



PRACTICE ICAO ENGLISH



How to pass with ICAO Level 4 and higher

Version:

2026

For

Pilots wishing to pass
their ICAO English test

Presented by
Rachel Shieff

Contents

- Introduction
- Pronunciation
- Structure
- Vocabulary
- Fluency
- Comprehension
- Interaction
- How to exceed level 4
- Why aim higher?
- Solution



In this guide you are going to learn what it takes to reach ICAO level 4 and higher in each of the ICAO English components:

Pronunciation
Structure
Vocabulary
Fluency
Comprehension
Interaction



To pass the ICAO English Proficiency test, pilots have to demonstrate they can communicate effectively with air traffic controllers and with each other in routine, non-routine and emergency situations during flight operations.

It's time to learn what this means.





Pronunciation

It's ok to have an accent, but you need to make sure your examiner can understand you.

Examples of level 4 pronunciation errors that are accepted:

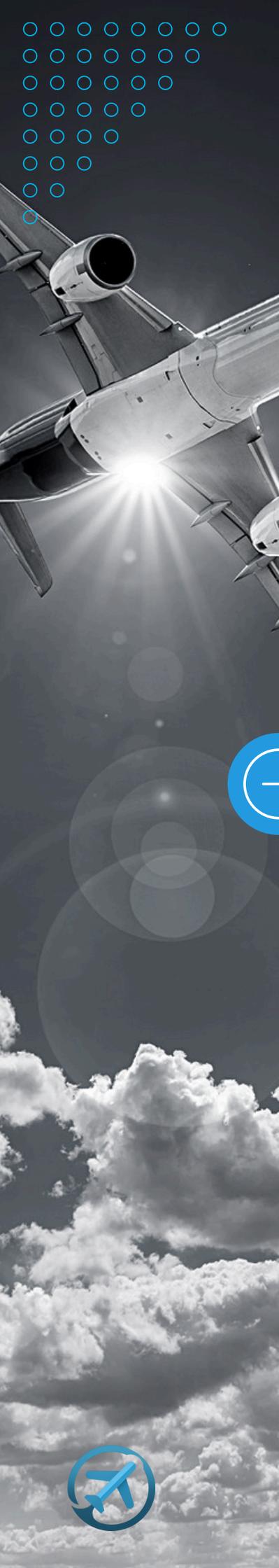


strange - "estrange" (Spanish speakers)
departed, stopped, landed - "depart", "stop", "land" (dropping the /ed/ is a common mistake)
aircraft- "aircraf" (dropping the /t/ is a common mistake)
dangerous - "dangeras" (confusing vowel sounds)
three - "free" (difficulty pronouncing the /th/ sound)
fuel - "few" (there are 2 syllables fu-el)
request - "wequest" (difficulty pronouncing the /r/ sound)
throughout - "truout" (confusing /t/ and /th/)
fly - "fry" (confusing the /r/ and /l/ sounds)
debris - "daybreez" (unfamiliar with the real pronunciation)
cancelled - "cansowed" (confusing vowel sounds)
runway - "wonway" (confusing /r/ and /w/ sounds)

Here are 3 ways you can effectively improve your pronunciation:

1. Attend my [ICAO English Foundation Course](#), where I will correct your pronunciation.
2. Copy and paste the words you are unfamiliar with into this [website](#), and learn how to pronounce them correctly. You can also listen to how the words are pronounced in different accents.
3. Find a study partner. Listen to correct pronunciation, repeat it, and ask your partner to critique you.





Structure (grammar)

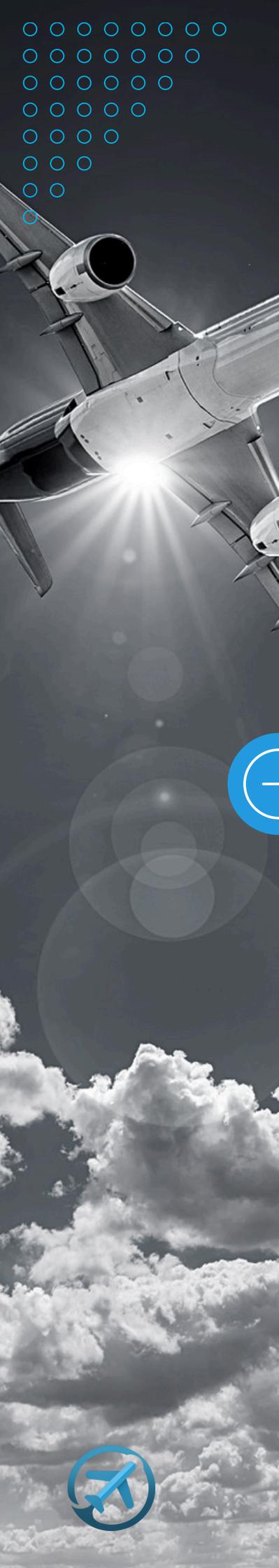
You are allowed to make mistakes, but make sure that you can express yourself clearly.

Examples of level 4 structure errors that are accepted:

Accepted as ICAO Level 4 errors	Correct
This is a Cessna that have landed in the grass.	A Cessna has landed on the grass.
I love very much to fly as a pilot.	I love being a pilot.
It was an emergency that go wrong	It was an emergency that went wrong.
Please calm the passenger and make sure everyone buckles up their seatbelt.	Please keep the passengers calm and make sure they fasten their seatbelts.

To effectively improve your grammar the best method is to immerse yourself in English. Push yourself outside your comfort zone and speak English at every opportunity. Spending time in an English speaking country is ideal.

If that isn't possible you can attend an Aviation English class and learn how to communicate using correct grammar. The course must provide lots of speaking practice, and ideally, you should be corrected on the spot.



Vocabulary

You must have sufficient vocabulary to talk about normal and abnormal situations.

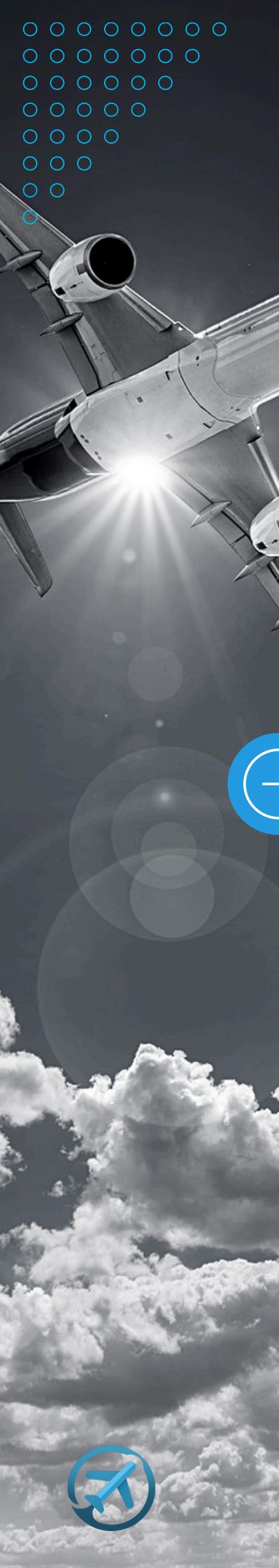
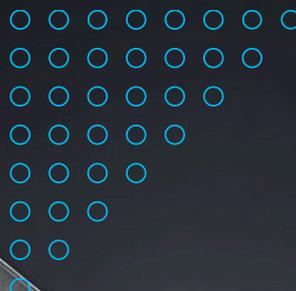
If you can't think of specific words, use the words you know to communicate your message.

Examples of level 4 vocabulary errors that are accepted:

Accepted as ICAO Level 4 errors	Correct
This is a very important date for the pilots.	This is a critical time for the pilots.
The finger is attached to the aircraft.	The airbridge is attached to the aircraft.
There is big damage to the aircraft.	There is a lot of damage to the aircraft.
Gone out the runway	overshot the runway

To effectively improve your vocabulary, you can read aviation blogs, watch YouTube channels like Captain Joe and Pilot Obet, and attend my [ICAO English Foundation Course](#).

Look up the definitions of new words in your first language and practice using them in context.



Fluency

Speak at a natural pace whenever possible. You are allowed pauses when translating from your first language into English, as long as communication is not affected.



The following errors in fluency are accepted at ICAO level 4:

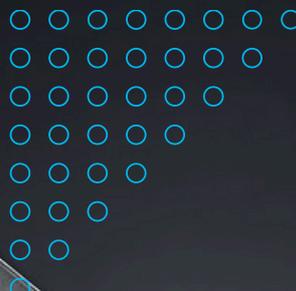
1. Some hesitation when translating from the first language into English.
2. Using some filler words like ah and um, but they are should not be distracting.
3. Discourse markers like “ok”, “anyway”, “even”, “although” are limited.

What you need to do is speak effortlessly without pausing and sound natural.

Fluency can only be improved by building your foundational skills of pronunciation, structure and vocabulary, and then repeatedly practice your speaking skills.

Time, commitment and discipline are required to build your fluency.





Comprehension

Be able to understand English spoken in different accents in normal and non-standard situations.

Your ICAO English examiner (rater) should have ICAO level 6, which means their accent will be easy to understand.

However, you are allowed to take your time and ask for clarification if what you heard isn't clear.

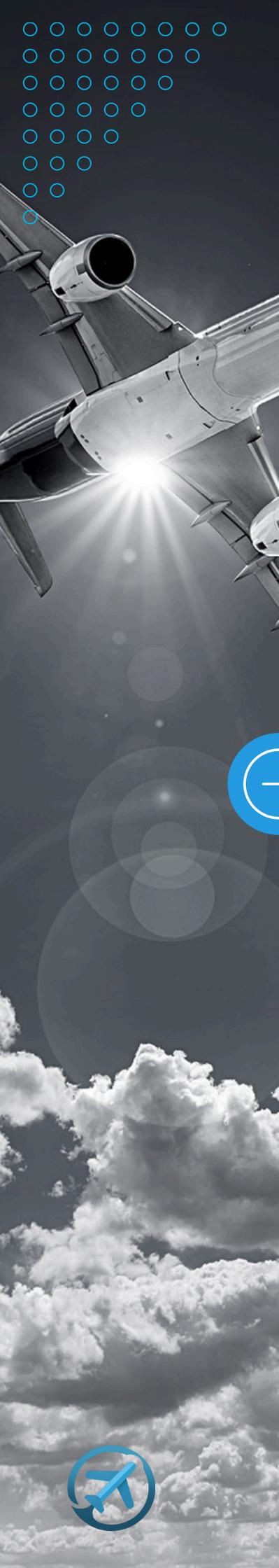
You'll be listening to radio communication, and you'll have to demonstrate your understanding through your responses.

To improve your aviation English comprehension, I recommend attending aviation English classes and also listening to the video resources that I suggested earlier. Visit my [Youtube channel](#), Practice ICAO English for further practice.

Forming study groups with people from different cultural backgrounds is also a very effective way to improve comprehension. You can ask each other questions about aviation scenarios and listen to the various responses.

Just like 'fluency', comprehension will improve when you build your foundational ICAO English skills: pronunciation, vocabulary, and structure. You can do this on my [ICAO English Foundation Course](#).





Interaction

You must respond to questions about normal and abnormal situations quickly and correctly most of the time.

Please initiate and maintain communication with your examiner, especially when dealing with unexpected situations.



Following instructions without first checking that you've understood correctly could lead to miscommunication.

Carry out the roleplays with your examiner as if he/she were the ATC or pilot you are communicating with.

To improve your interactions, you must listen attentively and ensure that your responses are accurate.

You'll find that your ability to interact appropriately will improve naturally as your ICAO English foundational skills develop.



Why should you aim for a level 5 or 6?



English level 4

If you drop one level you lose your license



Aim Higher

Feel more secure in your pilot position



Increase your opportunities

Many airlines only hire First Officers and Captains with ICAO level 5



Achieving ICAO Level 5 means that you won't have to be revalidated for 6 years.

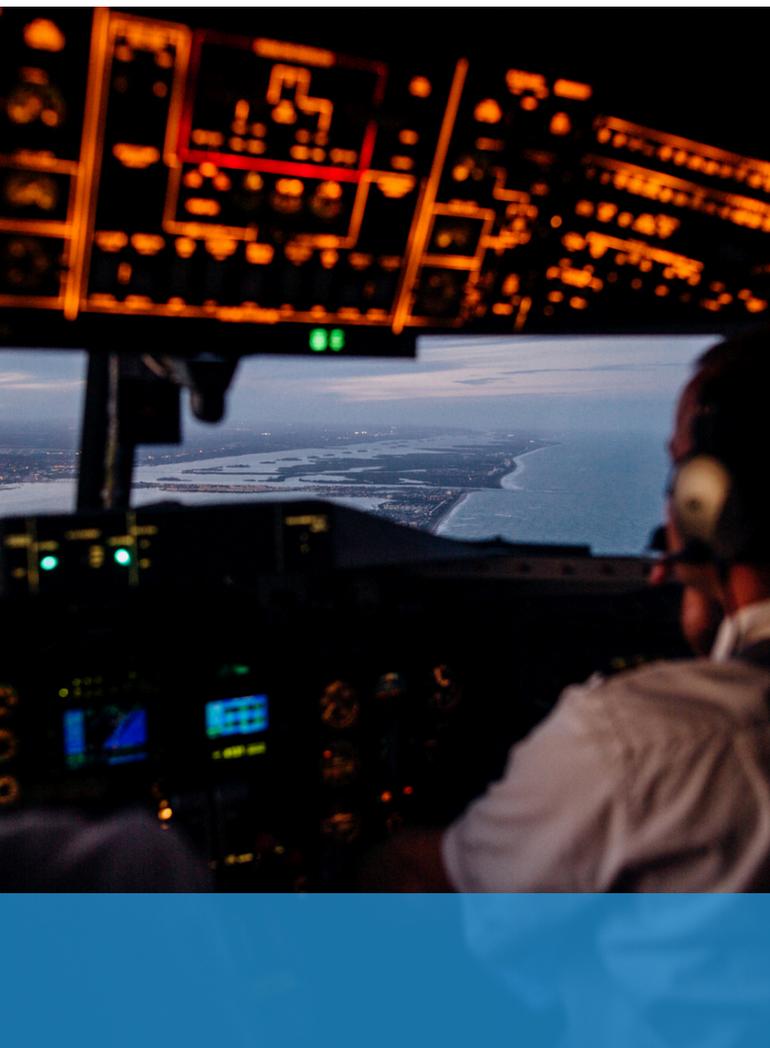
At level 5 your pronunciation will rarely interfere with understanding. You'll be able to use more complex grammatical structures. Your range of vocabulary will allow you to paraphrase successfully. You'll speak with ease on familiar topics. You will accurately comprehend most accents of English and you will respond immediately and appropriately to questions and requests.

Level 5 is achievable with professional training, consistent practice and a determination to succeed.

When you achieve ICAO Level 6, you will be at near native speaker level and will never need to be tested again.



ICAO Level 4, 5 and 6 is definitely achievable if you commit to putting in the study time and effort required.



You may download a FREE recording of the latest [ICAO English Masterclass](#), to learn some essential language skills to pass your test.

To see updated information on my **ICAO English Foundation Course**, including upcoming course dates, click [here](#).

If you have to pass your test in a few weeks, you should take the quick-start **ICAO English video training course - only \$29**. available [here](#).

For Hong Kong Aviation professionals only: My training is approved by the Marine Aviation Training Fund (MATF). This means you will get 80% of your fee refunded upon successful completion of the course. Please [email me](#) for further information.

I hope you now feel more informed about the ICAO language requirements.

I wish you all the best on your journey to ICAO level 4 and higher, and if you choose to train with Practice ICAO English, I look forward to meeting you soon.

