



Setting Your Personal Minimums

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Years of aviators that came before us continued to innovate, create, and reach higher in pursuit of safer flying. They had both great success, and great failure. Often those failures had contributing circumstances like mechanical issues, severe weather, or from inadequate risk management. Today we have readily available tools that help us manage our risk.

While federal aviation regulations provide the legal framework for flight, they don't offer explicit instructions for everyday aeronautical decision-making; that's where personal minimums come in. Personal Minimums are your decision-making tool to set objective limits on when to fly, and, importantly, when **not** to fly, based on **your** capabilities. Here are the four components of personal minimums:

Weather Conditions: Weather consists of many components like wind, cloud layers, precipitation, visibility, temperature, etc. Additionally, pilots should consider the time of day when setting personal limits on weather. For example, flying an approach on a cloudy day may be considerably different than flying an approach at night. Consider your recent experience (ie. within 6 months) when setting limits on weather related factors. Here's an example for a pilot that has not flown many approaches in IMC over the past several months: Set a personal minimum that states they will not attempt an approach in IMC unless the cloud bases are 500 feet above minimums. A clear limit like this will guide the pilot during pre-flight planning to choose a favorable airport and/or alternate.

Aircraft Capabilities: When setting personal minimums for how you will use your airplane, you must consider the aircraft's actual performance. These considerations include fuel consumption and range, performance calculations, equipment onboard - such as anti/de-

icing systems, and crosswind limitations. In addition to your airplane being capable of safely conducting the flight, you must also consider your capability in operating the aircraft and its avionics systems. A well-equipped aircraft is only as good as the pilot operating it. When setting your personal minimums consider your experience with aircraft's performance and avionics.

Pilot Proficiency: The key to understanding pilot proficiency is to consider how much actual and recent practice you have had in the flight conditions expected for an upcoming flight. To assist in this assessment, pilots should review their logbook and/or consult with a CFI - both offer an objective look at recent experience and flight conditions. As pilot proficiency changes, so might your personal minimums. Pilots should never modify personal minimums prior to a proposed flight. They should only be changed following a thorough assessment of recent experience. It's also recommended that pilots consult a CFI when modifying personal minimums.

External Pressures: We all experience external pressures in life, for example, my friend will be upset if I'm late to his birthday party, or I just want to get home despite the fact I'm exhausted and really should sleep. The pressures are commonly referred to in aviation as "get-there-itis" and they should be considered a dangerous distraction that can negatively influence a pilot's decision making. Pilots should set personal minimums that limit their exposure to "get-there-itis". These limits could include not flying the day that you are required to be at a particular commitment. Your personal minimum may be stated as "I will only fly to a commitment if the flight can be completed at least 24 hours prior to the commitment." External pressure can be insidious and emotional, setting a bold line on what you will and won't do can help to manage expectations and reduce risk.

Establish Your Personal Minimums Today

At Mike Goulian Aviation, we require all our CFIs and clients to set and commit to personal minimums as part of renting our airplanes. At each recurrent training event, CFIs and client work together to set personal minimums. Using them to guide your decision making is a powerful pre-flight tool. To learn more about the process of setting personal minimums, check out AOPA's Personal Minimums template linked below or contact your MGAV CFI. As pilots we should aim to constantly improve not only our stick and rudder skills but our risk management and decision-making ability. Tools like Personal Minimums are a great place to start. Get your Personal Minimums Template here:

<https://mikegoulianaviation.com/personal-minimums/>