

Defensive Flying Checklist

2025
EDITION



NOTE

Due to extremely busy summer operations, pilots are faced with a number of safety-relevant issues and disruptions. **This checklist** has been compiled by the European Cockpit Association to keep crew focused on what's important: safety.

This checklist is not intended to supersede or replace individual company procedures. It should be seen as an additional awareness tool to ensure safe, reliable, and efficient flight operations.

For additional reference, for both crew and operators, ECA draws your attention to the EASA Safety Information Bulletin (SIB - 2023-05).

PRE-FLIGHT

Take care of yourself & your crew



Adequate rest before commencing a flight duty is paramount. If you are fatigued or feeling unfit to fly, step away from your duty and file a Fatigue Report (**see also ECA's Summer Fatigue guidance**)

Remember, fatigue is difficult to self-diagnose and is literally a 'silent killer'. Consciously monitor your alertness and stress levels as well as within your crew and encourage your crew to be assertive, including when it comes to fitness.

Plan for disruptions



Many disruptions are to be expected, such as ATC slots, ground handling delays, weather etc. While you cannot foresee every issue, plan and brief for contingencies.

During this intensive summer period, priorities might change. For example, fuel planning for contingencies might take precedence over fuel planning for efficiency: while companies may prioritise efficiency and 'encourage' minimum fuel uplift, the Pilot In Command remains the final authority on fuel carried.

Own the clock



The Pilot in Command is ultimately responsible for the safe conduct of the flight. This means that you have the authority to refuse any course of action that, from a safety perspective, you don't feel comfortable with.

While the Pilot in Command is central to the coordination of the flight, you should not feel compelled to make up for every deficiency of the flight process and put unnecessary pressure on yourself and your crew.

If in doubt, take a step back - and reassess your course of action and priorities.

DURING FLIGHT

Stick to Standard Operating Procedures



Standard Operating Procedures are the foundation of a safe and efficient operation. In a situation where disruptions and stress might accumulate, resist the temptation to adopt 'workaround' procedures or take shortcuts in your work routines.

Keep Calm & Fly Safe



Do not rush into approaches or accept shortcuts if it might end up in a non-stabilised approach. Take extra care when accepting last minute runway changes or intersection departures to cross-check the correct performance. "Haste makes waste" ... So if it is too tight - state "unable" or Go Around.

Your first and foremost responsibility is to the safety of your passengers and crew!

The exceptional use of Commander's Discretion



Operators have been advised by EASA that 'Commander's Discretion' (CD) is not intended to make up for unrealistic scheduling practices and that they should provide for contingencies in their planning – including foreseeing extra buffers. Among others, EASA clearly stated that “any scheduling of crews, with commander's discretion already included is not acceptable”. (SIB 2023-05, Chapter 2.1.)

Commander's Discretion is a tool reserved exclusively for the Commander. It is meant to be used in exceptional circumstances, usually to allow a flight to be continued to a destination.

It is NOT a standard resource planning tool for the operator, nor a tool to make up for its unrealistic scheduling practices.

When Commander's Discretion is used, it is to be reported. However, pilots have no obligation to report when they are *not* using Commander's Discretion. (EASA letter to ECA, 29/11/2023)

If considering to use such Discretion, remember to ensure that you and your crew are fit to safely finish your duty. Before your next flight, please consult ECA's guide on Commander's Discretion

Importantly, you also have the authority under Commander's Discretion to reduce a Flight Duty Period or to extend a rest period if you deem it required.

POST-FLIGHT

Please do report! If you don't, it didn't happen



If faced with disruptions or situations that might potentially be a hazard to the operation, report them – even at the end of a long day. If you don't report, nobody will know about safety-critical situations – and the system cannot be changed.

Use your company's reporting scheme to report all safety relevant issues. Additionally, you may also report via your national authority, or to EASA's Confidential Safety Reporting ('CSR') channel to draw attention to situations, alleged malpractices and irregularities that you feel should be addressed.

Such malpractices or irregularities include, for example, your operator

- a) systematically planning schedules with Commander's Discretion,
- b) exerting undue pressure on crew to use CD, and/or
- c) direct or indirect punitive / disciplinary action for the non-use of CD, for reporting unfit/fatigued before duty, or for any other safety-related decision you may have taken.

Crucially, EASA's CSR channel enables you to report confidentially, without having to fear that your action may have adverse consequences for you.

Debrief the lessons learned



After a long and eventful day, there is a natural tendency to "go home" quickly.

Nevertheless, we urge you to take a couple of minutes to review the day with your crew and have candid feedback from all of them. Despite the possible stresses and frustrations every flight is an opportunity for useful take-aways.



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