

Let me start by first talking about the test prep guides and software versus the "new FAA"...

For years, the FAA published their bank of test questions. The test guide publishers printed those questions with the answers then wrote explanations for the correct answers as well as explanations for why an answer is not correct.

Instructors would push their students to read and memorize the questions and correct answers. And, it worked. It worked for me back in 1981.

That's all changed. I suspect the investigation into training behind the Colgan 3407 crash had some influence, probably a lot along with the NTSB.

I still have a few of the question banks in stock that Jeppesen published but they were hardly ever purchased. The FAA had PDFs on their site but now they have only a list of "representative questions" for each certificate and rating.

The questions you see in test prep books may or may not be on the tests. There may be and very likely will be questions not in the test prep books. The best the publishers can do is use old questions and write new ones that correlate to knowledge required by the PTS or ACS as may apply.

There are a variety of "free" test websites. Be very careful. Trust only the very well known sites such as Gleim, ASA, King, Sporty's etc. They keep up with adapting with changes to the ACS and the test supplements. Most sites do not. And, absolutely no one can guarantee they can show you every question you may be asked. Well, unless they're getting their information from FAA Branch, AFS-630. Their security has gotten very tight on the written knowledge test banks.

The FAA is adding new versions of the questions all the time so it is very likely you'll see one worded quite differently but asking the same thing as what you'll see in the test prep book. You may see a similarly worded question but with different answers. Don't let yourself get fooled.

Why the change? Well, the FAA thinks you should actually study and learn the material. It's a novel concept compared to the old method of rote memorization where you knew the answer but often had no clue why it was correct.

When you go through the test guides read the question. Understand the premise of the question and all aspects of what it entails. That's fairly minor for a private or sport ticket but changes considerably as you move to instrument, commercial and ATP tickets. It also applies to AMT tickets.

Then read the correct answer. Read why it's correct. Understand why it is the correct answer. Enhance that with referenced handbooks. Doing so will also better seat the information and source in your mind for the oral portion of the practical exam.

Ignore the incorrect answers and their explanations. The law of "Primacy" in learning is you tend to recall what you first see. Pretend they don't exist. They will become useless clutter in your brain until that moment you're reading a question on the test and you see an answer that sounds like one of those incorrect answers. So, you use it. Oops! Ignore the the incorrect answers. Concentrate on only the correct answer and its related information.

Don't ask for an endorsement until you've taken at least three practice tests with a minimum of 90%, consecutively. That was my rule as an instructor.

If you score low you can count on the DPE hitting you with those deficient areas during the oral. Yes, he will have access to your test results. Know them well.

While taking the private test, DO NOT use your plotter with the chart examples in the test supplement book. Use the scale with the chart and turn a straight edge of a sheet of paper into a scale you can move over the chart. If you use the scale on your plotter, there will be answers that will correspond with what you arrive at and it shall be wrong.

A couple more things... whether you get the 2020 or 2021 test prep books won't matter a whole lot. It goes back to what I was saying about actually studying. The tests won't change that much from year to year. About the next major change will be more application of glass technology without it requiring an entirely different test but that's been in discussion since a major NTSB presentation back in 2010. Even with that it applies more to the instrument rating. The FAA moves slow so until there's a codified mandate it won't be soon.

Both ASA and Gleim publish new books annually. ASA releases theirs late October and Gleim scatters theirs across August to October. Jeppesen is less frequent on updates but still suitable for its purpose.

Study hard and fly safe.