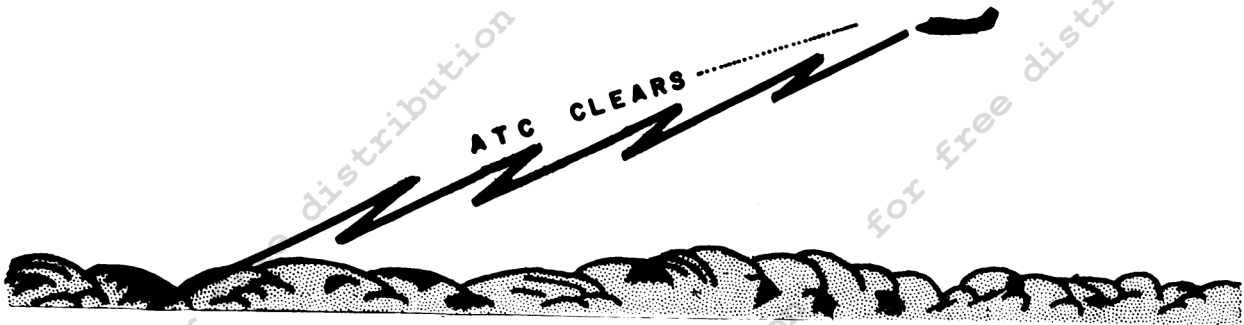


Department of Transportation  
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION  
IFR PILOT EXAM-O-GRAM\* NO. 6

VFR OPERATIONS on an INSTRUMENT FLIGHT PLAN



Analyses of answers to Instrument Pilot Written Examinations indicate that many applicants do not understand certain aspects of VFR and "VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP" operations while on IFR clearances. Applicants for the Instrument Rating should be able to answer the following questions relating to these operations. Answers and explanations follow.

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1. Why request a "VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP" clearance?
2. When would a pilot request a clearance to "VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP"?
3. What restrictions apply to the pilot's choice of altitude while operating on an IFR clearance with provision to "MAINTAIN VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP"?
4. When can a "VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP" request be approved by ATC?
5. What separation from other aircraft is provided to a "VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP" flight?
6. What is the recommended position reporting procedure for "VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP" operation?
7. A pilot is flying on an IFR clearance, with an altitude assignment of "VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP". He anticipates that he will be unable to maintain flight in VFR conditions because of reduced visibility or increasing height of the tops. What should he do?
8. When may a pilot deviate from his route of flight while operating IFR with a "VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP" clearance?
9. Why would a pilot request a VFR climb or descent while on an IFR flight?
10. What are the procedures for radio communications failure during a "VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP" operation?

\*Exam-O-Grams are non-directive in nature and are issued solely as an information service to individuals interested in Airman Written Examinations.

**EXPLANATIONS (numbers correspond to questions):**

1. In preparation for IFR flight above an overcast, or in an area of generally unlimited ceilings and visibility, pilots may request "VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP" to permit them to select an altitude, or altitudes of their choice, rather than specific ATC assigned altitudes. If during flight "in the clear" at a specific assigned altitude, turbulence or unfavorable ground speeds are encountered, or if icing in clouds ahead is expected, a "VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP" clearance may allow the pilot a greater choice of operating altitudes.
2. Departing instrument-rated pilots who wish an IFR clearance only to climb through a layer of overcast or reduced visibility, and then continue flight VFR, may request ATC clearance "TO VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP". - This request may be made through a Flight Service Station, by telephone to ATC, or by request to the Tower before taxiing out. The clearance, which authorizes IFR flight through the cloud layer, will contain a near-by clearance limit, routing, and a request to report reaching "VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP". When the pilot reaches "VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP" and desires to cancel the IFR portion of his flight, he should so state. This type of operation can be combined with a VFR Flight Plan to destination.
3. The pilot may fly at an altitude of his choice, provided the altitude is
  - a. at or above the MEA, or MOCA if appropriate, and
  - b. at least 1000 feet above the existing meteorological condition (cloud layer, smog, haze, etc.) if any, and
  - c. at an altitude appropriate for the direction of flight (odd or even thousand, plus 500 feet) if operating at 3000 feet or more above the surface.

Pilots should be especially alert for head-on traffic when climbing or descending on the airway centerline.

4. "VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP" may be approved by ATC when specifically requested by the pilot in flight provided pilot reports have not indicated that conditions are unsuitable.

## 4. (continued)

"VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP" may be approved by ATC when specifically requested by the pilot prior to departure, provided

- a. pilot reports have not indicated that conditions are unsuitable, and
- b. the pilot is advised of the height of the tops, or that height of tops is unreported, and
- c. if height of the tops is unreported, alternate altitude provisions are included in the clearance.

**EXCEPTIONS:**

ATC will not approve "VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP" operations

- a. to provide separation between aircraft holding at night, or
- b. to aircraft operating in Positive Controlled Airspace.

5. No separation is provided. However, the pilot may expect to receive traffic information on known IFR traffic. Any time a pilot is flying "in the clear", whether at a specific assigned altitude or at an altitude assignment of "VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP", collision avoidance is the pilot's responsibility.

6. Regardless of the altitude being flown, pilots on IFR Flight Plans report those fixes designated as compulsory reporting points for all altitudes, and additional position reports as requested by ATC. A pilot operating on an IFR Flight Plan with an altitude assignment of "VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP" would report in the following manner:

SKYTWIN FOUR ONE ALPHA OVER OKLAHOMA CITY ONE EIGHT, VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP AT EIGHT THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED, ESTIMATING SAYRE FOUR EIGHT, AMARILLO.

If position reports are made to a Flight Service Station for relay to the controlling facility (center or approach control), pilots should state that the flight is on an Instrument Flight Plan.

7. Pilots flying with a VFR restriction must not enter IFR weather conditions. In such situations, pilots must request a specific altitude assignment and maintain flight in VFR conditions until an appropriate amended clearance is obtained.

8. Remember that when flying on an IFR clearance with a VFR restriction, a pilot must comply with Instrument Flight Rules plus applicable Visual Flight Rules. A pilot operating "VFR CONDITIONS ON TOP" is expected to remain on the centerline of airways or routes described by his ATC clearance unless
  - a. otherwise authorized by ATC, or
  - b. maneuvering as necessary to clear the intended flight path, or
  - c. the pilot exercises emergency authority.
9. If, at the start of an IFR flight, a pilot wishes to climb in VFR conditions, or if, while flying at a specific assigned altitude, he wishes to climb or descend in VFR conditions, he may request to do so (except in Positive Controlled Airspace). Sometimes such a procedure is considered a practical method of avoiding delay due to other traffic.
10. The procedures are the same as for operation at a specific assigned altitude. Pilot action in compliance with regulations is determined by existing weather conditions (VFR or IFR), as outlined in the Airman's Information Manual.

References:

Airman's Information Manual, "Air Traffic Control Procedures."  
FAR 91 (Vol. VI.)

FAA Aeronautical Center  
Flight Standards Technical Division  
Operations Branch  
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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73125  
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