DPE would tell me and I had the choice to continue or stop but at that time, I didn't really consider it. I figured he'd tell me when we got on the ground.

With winds variable at 5, I was excited about my last maneuver. I had been working extremely hard on my precision landings on 16 and I knew by the ATIS we were landing on 16. Let's go so I can at least end on a positive note. Slightly to the north of Riverside campus which is 12 miles NW of the airport, I called in to the tower.

"Easterwood Tower, Cessna 8926V information India 12 miles to the NW inbound full stop", I stated.

"8926V, Easterwood Tower, are you over the annex?"

"Yes sir, just to the north for 8926V"

"8926V, make straight in Rwy 10 report 2 mile final"

GREAT! Yet another something new for me. What else could possibly go wrong?

"Tower, could I have Rwy 16 for 8926V?"

"26V, you can have 16 but winds are 100 at 10 gusting 15 now"

Convinced that I didn't want to do a short field cross wind landing for my exam, I came back with "We'll take 10 for 26V".

Now one would think that one would know his/her home airport like the back of his/her hand. One would think that one would be prepared by now for just about anything. Well, although I knew lengths and widths, I had forgotten if 10 had lights. As a student, we use reference points to figure out where we need to be altitude-wise at a given place. We are still new to this and we don't have a ton of experience to be able to judge distances perfect. I've never seen the approach end of 10 and I'M FREAKED OUT! I do not want to blow this.

Shaking my head with a smile, the DPE looks over at me and says "What's up?"

"It just stands to reason after this whole ride, I get a runway that I haven't landed on before to do a precision landing", I say.

He says, "Scott McHarg, it's a *!#@ runway so land on it!"

I make my turn to 10 and I see the VASI lights. I'm good. I can do this and it will be good. DPE says, "Land on the thousand footers". I say, "Yes Sir!"

Two miles out, I'm given landing clearance. I'm ready for this and it's going to be gorgeous. All of a sudden, the air gets real still and then, the sound....B O O M!!! A clap of thunder all but rocks the little 172 and it pours like I have never seen it pour outside of a hurricane. There's not much wind but it is so hard to see. I've flown in rain before. A nice little shower in the pattern is no big deal but this....this I'm looking around for Noah's Ark! I'm positive I held my breath for the next 2 miles but somehow I landed just past the beginning of the thousand footers and got the plane stopped by the crossing of Rwy 4/22. I did it! Somehow, by the grace of God, I'm alive and I did it! Tower calls and asks me to taxi Rwy 4 and hold short of 16. I read back the instructions and begin to taxi. The cockpit is filled with the sounds of rain bouncing off the plane. Now, I'm not a fast taxi guy. I don't piddle around but I don't come anywhere close to a fast taxi for safety if nothing else, especially in the rain. Before the next taxiway and quite a bit before Rwy 16, tower gives me permission to cross 16 to the ramp. I repeat and continue my taxi. The DPE looks over and says, "You've got to pick up the speed and get across that runway right now. You've been given clearance to cross and you should hurry because you're holding up other traffic". Yet again, I've blown it. I pick up my pace substantially and get across the runway and proceed to parking.

At parking, I shut down the airplane mentally exhausted. I knew I failed. Sitting back in the seat with the wind picking up from my tail and the rain increasingly getting stronger, the DPE says, "Well, we have a lot to talk about".

"Yes sir, I'm sure", I proclaimed.

The DPE opens the door stating he'll meet me inside after I tie down the airplane in the pouring rain. He starts to shut the door and opens it back up and says "Oh by the way, congratulations! You passed!".

I was blown away. I freakin passed! Holy wow, I did it!!

I tied down the airplane and walked back inside. The DPE and I sat down and went back over the flight. He said he understood the bad things I did and was impressed with the good things I did. We signed some documents and he was on his way. I am now officially a certificated pilot!

The reason I chose to write this all down is because I'm hoping that someone can learn a little something from my experience. Regardless, never give up even when you think it's all for nothing. That's one of the things we learn after all. Never give up, you can make a difference. When you go in to your check ride, you will hear the DPE say to treat him like he knows nothing about airplanes and he is simply your first passenger. "Don't worry about it", he'll say.

I disagree with this. The DPE holds everything in his/her hands. They hold your aviation career in their hands and critique every little move you make inside that aircraft. They will make or break you. The good news is that it's not a one shot deal. If you mess up, you get to retest and you get to do this until you succeed. With the help of Brazos Valley Flight School, you will not fail, period. These guys are some of the best.

The bad news is that, once again, we are faced with a contradiction. We, as pilots, decide to go or not to go based on "IM SAFE". The "S" is for stress and the "F" is for fatigue. During your exam, you will be faced with both of these and not in small amounts. In essence, this is a perfect example of when not to fly. I don't believe it gets any more ironic than this.

If you're anything like me, you will be worried and you will be stressed if for no other reason than wanting to do the absolute best you can do. No matter how many times you hear "don't stress about it", you still will. In hindsight, it wasn't nearly as bad as I thought it would be. What was being asked of me isn't a big deal at all. This miscommunication wasn't good but the actual maneuvers were exactly what we do every day. All I can say to the point of stress is just accept it for this ride and learn to manage it. If you learn to deal with it now, it won't be so bad on the ride. It will happen and you will succeed. Good luck to you and we are all pulling for your success. Now, I'm going to go out and enjoy the fact that I'm actually flying when I'm in the airplane because when you're learning, you aren't afforded that luxury because it's constant work. It should be this way. We should always be learning. If the day comes, even after you get your license, that you aren't learning something new about our aviation career, hobby, sport, you should probably check your six o'clock again because you've definitely missed something.

Suggestions from one student to another

- A.) Try to schedule at least 4 flights per week if you can. It never fails that 1 or 2 flights will be cancelled due to weather or maintenance or timing for you and your instructor.
- B.) Try several instructors but pick one that you feel comfortable with. This is your money and your time. Essentially, we are customers of the school and you should select the instructor that you can learn the most from.
- C.) Don't be afraid of the instructors that are a little harder. They aren't being hard on you because they like it, they're doing it to make you a better pilot.
- D.) Stay on top of your own training and know what you have to complete. When you're ready to move on, tell your instructor. Your instructor will have many students and very little time. Take the time to manage your training in conjunction with your instructor and don't leave it up to him/her to plan more.
- E.) Manage your budget for your instruction carefully. This is not a cheap venture and it will cost you quite a bit of money. The entire purpose of this is to make you a knowledgeable and, most importantly, a safe pilot. It costs what it costs but regardless of the amount of money it costs you, it's not near as expensive as the price of your life to you and your family.
- F.) Although there are only 40 hours total time required for you to take your check ride, count on more. In order to prep you for your ride, you will go through day after day of flying up to your ride to make sure that you are on top of your game. I'd suggest planning on between 55-65 hours flight time and 40-50 hours of instructor time. It is what it is so just plan on it. Very rarely do people take their check ride with the minimum required hours. There's so much to learn and you will continue learning after you finally obtain your certificate.

- G.) Don't feel you need to pick an airplane and stick with it as you're learning to fly. This does not mean you should be switching planes right before your check ride. I'm speaking of the time leading up to just meeting the minimums. I say this because each and every airplane is different. They all have similar characteristics but they are all different. Even the same models can be different but spend a little time in each airplane that you are using, even if it's in 2 different airplanes of the exact same model. Learn each aircraft individually. I found this very helpful to do and I feel that because of this, it is easier to make the transition to a different airplane even after my certification.
- H.) Always, always, always repeat the instructions given to you by ATC, your instructor and the DPE. If you didn't understand or you got confused in the instructions, just ask for them to be repeated. It will save you time and time again.
- I.) Once you have your check ride scheduled, make all the rest of your flights at the same time of day as your check ride. I made all of my flights after work up to the check ride and the air was gorgeous. My check ride was in the middle of the day and was far from smooth air. Save yourself another learning curve and fly at the same time daily.
- J.) Manage your stress! You will be under stress no matter what when it comes time for the exam. You can tell yourself over and over that it's just a ride but the stress will be there. Learn to perform with it and know that you can do this. We learn as pilots to not fly if we are stressed or fatigued. This is one time that you will fly under stress. Accept it and manage it. It will be OK.
- K.) Electronics – This one really gets me. I could rant on about this subject for hours but here's the cold hard facts. The FAA allows items such as the iPad and apps such as ForeFlight to replace paper charts in the cockpit. They are legal and you should learn to use them and make them part of your flight bag, no doubt. It is recommended to have a backup such as a 2nd iPad or smartphone or, of course, paper charts but it is not required (just so it's clear, I have a 2nd iPad as well as a smartphone and the onboard GPS as well). The DPEs rarely let you use them even though you may find the DPE using them on your check ride to keep track. You will, more than likely, not be afforded the same luxury. Make sure you know how to read, fold and even organize a paper sectional and know how to use the ancient E6B that they teach you to use. You will absolutely need this on your ride. Here's why this is so absolutely frustrating. One of the main things when learning to fly is to get on board with "See and Avoid". This is all about keeping your attention outside of the cockpit with your eyes on the skies and/or the airport environment. In my opinion, utilizing electronics helps you "See and Avoid". All of your information is available by touch screen without a percent error for human calculation and takes a lot less time than trying to figure out how the heck to fold your sectional or sectionals as you're flying or trying to divide your time between the outside and working an ancient slide rule E6B. In my opinion, the paper version and the old E6B version allow for much more human error and human error is the cause for the majority of the accidents in aviation. Having a computer do the calculations for you and having a taxi diagram with your moving airplane on it takes away so many of the potential issues that can happen at the airport and in flight, it makes no sense why we should have to concentrate on the old paper renditions. As far behind the curve as we are as new pilots already and as much as we have to multi-task, we should be using as much help from a single crew cockpit resource management perspective as allowed. This rule of not being able to use electronics is out dated and contradictory to what the FAA is trying to accomplish. End of rant.

- L. It's understood and appreciated that the instructor is typically harder to impress than a DPE who is only concerned about safety and meeting the standards. During a Soft Field Takeoff, the instructors will teach you to stay absolutely as close to the runway as possible. This is to make sure that you stay in ground effect and to keep you from stalling the aircraft. This is not a bad thing but I was actually criticized for not using the allowed "ground effect height" in my Soft Field Takeoff. My instructors had me trying to keep the plane as low as possible i.e. 1-2 feet off the runway when in reality my DPE didn't appreciate that. I should have used more of the height of the ground effect which is the same as the wingspan of the aircraft. This holds especially true when the airplane tries to settle back to the runway. In essence, try to keep it as low as possible but during your check ride, be OK with using a little more height to separate yourself from the ground while remaining in ground effect. This way, if the plane settles back down, you don't set the aircraft back down on the runway.
- M. Complete ALL checklist items and be prepared to take off prior to obtaining take off clearance. The DPE is interested in starting the takeoff as soon as clearance is given, not when you're good and ready. It's assumed that you are good and ready if you're calling for the clearance. This is taught but in my opinion, understated. Do your 3 checks to make sure you're on the correct runway prior to requesting takeoff clearance if at all possible.
- N. Get away from the bigger airports that have long and wide runways. When we as students have that much leeway at larger airports, it makes a "normal" runway of 50 feet wide by 3200 feet long look daunting. Spend the extra .2 on the Hobbs to go to different places and practice there. If we as students don't spend much time at the smaller airports, we are seriously limiting ourselves to where we can go fly. Land on every runway you are able to and do it again. Become familiar with all possible runway scenarios. At Easterwood, we use 16/34 almost all the time. Land on the others if wind permits along with ATC clearance. You will only give yourself more confidence as you progress.
- O. Fly more engine out situations all the way to the ground. Make yourself land simulated engine out more at these smaller airports and don't just look and say "OK, yeah, it looks like we'll make it and go around".