

On Supervised and Supervising Pilots

Being a Supervised Pilot is possibly the most challenging phase of a pilot's development. Similarly, supervising a Supervised Pilot carries a high degree of responsibility. Let's dig into the issues and have a look from both perspectives. Note that for the moment we are talking about hang gliding and paragliding operations; the powered variants and weight-shift microlights qualifications do not have these requirements.

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The Supervised Pilot

You are fresh out of school, bursting with enthusiasm and wanting to get right into it. But you must fly under direct supervision. Who does this apply to and what does it mean?

Paraglider and hang glider pilots who have completed their ab initio training (i.e., hold a PG2 or HG-Supervised qualification) are subject to the requirements of supervision. These requirements are listed in the Operations Manual (V20200323), under Section 5.3.1.2 for hang glider pilots and Section 5.3.3.2 for paraglider pilots. Essentially, you must fly under the supervision of an instructor, safety officer or duty pilot, at sites suitable for supervised pilots, fly a red streamer from your aircraft, and log your flights in a Supervised Pilot log book. These are the key requirements; you should familiarise yourself with all of the requirements listed as there are more.

How long does this phase last for? This is different for both disciplines. For hang glider pilots you need to log 25 hours on at least 25 separate days before you are eligible to step up to HG-Intermediate.

Paraglider pilots must make a minimum of 60 successful flights and a total of 15 flying hours, with flights from five different sites of which three are inland, and a minimum of three soaring flights and two hours of thermic flight. For sign-off to PG3,

your logbook must be inspected by an instructor and you must do a check flight.

This does not mean that you will be automatically signed off.

You need to satisfy the person doing the sign-off that you are ready, both in terms of skill/knowledge and attitude.

This stage of your development can be very frustrating. You definitely need a number of stars to align to progress – you need to be free when the weather indicates a site will be on and a supervising pilot will be available. There is no magic switch we can flick to make that happen. Again, our sport is one where patience is required, and it is at this stage where impatience can do great harm.

It's also important to recognise an important fact – you do not yet know how to fly. I think a lot of people come away from their training believing that they do. What has happened is that you have been given a basic amount of instruction – practical and theory – and certified as competent by your instructors to enable you to go out and LEARN how to fly. Using a motor vehicle analogy, you're on your junior P-plates. We are all constantly learning about this aviation thing we do; anybody who tells you they know it all should be treated with a high degree of scepticism.

Towards the end of your course, your instructors would have pointed you in the direction of your local club or State association and urged you to make contact. It is really important that you do. Clubs are the folk that manage sites and have the safety

officers you will need to work with as you progress. They will take you under their wing and assist you in your progression. Within the clubs are the people who can be trusted to supervise you and provide sound advice. It is really difficult to gauge who to trust if you just turn up to a site unannounced. Your safety is paramount, and you need to have trust in the people advising you.

So, the first thing I would normally suggest you do, before even contemplating heading to a launch is get in touch with a local club, go to a meeting or social event and meet the people. In this current environment, with Covid-19 closing down all of our gatherings, and in some cases (at the time of writing) our flying options, you will have to suffice with social media and remote communication methods. Regardless, you'll be made more than welcome. If you have doubts about someone supervising you, ask a safety officer in your club, or ask your instructor. Satisfy yourself first and make sure all your concerns are addressed.

Always remember that your instructor is there for you. If you are thinking of buying gear, ask the folk in the club and back that up by asking your instructor what they think. There are some pretty unscrupulous people out there that will sell anything to anyone who doesn't know better. You could be forking out a mint for a ragged-out dish towel or poorly maintained airframe, or gear that is way above your grade. Your first wing purchase is critical – don't jump at the first thing on offer without consulting those who know. Don't jump too soon to trade-up either. A good guide is to get 50 hours



Photo: Cookie

on a wing in a variety of conditions before you even begin to think about your next wing.

When you do arrive at a site for a day of flying, make sure you know who your supervisor is, who the other people are and that they know you. Don't be shy. It's always good to remember they started off same as you once, they've been where you are, they've been just as nervous, had the same questions and wanted the same answers and support.

You should get a site briefing as a matter of course the first time you go to a new site, and even on subsequent visits to the same site – different conditions on different days may introduce different hazards at that site. Make sure you get one. Ask who the SSO/SO/Duty Pilot is and ask for a briefing if you have not already received one. **DO NOT LAUNCH** until you are given one. Each site has its own peculiarities and you need to be aware of the dangers. If the folks say it's not suitable for you, don't take it personally – they're looking out for you. Ask why, listen, sit back, watch what is going on and learn from the experience. It may come on later, or it may just be a day on the hill observing, hanging out, talking flying and learning.

Being signed off to your next qualification means that you have been judged competent to evaluate flight conditions for yourself. With it comes a reduced set of restrictions. Consult the Operations Manual and make sure you are aware of what they are, and what the privileges associated with your new rating are.

Remember, being able to fly IS a privilege, NOT a right.

Supervising Pilots

At some point, you may be asked to supervise a pilot. This is a task with great responsibility. You will be using your knowledge of a site and the conditions to decide whether a supervised pilot should fly or not, and if so, make sure they have a successful flight and sign off the flight in their Supervised Pilot logbook. To help you, cast your mind back to when you were starting out. Have you forgotten what you didn't know at the stage these new pilots are? Put yourself in their boots and think of the questions and concerns they might have. Empathy and understanding are great prerequisites to effective supervision.

Who can supervise? Instructors, safety officers and duty pilots can supervise. The full description of the Duty Pilot role is covered in Section 2.1.3 of the Operations Manual. Of significance is that HG-Intermediate or PG4 pilots can be duty pilots provided they have 50 hours airtime on the aircraft type at a site they have flown previously, or 80

hours airtime on the aircraft type at a previously un-flown site.

A common concern I hear from instructors concerns the incidence of pilots who have rapidly worked their way up the ratings, but who have not fully developed their flying 'common sense' or are clear cases of Intermediate Syndrome (i.e., the mistaken belief that you know it all, you're indestructible and IT won't happen to you), being in a position to supervise pilots. Just because somebody meets the requirements does not necessarily mean that they should be supervising someone. This is something that we in the Safety and Training Committee will no doubt be discussing as we get firmly underway. At present, I believe the clubs should take the lead in monitoring who is stepping into the role on any given day and make sound decisions in the appointment of the Duty Pilot.

Let's assume you've been asked to fill that role for a site for the day. There are a number of things that you ought to check before letting a pilot under your supervision commit to launch:

- SAFA Membership – are they a current member of SAFA, holding an appropriate qualification? Ask to see their member card if their helmet sticker is not evident or you cannot verify their membership via the SAFA app. If you cannot verify this, then they should not be allowed to fly.
- Gear – does their gear look well maintained? Is the wing appropriate for their level of experience and qualification? If you have doubts or concerns, then you should advise them not to fly and explain why.
- Radio – are they carrying a VHF radio or a UHF radio that can be set to the configuration you and other local pilots are using? If not, is there a spare unit that they can borrow? If not, then advise them not to fly. Being able to communicate with supervised pilots is crucial. You may need to warn them about any number of events or tell them to land if a dangerous situation is evolving.
- Site briefing – if all the above are okay, then proceed to a site briefing. Give them all the information they need to make a safe flight and make it to a safe landing. What are the danger points, what conditions do these occur in, what are the dangers today? Then ask them what they are seeing and based on what you have told them, what would be their planned flight for the current conditions. Make sure you get a good read back of any hazards that they may encounter and what steps they will take to avoid them. You must satisfy yourself that

they have a clear appreciation of the potential hazards of the site in the current conditions and that they are clear in their mind as to how they are going to approach the flight.

Now you can assist them in setting up if required and getting in the air. Make sure the other pilots on site are aware of who the new pilot is. You will have several things to monitor: their progress and behaviour in the air, the conditions as they evolve and any threats or hazards as they emerge. Be prepared to get on the radio and give advice or directions when required, or to direct pilots to land if circumstances dictate. At the end of the day you will also need to sign off their flights in their Supervised Pilot logbooks. A debrief with them on how the day was and how they went will be a good opportunity for them to talk about what they experienced and for you to give them feedback on their progress.

In summary

For the supervised – Be patient. Patience exercised while in your supervised days will yield positive results as you progress. Ask your supervisors why, why, why? Remember we were all the same as you, not knowing what you don't know. Keep learning. We are there to help you.

For the supervisor – Be patient. Remember how it was when you started out and fill in the gaps in your charge's knowledge that you have learned. It is your mission to ensure your pilots make it to safe landings. If it's not safe, don't let them go. If it becomes unsafe, direct them to a safe landing. Brief. Debrief. Explain why.

Finally, I'm going to close with a direct quote from the Operations Manual:

Safety Officers & Duty Pilots Liability:

While Safety Officers and Duty Pilots will give advice when asked, they accept no responsibility or liability in respect of any advice given.

As the role of Safety Officer and Duty Pilot are entirely voluntary, each member of the Federation accepts that they will not hold any Safety Officer or Duty Pilot liable for any act or omission in the performance of those duties which may cause injury or loss.

Ultimately people, you need to remember that you are the pilot in command, and the decision to launch rests entirely with you. If it don't feel right, don't do it. Until next time, stay safe. 🍷