

DEALING WITH DISTRACTIONS IN THE PATTERN

If you haven't figured it out yet, the traffic pattern is a lousy place to deal with distractions. And in busy patterns, distractions are everywhere: The yahoo who slows to 60 knots on downwind, the bizjet on a five-mile final and the maroon inbound on a practice approach to the opposite runway. How you deal with them will determine the approach and landing's outcome.



If there's no one behind you on the downwind, you also could go into what I call "hover mode": Slow to the landing configuration, but maintain altitude. Then fly the pattern at reduced speed. Again, this gives everyone time to complete what they started while keeping you out of the way.

Sometimes, the best thing to do is leave the pattern: Go out, fly around a little bit, maybe do some slow flight, then come back and re-enter it on the downwind. The commotion probably will have subsided by then.

Leaving the pattern to sort things out is also a great idea if there's a mechanical problem, like a landing gear annunciator. Find a quiet place away from the airport and its traffic to run through the necessary checklists.

Even if there's no mechanical issues—just too many loose nuts around—you still need to concentrate on the task at hand. If you don't, you could end up like the image above.