ORGANIZE YOUR APPROACH BRIEF

There are many ways to mentally prepare for an instrument approach. Find a method and stick to it. Here's one that might work for you: WRIMTM.

by Fred Simonds

Imagine that you are flying IFR into a busy international airport. The Center controller is swamped and hands you off late to Approach, who asks you to keep your speed up to the marker. You're being vectored onto a tight final in between regional jets and quickly find yourself behind the airplane.

You scramble to catch up, but what might you have missed? Is everything you set correct? Now you're in the murk and your palms are sweating. How did this happen?

To avoid being caught unprepared for an approach, I use a checklist called WRIMTM (pronounced "rim-tim"): Weather, Radios, Instruments, Minimums, Time and Missed approach. WRIMTM helps me set everything properly and efficiently. With my mind at ease, I can fly the approach feeling relaxed and confident.

The Wreason for WRIMTM

I am always astonished when I inherit an instrument student and discover that he or she has not been taught an organized way to do all the things needed to safely execute an approach. The student's hands and eyes are all over the place, and this lack of organization constitutes an invitation to disaster.

The intricacies of an approach cry out for a checklist, but an Internet search revealed no general-purpose instrument approach checklist. WRIMTM is a gem I learned some time ago from a very talented instructor and now designated examiner named Glenn Endsley of Englewood, Colorado.

"I'm 70 years old now. I don't know, I guess I made this up," Endsley told *IFRR*. "It gives the kids something to work with."

W: Weather

The first thing you need to do is obtain the current weather at the destination, because the wind will likely dictate which approach you will set up. If the destination is reporting 200 and a half, you will be looking for an ILS, not a VOR approach. If there is only one approach at the airport, you may have to circle.

Set the AWOS/ASOS/ATIS in COM 2. This way you can hear it as often as you like if conditions are changing rapidly or if it's near 52 minutes after the hour when towers routinely update their ATIS broadcasts. Be sure to keep the volume down so you can hear ATC on COM 1.

R: Radios

In a conventional (non-glass) radio stack, the setup flows from the very top of the stack to the bottom, what I call "stack order." Start with the marker beacon and audio panel and work down to COM 1, NAV 1, COM 2 and NAV 2 and so on down the stack.

The benefits of stack order are twofold. First, in so doing you will utilize every electronic asset you have, maximizing safety.

Second (and not so obvious) is the fact that loading frequencies in systematic order is much safer than cherry-picking numbers from the approach plate and dialing them in somewhere.

One of the virtues of stack order is that with use you will eventually label in your mind each frequency window. Then you will always know where to look for the frequency you are talking on, because it's always active in COM 1. This makes it mostly unnecessary to switch between COM 1 and 2.

For the same reason, if you always try to navigate on NAV 1 and use NAV 2 to identify intersecting radials and fly transitions, you will always know where to look for course guidance and intersections, respectively.

The sample approach plate on the opposite page will help you standardize your radio use. It's based on putting the same stuff in the same place all the time. Potomac Approach goes in COM 1 active, followed by Baltimore Tower in COM 1 standby.

Weather goes in COM 2 active and then is swapped with ground after landing. NAV 1 is set to the localizer in the active window with BAL in the standby window in case of a missed approach. NAV 2 can be used to back up NAV 1 for both the localizer (but not likely the glideslope if you lack dual glideslopes) and the BAL R-045 as well.

You can practice setting up radios with this guide and a set of approach plates, or on MS or any other flight simulator. Practice makes perfect!

I: Instruments

My instrument check begins at the top left of the six-pack round dial panel or PFD and flows to the right, which is very natural since this is the way we read. A complete instrument check should take about 10-15 seconds. What you get is the comfort of knowing they are telling you the truth.

M: Minimums

Select the minimums for the approach you are flying. Common mistakes include intending to circle, but selecting straight-in minimums; performing a localizer approach but choosing ILS minimums; and not selecting the correct GPS minimums.

Be sure to set your altitude alerter or altitude bug if you have one.

T: Time

Be sure your stopwatch is reset and ready to go. What's my time on this approach? I always start my watch at the final approach fix, whether the approach is timed or not. This way it's part of my habit pattern and nearly impossible to forget.

M: Missed Approach

Where is the missed approach point? Have just the first step or two in mind, and remember it always starts with a climb. You probably can't remember it all and it's safer not to rely on memory, anyway.

Cleared To Land

Now your approach checklist is complete. I often roll right into the prelanding checklist because you want all the housekeeping done before the company arrives.

Those of you flying complex airplanes may elect to complete the prelanding checklist outside the final approach fix. Fixed-gear drivers can do it sooner and this is one way of reducing approach workload.

Make altitude callouts as you think best. I make three: at 500 and 100 feet above minimums, and then at minimums.

Now you're on short final, primed and ready to land an airplane. With a thorough approach briefing completed and a stabilized approach established, you can feel confident that a smooth touchdown will follow.

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Briefing With WRIMTM

Let's brief the following approach, the ILS Runway 33R into Baltimore, Maryland, using the WRIMTM method. *NOTE: Procedure graphic not for navigation. Be sure to check NOTAMs prior to every flight for changes to instrument approach procedures.*