

NOT ALL SIMULATORS ARE SIMULATORS

The term “flight simulator” actually doesn’t mean much anymore. Thanks to evolved standards on how the devices can be used, the FAA and its counterparts in other countries have broken down their capabilities into three basic categories, with specific, defined capabilities:

- A **full flight simulator** (FFS) is a full-size replica of a specific aircraft cockpit including the hardware and software necessary to represent the aircraft in ground and flight operations. It requires both motion and a visual system. There are four subcategories, Levels A through D, with Level D being the most capable.
- A **flight training device** (FTD), meanwhile, is a full-size replica of an aircraft cockpit, or representative of a series of aircraft, in an open flight deck area or in an enclosed compartment. It includes hardware and software necessary to simulate the aircraft in ground and flight operations but does not require motion or a visual system. An FTD can come in up to four Levels, 4 through 7, although Levels 4 and 7 are for helicopters only.
- A **personal computer-based aviation training device** (PCATD) is a hardware and software combination capable of satisfying a portion of the flight training required for an instrument rating. This category includes basic (**BATD**) devices, like the Elite PI-135 pictured above right, and advanced (**AATD**).



Yes, you can still fire up *Flight Simulator* or *X-Plane* on your Windows PC or Mac and gain valuable experience in your living room. You can’t log the time, however—it will never count toward a rating—but applications like these two can be valuable as procedures trainers.