



PILOT NOTES

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Human Factors Aren't a Subject — They're the Flight

Why what you study on the ground is what keeps you alive in the air.

Welcome. This is the first issue of Pilot Notes — a short monthly read for RPA students. We wanted to start where every flight actually starts: not with the aircraft, but with you.

Human Factors Aren't a Subject. They're the Flight.

If you've spent any time in ground school, you've met **Human Factors** as a topic. A chapter in the book. A set of questions on the exam. Something to study, tick off, and move past on the way to the things that feel more like *real* flying — circuits, navigation, forced landings.

Here's the truth we want to plant early: Human Factors *is* the real flying. Everything else is just the aircraft doing what it's designed to do.

What Actually Goes Wrong

When recreational accidents are investigated in Australia, the aircraft is rarely the problem. Engines run. Wings stay attached. What fails is usually a decision — made by a tired pilot, a rushed pilot, a pilot who didn't want to disappoint a passenger, or a pilot who knew the weather looked marginal but pressed on anyway because they'd already driven two hours to the strip.

That's Human Factors. Not a textbook concept. The reason the flight ended the way it did.

From the Book to the Cockpit

Think about the **IMSAFE** checklist — Illness, Medication, Stress, Alcohol, Fatigue, Eating. Easy to memorise. Easy to skip. But it shows up in real ways:

- **You slept badly.** On downwind, you forget to extend your leg in a crosswind and end up high on final. That's fatigue, not stick-and-rudder.
- **You're flying with a mate keen to get to the coast.** The cloud base is lower than you'd normally accept. You go anyway. That's *get-there-itis*, and it's killed more pilots than carburettor ice ever has.

- **You're new, and on first solo nav you realise you're not where you thought.** Your heart rate climbs. You stop scanning. You stop flying the aircraft. That's stress narrowing your attention — a Human Factor in real time.

The Practical Habit

The pilots who fly long careers without serious incidents tend to share one habit: they treat *themselves* as part of the preflight. Before they walk to the aircraft, they ask honestly — am I fit, am I current, am I rushed, am I being pushed by something I shouldn't be?

It takes thirty seconds. It's the most important thirty seconds of the flight.

“The aircraft is rarely the problem. What fails is usually a decision.”

For This Month

Next time you're heading out, try this: before you start the walkaround, sit in the car for a minute and run IMSAFE on yourself *out loud*. Then run a quick “what would make me turn back today?” — wind, cloud, fuel, fatigue. Decide your limits *before* you're airborne and committed.

You'll be surprised how often that thirty seconds changes the flight — sometimes by sharpening your focus, occasionally by keeping you on the ground for the right reasons.

Fly safe, fly prepared.

We'll see you next month.

— The RPA Team