

IFR Alternate Planning

When do you need to file an alternate?

You always need to file an alternate unless

- The airport has an instrument approach
- Weather reports and forecasts indicate that from 1 hour before to 1 hour after you ETA at the destination the ceiling will be at least 2,000 AGL and the visibility will be at least 3 SM. The 3-2-1 rule is the way to remember this regulation.
If the weather at your destination isn't at least 3SM of VIS and 2000' AGL ceilings from 1 hour before to 1 hour after your ETA you need to file an alternate.

Planning your IFR Alternate

For the alternate to meet the requirements of FAR 91.169 the weather conditions at the ETA must meet or exceed:

- If a usable precision approach is available: 600' ceilings and 2SM of VIS
- If only a non precision approach is useable: 800' and 2SM of VIS
- If no instrument approaches are available: Descent from the MEA and landing must be conducted under basic VFR.

Alternate Minimums

FAA Charts:

- If the airport has nonstandard alternate minimums you will see a triangular A filled in black
 - The chart supplement will have the alternate minimums listed
 - If using fore flight the "Alternate minimums" tab under "arrival procedures"
- Many airports will have nonstandard alternate requirements due to terrain considerations. They could also vary by aircraft approach category.
- In some cases an airport might not be available to use as an alternate because of no on airport weather reporting.

Weather products for alternate planning

A TAF is the most common way to determine the forecast weather for your flight plan.

If the airport doesn't have TAF the "Graphical Area Forecast" is the tool to use.

Using the "ceiling and visibility" tab and the time slider will allow you to see the forecast ceiling and VIS for your alternate.

Fuel Requirements

The fuel requirements from FAR 91.167 are as follows:

- Fly to your intended destination
- Fly from the destination to the alternate (if required)
- Fly for an additional 45 minutes at normal cruise speed

Other reasons for an alternate

- ATC services available
- Transportation
- Lodging
- nearby restaurants
- FBO services
- Passenger Requirements
- Maintenance
- Runways and Conditions