

See Me, Feel Me, Touch Me, Heal Me

My primary CFI was big on learning aids; one of his colleagues embraced this approach, which reflects his fanboy feeling about the Who's rock opera, "Tommy." Both CFIs recognized that the ideal preflight varies with the aircraft. Both felt a generic outline offered a valuable framework on which to build. Consider these steps to more-consistent pre-flight inspections:

1. SEE ME

Start your inspection of the airplane well before you get to it. While walking up, you're looking at general-condition things like sagging gear struts and low tires, often identified by the airplane not sitting level and easier to spot from a distance. Basically, you're looking for anything that appears wrong, different or out of place.

2. FEEL ME

Move, shake and wiggle anything that shouldn't move—wings (rather than ailerons), vertical and horizontal stabilizers (rather than rudder and elevators) and, in particular, with a cap or valve (fuel and oil fillers, fuel-drain valves, sumps). Exhaust pipes are another item begging to be touched and wiggled, along with antennas. Of course, you're checking them to ensure they're secure. A little bit of this goes a long way—don't damage anything in the process.

3. TOUCH ME

This is item 2's close cousin: Make the pre-flight inspection as tactile as possible, using fingers to reinforce what the eyes behold—whether confirming the dipstick is correctly seated, threads are showing on aileron lock nuts or the control surface's connections to control system cables or tubes are intact and secure.

4. HEAL ME

This should be self-explanatory—in fact, we shouldn't have to say it at all: Correct all shortcomings—or reconsider the flight.

5. REPEAT, BUT IN REVERSE

If starting at the nose and going counterclockwise, back up your full pre-flight with a clockwise walkaround from a distance beyond arm's length, looking again at everything you've checked.

