CFI ACS Companion

Area of Operation I | Task D

Student Evaluation, Assessment & Testing

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This companion document breaks down every element of the CFI ACS Area of Operation I, Task D: Student Evaluation, Assessment and Testing. Each knowledge element, risk management item, and skill demonstration is mapped to the Aviation Instructor's Handbook Chapters 6 and 9 with page references.

> Primary Sources: Aviation Instructor's Handbook (FAA-H-8083-9B), Chapters 6 & 9; Flight Instructor ACS (FAA-S-ACS-25); 8900.1 Volume 5, Chapter 2, Section 1 (Scenario-Based Evaluation); FOI & FIA Written Exams (FAA Testing Matrix)
>
> Testing Rules: At least one knowledge element (plus any missed on the FOI written). At least one risk management element. All skill elements. Scenario-based evaluation to the maximum extent possible (8900.1). The underlying private/commercial ACS questions are also fair game.
>
> AOO I Note: The evaluator must select Task E, Task F, and at least one other task for initial flight instructor applicants. For add-on ratings or reinstatements, FOI coverage is at the evaluator's discretion.
>
> Start with the Skill: There is only one skill and one risk management item for this task, but there are seven knowledge topics (some with subcategories). The knowledge is heavy; the application is straightforward. Know the material, then prove you can choose the right assessment method for the situation.

KNOWLEDGE ELEMENTS

K1 — Purpose and Characteristics of Effective Assessment

FI.I.D.K1

AIH Chapter 6, pp.6-2 to 6-5

Chapter 6 opens with two broad categories of assessment. Traditional assessment is the written-test format — multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank. Authentic assessment leans into scenario-based training to verify that a learner can actually apply knowledge, not just memorize it. Think of it as the difference between book-smart and street-smart.

Why assess at all? Assessment is the last step of the teaching process from Episode 3 — and it tells you whether the first three steps worked. You can't wait until the checkride and let the DPE figure it out. By then it's too late. You should be assessing something on every lesson.

Perhaps most importantly, a well-designed assessment gives the learner an opportunity for self-evaluation — the foundation of aeronautical decision-making. Once a pilot is signed off, nobody is looking over their shoulder. They need the self-assessment skills to recognize when they're beyond their capabilities.

Characteristics of Effective Assessment

The handbook lists eight characteristics. An effective assessment should be:

- Objective — Keep personal opinions, biases, and techniques out of it. Measure against the ACS standards, not your preferences.
- Flexible — Decide what to assess and when. Don't pile every deficiency into a single debrief if doing so would overwhelm the learner. Pick two or three focus items per lesson.
- Acceptable — This is the credibility piece. The Air Force Weapons School motto — humble, credible, approachable — captures it. Your learner has to respect you as an aviator. If you can't demonstrate the maneuver you're grading, that assessment won't carry weight.
- Comprehensive — A comprehensive assessment isn't necessarily long. It means covering the stated learning objectives thoroughly — not doing a history lesson on the entire flight.
- Constructive — Assessment is pointless unless the learner benefits. Use the poop-sandwich approach: start positive, deliver constructive criticism in the middle, end on a good note.
- Organized — Break the debrief into phases: ground, departure, en route, arrival and landing. Sequential order makes it easier to remember what happened and trace how early issues snowballed.
- Thoughtful — Respect the learner's self-esteem. Ridicule, anger, and sarcasm destroy credibility. Being humble, credible, and approachable means being honest and professional.
- Specific — "Your second steep turn wasn't as good as the first" isn't helpful. Why wasn't it as good? Give them something concrete to take to the next lesson.

K2 — Traditional Assessment

FI.I.D.K2

AIH Chapter 6, pp.6-5 to 6-6; Appendix B

Traditional assessment means written testing: multiple choice, matching, true/false, fill-in-the-blank. You will use traditional assessment as a CFI — the FARs require a pre-solo written exam before your student can solo the aircraft. The Aviation Instructor's Handbook discusses how to build a test bank in Appendix B (the handbook text incorrectly references Appendix A).

Traditional assessment is best suited for early training at the rote level of learning. It verifies that the student has been introduced to the material and can recall facts, but it doesn't tell you much about application or correlation-level knowledge. Don't let a good written-test score convince you that a student is ready for the checkride.

K3A — Learner-Centered Assessment

FI.I.D.K3

AIH Chapter 6, pp.6-7 to 6-9

Learner-centered assessment is the first type of authentic assessment. Instead of listing everything your student did wrong, you use a four-step series of open-ended questions to draw the assessment out of the learner:

- Replay — Have the student verbally walk through the flight or procedure. This gives you insight into what they were thinking and where they were fixated. You might discover that the botched landing happened because they were still rattled from the steep turns earlier.
- Reconstruct — Ask what they would have, could have, or should have done differently. You're bringing them to the mirror — letting them arrive at the conclusion themselves rather than you handing it to them.
- Reflect — Dig into why those mistakes happened. Were they fatigued? Distracted? Fixated on something? This is where you uncover patterns that affect more than one maneuver.
- Redirect — Help the learner connect lessons learned to other experiences and future flights. What personal minimums should be established? What proficiency training would be useful?

> Bringing Them to the Mirror: The psychological advantage of learner-centered grading is powerful. Nine times out of ten, the student can tell you what went wrong. That means they're giving themselves the negative feedback and you get to be the person offering constructive guidance on how to improve. That's a much healthier instructor-student dynamic than delivering bad news every lesson.

K3B — Maneuver / Procedure Grades

FI.I.D.K3

AIH Chapter 6, pp.6-9 to 6-11

Authentic assessment uses a five-level grading scale that replaces the traditional pass/fail or satisfactory/unsatisfactory model:

- Describe — The learner can describe the maneuver but cannot execute it without significant instructor assistance. This is the lowest level — they can tell you what a good landing looks like, but they need you flying along to make it happen.
- Explain — The learner understands the underlying concepts and can handle curveballs conceptually (like explaining what changes in a crosswind), but still needs assistance to execute successfully.

- Practice — The learner can plan and execute the maneuver, but needs coaching to correct deviations. The instructor is actively talking them through it.
- Perform — The learner executes without instructor assistance. They identify and correct their own errors promptly. This is the checkride standard — you're an evaluator, not a coach.
- Not Observed — Self-explanatory. Can't assign a grade to what you didn't see.

Early in training, most grades should be at the describe or explain level. By checkride time, nearly everything should be at the perform level. Your syllabus should map this progression.

K3C — Assessing Risk Management Skills

FI.I.D.K3

AIH Chapter 6, pp.6-11 to 6-12

Risk management gets its own three-level grading scale:

- Explain — The learner can verbally identify and describe the risks, but needs prompting to make decisions.
- Practice — The learner can identify, understand, and apply single-pilot resource management (SRM) principles, but still needs coaching.
- Manage/Decide — The learner can gather data, identify options, evaluate risk, and make appropriate decisions without instructor intervention.

> Let Them Fly Their Plan: To assess at the manage/decide level, you have to let your student run the show without coaching. Their course of action might not be the course you'd choose. If it results in a safe outcome, it's valid. Let them do it, then offer your alternative in the debrief — that actually makes them a better pilot because you've given them confidence and a new tool for next time.

K4 — Choosing an Effective Assessment Method

FI.I.D.K4

AIH Chapter 6, pp.6-12 to 6-14

The handbook outlines a four-step process for designing assessments:

- Determine level of learning objectives — Before you design the assessment, decide what level you're assessing. Are you expecting rote recall or correlation-level understanding?
- List indicators of desired behaviors — What would prove they're at that level? Reciting a definition is rote. Connecting steep turns to asymmetric G-loading and incipient spins is correlation.
- Establish criteria objectives — Set the specific benchmarks for the assessment. Tie them to the ACS or your syllabus grading criteria.
- Develop criterion-referenced test items — Build the actual assessment questions or scenarios. For traditional assessment, this is your test bank. For authentic assessment, this is the scenario you design.

K5 — Purpose and Types of Critiques

FI.I.D.K5

AIH Chapter 6, pp.6-14 to 6-17

The handbook identifies six types of critiques:

- Instructor-Learner Critique — The most common. You fly together, you debrief together.
- Learner-Led Critique — Similar to the self-assessment approach: you provide the framework (ground, departure, en route, arrival/landing) and the student walks through their own performance.
- Small Group Critique — Common in CFI prep courses where multiple students practice teaching and then the class provides feedback on each other's lessons.
- Individual Learner Critique by Another Learner — One student assesses another. This practices assessment skills for the evaluator while giving constructive feedback to the performer.
- Self-Critique — The learner evaluates themselves with no framework provided. You just ask "how do you think that went?" and let them go.
- Written Critique — Written critiques don't have the time constraints of oral debriefs, so you can be more specific and include references and homework assignments. They're also usable by future instructors — the written training folder becomes a history of the student's development.

> The Two-and-Two Debrief: Ask the student for two things they did well and two things they want to improve. If their two items match yours, their self-assessment is solid — a good sign for ADM. If they thought losing 500 feet in a steep turn was "pretty good," you have a deeper problem than just steep turns. Start with the good, address the constructive stuff in the middle, end on a positive note.

K6A — Characteristics of Effective Questions

FI.I.D.K6

AIH Chapter 6, pp.6-17 to 6-19

Oral assessment is a daily tool. The handbook distinguishes between fact questions (rote recall) and HOTS questions (higher-order thinking skills — application and correlation level).

Consider carburetor heat. A fact question: "What does carburetor heat do?" That tests rote memory. A HOTS question: "You're three miles from the airport, 70 degrees outside, high humidity. What should you be concerned about on this approach?" Now you're testing whether they can connect conditions to threats and decide when to apply the carburetor heat.

Five characteristics of an effective question:

- Applies to the subject of instruction
- Brief, concise, clear, and definite
- Adapted to the ability, experience, and stage of training
- Centers on only one idea
- Presents a challenge to the learner

K6B — Types of Questions to Avoid

FI.I.D.K6

AIH Chapter 6, pp.6-19 to 6-20

The handbook identifies five types of bad questions:

- Puzzle — Packs too many variables into one question. "What's the first action if a conventional gear airplane with a weak right brake is swerving left in a right crosswind during a full-flat power-on wheel landing?" That's not a question, it's a riddle.
- Oversize — So broad that the student doesn't know where to begin. "What do you do before beginning an engine overhaul?"
- Bewilderment — So convoluted the student can't parse what's actually being asked.
- Trick — The gotcha is in the format, not the material. Answer options numbered 1-4 but listed as A-D in reverse order.
- Irrelevant — Mid-discussion about eights on pylons, you ask about main tire PSI. It has nothing to do with the assessment.

K6C — Answering Learner Questions

FI.I.D.K6

AIH Chapter 6, pp.6-20 to 6-21

Three steps when a student asks you a question:

- Understand the question — Don't launch into an answer until you know what they're really asking. Repeat it back in your own words: "So what you're asking is..."
- Display interest and answer directly — Rephrasing the question proves you listened. Then give a direct, accurate answer. If your first analogy doesn't land, try a different one — but know your audience.
- Determine if the learner is satisfied — Follow up: "Does that make sense?" If you're approachable, they'll feel comfortable saying "not really." Then you take a different angle.

K7 — Assessment of Piloting Ability

FI.I.D.K7

AIH Chapter 9, pp.9-11 to 9-18

This is the only knowledge topic that reaches outside Chapter 6. It references Chapter 9, which covers how everything in this task applies to actual flight training. Key topics include:

- Demonstrated Ability — Before solo, you must assess that the student has demonstrated the skills to safely operate the aircraft alone. Your certificate is on the line.
- Post-Flight Evaluation — Keep the learner informed of progress. A quick verbal "two and two" on the taxiway is fine immediately after the flight, but follow up with a formal written assessment.
- First Solo Flight — Be present on the ground with a radio. Make sure your student is comfortable and ready. This is a major stress event.
- Solo Debriefing — Debrief solo flights and cross-country flights just like dual flights. For cross-countries, establish communication checkpoints.
- Correction of Learner Errors — Don't take the controls too soon. If you jump in the moment you get uncomfortable, the student never learns what their limits are. As long as safety permits, let them discover and correct the error.
- Pilot Supervision — You are the sole person who decides if a learner is ready for solo. You're letting them use your certificate. Supervise accordingly.

- Normal Challenges — Traffic pattern congestion, runway changes, unexpected crosswinds. These are great teaching opportunities.
- Visualization / Chair Flying — Sitting in front of a cockpit poster and walking through every step of a procedure. Proven and effective.
- Practice Landings — Full-stop landings develop better aircraft control and allow time for instruction. Touch-and-goes have their place but aren't a substitute.
- Practical Test Recommendations — When you sign the 8710, you're attesting in writing that this person is ready. The FAA tracks your pass/fail rate. Too many failures and you may receive a 709 re-examination.

> Whose Fault Is It?: When a private pilot applicant does poorly on a checkride, the DPE is usually more disappointed in the instructor than the student. The student doesn't know what they don't know. The instructor had the responsibility to assess readiness before signing them off.

RISK MANAGEMENT ELEMENTS

You must demonstrate the one risk management element below. Task D has only one, so it will always be tested if this task is selected.

R1: Delivering an Assessment

FI.I.D.R1 | AIH Chapter 6

The risk here is choosing the wrong type of assessment. If you sign a student off for the checkride based only on a good pre-solo written exam (traditional assessment) without ever conducting authentic assessment in the airplane, you've never verified application-level knowledge. Even if they squeak through the checkride, they're going into the real world without the scenario-based judgment skills that keep pilots alive. That's a real risk — and it traces directly back to your assessment choices.

SKILL ELEMENTS

You must demonstrate the single skill element below.

S1: Use Appropriate Methods to Assess Learner Performance

FI.I.D.S1

This encompasses everything above. On a checkride, you might be asked to teach a short lesson and then assess the examiner's performance (or explain how you would assess a student). Demonstrate that you can choose the right assessment type for the situation — traditional for early-stage written testing, authentic for scenario-based evaluation — and that you know how to use the learner-centered grading model, the maneuver/procedure grades, and the risk management grading scale.

WALKTHROUGH SCENARIO

This scenario demonstrates how a single assessment event ties together nearly every element in Task D.

> The Setup: The examiner asks you to assess their performance after a short-field landing demonstration. You have five minutes to demonstrate your assessment skills.

Step 1: Learner-Centered Assessment (K3A)

Use the Replay-Reconstruct-Reflect-Redirect framework. Ask them to walk through the approach. Listen for whether they mention the correct aim point, airspeed, configuration, and touchdown zone. When they describe what they would have done differently, you're testing their self-assessment skills.

Step 2: Assign a Maneuver Grade (K3B)

Based on their performance, assign a grade — describe, explain, practice, or perform — and explain why that grade applies. If they nailed it without coaching, it's a perform. If they needed your verbal cues to stay on glidepath, it's a practice.

Step 3: Apply Effective Assessment Characteristics (K1)

Keep the assessment objective (ACS standards, not personal technique), comprehensive on the stated objectives, specific about what to improve, and constructive in tone. Reference the Airplane Flying Handbook for common errors and suggest a practice plan.

Step 4: Questioning Technique (K6A)

Ask a HOTS question that tests correlation-level knowledge: "If the winds shifted to a direct crosswind during short final, how would that change your approach?" This verifies they can connect conditions to decisions — not just execute the procedure they memorized.

In five minutes, you've demonstrated knowledge of learner-centered assessment (K3A), maneuver grading (K3B), characteristics of effective assessment (K1), questioning technique (K6A), and the single skill element — all from one scenario.

QUICK REFERENCE — AOO I, TASK D

Code	Element	Source
K1	Purpose & characteristics of assessment	*AIH Ch 6, pp.6-2 to 6-5*
K2	Traditional assessment	*AIH Ch 6, pp.6-5 to 6-6*
K3A	Learner-centered assessment	*AIH Ch 6, pp.6-7 to 6-9*
K3B	Maneuver / procedure grades	*AIH Ch 6, pp.6-9 to 6-11*
K3C	Assessing risk management skills	*AIH Ch 6, pp.6-11 to 6-12*
K4	Choosing an assessment method	*AIH Ch 6, pp.6-12 to 6-14*
K5	Types of critiques	*AIH Ch 6, pp.6-14 to 6-17*
K6A	Effective questions	*AIH Ch 6, pp.6-17 to 6-19*
K6B	Questions to avoid	*AIH Ch 6, pp.6-19 to 6-20*
K6C	Answering learner questions	*AIH Ch 6, pp.6-20 to 6-21*
K7	Assessment of piloting ability	*AIH Ch 9, pp.9-11 to 9-18*
R1	Delivering an assessment	*AIH Ch 6*
S1	Use appropriate assessment methods	—

VSL ACE Guide: Every ACS element links directly to the source material. Green buttons take you straight to the right page in the AIH, AFH, and dozens of other FAA documents. Get the ACE Guide at vslaviation.myshopify.com