



The Zen Of Pre-Flight Inspections

No matter how many times we've done a pre-flight, each one presents something new: A creative insect-related problem, some oil on the ground—where did it come from?—a balky cowling fastener or a new noise when we move the elevators through their motion range.

To ensure you're not missing something, keep it simple and organized: perform one task at a time. Use the tips below for some guidance.

ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS

Unless you're just going out for a few touch-and-goes, you likely have luggage and passengers to deal with, plus the details of the coming cross-country flight on your mind. Get the luggage stowed while the passengers cool their heels in the FBO lounge, then perform the pre-flight. Board the passengers next, then do your final walkaround before assuming the left-seat position.

ENSURE THERE'S ADEQUATE LIGHT

Even when pre-flighting in the daytime, a flashlight comes in handy for peering into fuel tanks and an airplane's nooks and crannies. If you pre-flight in the hangar, perhaps to avoid the rain outside, inadequate lighting can force you to miss things or misinterpret what you are seeing: Is that oil, hydraulic fluid, water or just dirt?

DON'T MIX AND MATCH TASKS

Fueling the airplane, adding oil, cleaning the windows or arranging charts in the cockpit aren't the same. When conducting a pre-flight inspection, that should be the only task. If you let other tasks interfere, you can miss stuff, even if you use a checklist (highly recommended). Once the inspection is complete, then you can tackle all the other little things you want to do before lighting the fires.

ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS THAT ARISE

What oil goes in the engine? How full should the brake reservoir be? What's the correct tire pressure? All this and other data should be in the airplane's POH/AFM, well-hidden in the cabin. Consult it for answers to any questions that crop up during the inspection—don't go from memory.