

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
Federal Aviation Administration
IFR PILOT EXAM-O-GRAM* NO. 38

LOST COMMUNICATIONS PROCEDURES -- APPROACH REQUIREMENTS

This is the third and final in a series of IFR Exam-O-Grams pertaining to operations in an IFR environment with complete two-way communications failure. IFR Exam-O-Gram No. 36 deals with altitude requirements; No. 37 with route requirements. Responses received on the Instrument Rating (Airplane) Written Test indicate that many applicants do not know the correct procedures to follow in conjunction with descent and execution of an instrument approach when complete two-way communications failure occurs. This Exam-O-Gram will attempt to clarify the most commonly misunderstood procedures.

There are three situations that could exist when you reach your destination. Let's take an example of each. Example #1: You arrive at a designated approach fix and have NOT received an approach clearance or holding instructions. The time you should begin descent for the approach in this case is the flight planned ETA (as amended with ATC). Should you arrive ahead of the ETA, hold at the radio fix used for the approach in the holding pattern depicted on the approach chart. If no holding pattern is depicted, hold on the side of the final approach course on which the procedure turn is prescribed. If you should arrive after the ETA, descend for the approach immediately upon reaching the fix.

The next two situations involve holding instructions. If ATC issues holding instructions at your destination, they will include an Expect Approach Clearance (EAC), or Expect Further Clearance (EFC) time. Let's review these items. The EAC is "...the time at which it is expected that an arriving aircraft will be cleared to begin approach for landing." The EFC is "...the time at which it is expected that additional clearance will be issued to an aircraft." An EFC is not issued for an approach fix; only for fixes which are not considered part of the approach procedure in use, such as an outer limit or enroute navigational fix.

Example #2: If you are cleared to a holding fix with an EFC time (and experience two-way communications failure prior to reaching the fix), proceed to the fix and hold until the EFC time. At the EFC time, depart the holding fix and proceed to the fix from which the approach begins, then follow the procedure described in Example #1. A holding fix may or may not be the same as the approach fix, depending upon the type of approach used.

Example #3: If you receive an EAC, and the holding fix and the fix from which the approach begins are the same, begin descent for the approach at the EAC time. If the holding fix is NOT the same as the fix from which the approach begins, leave the holding fix to arrive over the fix from which the approach begins at, or as close as possible to, the EAC time received. Begin descent upon arrival at this fix where the approach begins, but not before the EAC time. The same would be true if due to navigation equipment failure you must execute another approach procedure.

Remember, it is pilot's discretion as to the type of approach that is to be made. The airspace will be cleared of other known IFR traffic for a period of 30 minutes. The simplified diagram may help you to understand when and where you should begin descent for an approach in the event of complete two-way communications failure.

SITUATION	LEAVE HOLDING	DESCENT FOR THE APPROACH	
		WHEN	WHERE
1- No holding instructions received	-----	Not before ETA	At approach fix
2- Holding with an EFC	At the EFC time	Same as above	Same as above
3- Holding with an EAC (Holding fix is not the same as approach fix)	To arrive at the approach fix at the EAC time	Not before EAC	Same as above
4- Holding with an EAC (Holding fix is the same as the approach fix)	At the EAC time	Same as above	Same as above

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Your preflight actions should include a thorough check of pertinent NOTAMS and a review of the approach procedure(s) for the destination airport. The decision as to the type of instrument approach you plan to make at your destination should be based on the type of equipment installed in the airplane, weather conditions, and the operational status of the components and visual aids for the approach considered (NOTAM information). This item of the preflight planning should be as thorough as for the enroute portion of the proposed flight. Arrival at the approach fix is NOT the time to locate the procedures charts and try to figure out how the approach is to be flown! The preflight portion of your flight, therefore, should receive a dedicated effort.

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As a summation of the two-way communications failure procedures we have discussed in these three Exam-O-Grams, this simplified chart may be helpful.

ROUTE:
A-Last ATC clearance received; or
B-EFC routing received; or
C-Flight planned route
ALTITUDE/FLIGHT LEVEL: (Observe the highest of)
A-ATC assigned; or
B-Minimum IFR altitude/flight level; or
C-EFC altitude/flight level
LEAVE HOLDING FIX: (Instructions received)
A-At EFC (if received); or
B-To make EAC (if received)
DESCENT FOR APPROACH: (When reaching approach fix)
A-At EAC time; or
B-At ETA time (no EAC received); or
C-Immediately (no EAC and ETA is past)

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