

Aviation English Language Proficiency

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This presentation focuses on how to meet the ICAO Aviation English language requirements which came into effect in March 2008. States have until 2011 to be fully compliant providing they have informed ICAO of their implementation plans to meet these requirements.

To begin with I would like to explain who emery-roberts are and our connection with Macmillan. I will then go on to discuss The ICAO Aviation English Language requirements and then look more closely at training and testing in Aviation English. Finally I will consider the role of the course book 'Aviation English' and how to reach and maintain 'Operational' level 4 as described by the ICAO Language Profile Requirements.

emery-roberts www.emery-roberts.co.uk provide professional consultancy and English language training and testing services to aviation regulators, airlines, ANSPs and training organizations working towards the implementation of the ICAO language proficiency requirements.

Our services are delivered worldwide and in the UK in partnership with one of the worlds leading flight training organisations, Oxford Aviation Academy.

www.oxfordaviation.net

Our services include:

A Benchmarking Test

A Proficiency Test

Aviation English Teacher Training

Aviation English Rater Training

Plain English & RT Phraseology for Professional Pilots & Air Traffic Controllers

Pre-Sessional English language training for Trainee Pilots, Air Traffic Controllers, Cabin Crew & Engineers

THE MACMILLAN GROUP

With operations in over 50 countries, Macmillan Education is a global publisher with a local focus.

Over the last 150 years, the organization has forged a reputation of excellence through innovation by publishing market-leading English language, curriculum and digital educational materials for learners from Europe, Africa and East Asia, to the Middle East, Latin America, the Caribbean and Australia.

Macmillan Education is one of the leading publishers of English Language Teaching (ELT) materials for teachers and students of English as a foreign or second language. Macmillan also leads the way in publishing school curriculum in many parts of the world.

Macmillan Education's international list is designed for learners who share common educational objectives, while country-specific publishing caters for local cultural, educational and professional needs.

As part of its commitment to providing the finest and most effective learning resources in new media, Macmillan Education also produces digital and online materials to accompany its publications. Interactive Whiteboard software, DVDs and CD-ROMs and online content add rich, new dimensions to preparation and study, while onestopenglish.com, a community site for ELT teachers, is a leader in its field.

Andy Roberts and Henry Emery had been delivering courses for pilots and traffic Controllers for many years but were frustrated by the lack of quality training materials available for pilots and controllers who wished to reach level 4 and beyond and consequently became authors for Macmillan to produce the worlds first course book for Pilots and Controllers to learn and practice the English language skills necessary to be compliant with the new ICAO requirements. But before looking in more detail at the content and thinking behind 'Aviation English' It is necessary to clarify what skills are necessary to reach and maintain level 4.

Aviation English is a specialized form of Language that can be broken down into many parts which include Phraseology, Technical, and Communicative English. Phraseology and the technical English needed to fly and direct aircraft are often included in flight training. What is not included is the plain English needed to communicate in flight operations when phraseology is not enough. This is particularly relevant in non-routine or emergency situations. It is this area that ICAO have recently focused on.

ICAO have produced a set of holistic descriptors which outline the plain English requirements as follow

Proficient speakers shall:

- a. communicate effectively in voice-only (telephone/radiotelephone) and in face-to-face situations;
- b. communicate on common, concrete and work-related topics with accuracy and clarity;

- c. use appropriate communicative strategies to exchange messages and to recognize and resolve misunderstandings (e.g. to check, confirm, or clarify information) in a general or work-related context;
- d. handle successfully and with relative ease the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine work situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar; and
- e. use a dialect or accent which is intelligible to the aeronautical community.

These aims require a radical shift from traditional English language teaching. To begin with, since they are intended for flight communications they are restricted to Speaking and Listening. The emphasis is on communication and mutual intelligibility. It is not necessary to be perfect English speakers in order to communicate, therefore perfection is not the goal, but rather to understand and be understood

Language competence is divided into six profiles

Pronunciation

Structure

Vocabulary

Fluency

Comprehension

Interaction

Candidates are assessed according to the language profile descriptors on a scale of 1 to 6. The lowest score in any profile is taken as the ICAO score. Level four is the lowest acceptable level for licensing. Some extracts from the descriptors of level four provide evidence of what is needed

Pronunciation

Although influenced by first language only sometimes interferes with understanding

Structure

Errors may occur but rarely interfere with meaning

Vocabulary

Usually sufficient to communicate successfully

Fluency

There may be occasional loss of fluency but this does not prevent effective communication

Comprehension

Comprehension is mostly accurate but may require clarification strategies

Interactions

Responses are usually immediate, appropriate and informative

There are several unique points to the assessment criteria. The addition of an 'Interactions' profile being the most prominent. This is of course eminently sensible given that pilots and controllers are using the language in an active sense. Knowledge is not enough they must be able to use their language in practical terms

So the challenge in developing materials that would cater for these quite specific needs was to create something that would not only build up the language skills needed, but also teach and practice the communicative strategies (the language tools to enable understanding and communication without having total command of the language). This is what Aviation English allows its users to do

Now you may well read/hear claims that a company is offering you the total package for aviation English language training. Buy the one product and you will never need anything else. I could make that claim for 'Aviation English'. After all it has a students book, an accompanying CD ROM with animations and Interactive exercises, a pronunciation CD with all the words from the Macmillan Dictionary plus aviation terms; a teachers book and an accompanying website that is updated on a monthly basis with additional activities. However, I have spent many hours in the classroom as a trainer and I know that sometimes a variety of materials can be helpful. So is it possible to use Aviation English on its own? Yes. Is it possible to use it as part of a training package? Absolutely. Aviation English provides an incredibly cost effective solution to the language needs of pilots and controllers. (Because Macmillan use local publishers the costs are kept to a minimum)

You may also hear claims that course-books are old style education and on-line learning is the way ahead. On line learning has many positives it can be easily accessible and fit into the non-routine study time available to pilots and controllers. It's why we have included self study materials in both the book, on the CD ROM and on the website.

BUT. As a teacher and as a student, to have a book that can be held and used as a basis for genuine interaction whether in pair or group work cannot be beaten.

Working alone can provide a good foundation. But the ICAO requirements demand communication and interaction. It is essential that learnt skills are practiced by communicating and interacting.

Once an Aviation English language student has reached his or her goal. The next challenge if not to extend further, is to maintain this level. This is difficult as the language that it is necessary to know may only be used in non-routine situations. By their very nature these do not happen often. Yet unless this language is practiced on a regular basis the language skills and knowledge will atrophy and fade. 'Aviation English' is organized into 12 units each with four sections connected to a non-routine situation so that language can be practiced and kept alive

Finally you have received one of the authors views of 'Aviation English' and so here are some quotes from people who are in a much better position to judge the quality of the book. The users. Since its publication in April this year 'Aviation English has sold over 20,000 copies in 57 countries.

Here are just a few of the many comments:

'I think that it will be very useful for Aviation Teachers around the world because it fits exactly what is needed to help pilots and ATCOs to reach and maintain language proficiency at Operational Level 4, according to ICAO language proficiency requirements.'

William Aranda, ICAO Language Proficiency Expert, Peru

'I'd like to mention that in my opinion you made a brilliant choice of aviation topics. Tasks set and pair work exercises help to train main skills in comprehension and interaction which are very necessary for passing the test successfully.'

Helen Gamayunova, Ukraine State Aviation Administration'

As a former NY based Jet Captain I know first hand the underlying need finally being addressed by ICAO's Language Proficiency Requirements

'The Aviation English package; Student's and CD-ROMS, Teachers Book, CDs and supporting web site, provides the all-inclusive solution that I needed to bring my students up to speed. While technically accurate, particularly on phraseology, the plain-English skills training demanded by today's exploding air travel industry is where the materials really shine. I could go on, but I will simply say this: I highly recommend Macmillan's Aviation English Resource package to anyone interested in proficiency in Aviation English.'

Thomas Simon

Aviation English Instructor
and Language Consultant
Gdansk, Poland

'Even in the hands of minimally qualified language instructors, this well-conceived English training product can play a central role in an English for Aviation program that is targeting L 4'

Graham Elliot, FAA, written for the International Journal of Applied Aviation Studies

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