

Mike Goulian Aviation
Pro Tip of the Month - Pre-Arrival Briefings
By CFI Ryan Jordan

One of the great advantages of general aviation, and Cirrus Aircraft, is the ability to transport us from point A to point B quickly in a relatively easy, comfortable, and safe manner. Whether that point B is an “exotic beach destination,” as our friend Anthony Bottini from the Cirrus Approach team loves to say, or just your local airport, it is important to take a step back prior to reaching our destination and review our arrival at said destination. One simple way we can increase our situational awareness and be more professional in our flying is by making a habit of performing a pre-arrival briefing, very similar to our takeoff briefing. Many of us likely already do a form of this, especially instrument pilots, but even VFR pilots should incorporate this briefing into every flight.

Personally, I use and teach the “**ABBC**” briefing method for pre-arrival briefings. This method is used at numerous airline and corporate operations as well for their pre-arrival briefings. Let's go through what this is and how we can apply this to our daily flights:

A: ATIS

The first step to arriving at an airport is to get the weather. We should be as proactive as we can on getting the arrival weather, whether that is by simply listening to the ATIS broadcast as soon as it is in range or using our Cirrus's Garmin avionics capabilities to see a textual broadcast of the current METAR report. This can help us determine runways in use and anticipate the instrument or visual approaches that will be in use.

B: Build

Next, we want to “build” an approach into our avionics if we will be flying an instrument approach, using transitions and minimums that have been corrected for any NOTAMs regarding that procedure. If we are flying a visual approach (looking at you VFR pilots), we can still at this point load a visual approach for the runway we are expecting to use into our Garmin Perspective+ avionics or bug the runway heading in to increase our situational awareness as we get close to our destination airport.

B: Brief

For instrument pilots, briefing our approach plate as normal will occur here, ensuring that we include applicable frequencies, type of approach, transitions, NOTAMs, and minimums. Essentially at this point, we are checking our work on the previous step and further building our situational awareness. VFR pilots can here brief how they will enter the traffic pattern. Both VFR and IFR pilots should take a moment to look at the taxi diagram for the airport and become familiar with their anticipated taxi route from the runway to parking. Be sure to include runways needed to be crossed and airport hotspots while reviewing the diagram.

C: Checklists/Communicate

Finally, we will complete our descent/before landing checklists here as necessary. If the airport is in sight and we have been approved to transition to a local frequency or tower frequency, we can swap and communicate to the intended airport, or make our initial call to the tower.

Another popular acronym used in the industry is the “NATS” briefing acronym. I'll briefly list that below:

N: NOTAMS and Wx

A: Approach and Airport Briefing

T: Terrain (Minimum Safe Altitude or MSA)

S: Speeds or Specials (Specials such as particular procedures for that approach, such as maybe anything abnormal with the aircraft or airport procedures)

Ultimately determining a method to perform a pre-arrival briefing is up to you as the PIC, however attributing an acronym or another method to performing one may assist you in ensuring that you effectively complete one on each flight. Cirrus Aircraft are beautifully equipped and capable of assisting both VFR and IFR pilots in guiding us through this process every time we approach that destination. Taking just a minute or two on each flight to think about our arrival will allow us to remain safe and ahead of the aircraft in this last critical phase of flight.