

Crash Course Paparazzi 2016

Safety

Lesson 1... safety

Roland Meertens, Christophe de Wagter, Guido de Croon

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Introduction

Welcome to the first lesson of a short and gentle introduction to programming autonomous drones. As we will see in this lesson it is easy to break a drone while trying to make it autonomous. Luckily you can avoid all crashes by simply following several rules. This week we discuss how you can break drones, how to prevent this, and how to teach yourself to fly a drone.

Goals of this exercise

- Learn how drones break
- Know when to stop flying, and when not to start flying
- Learn how to fly your drone (so you can recover your drone when automation shows unexpected situations)

Why do drones and batteries break? (and how can YOU break them?)

Breaking a drone is easy, they tend to break when they fall on the ground, or get stuck in the net. As you will create an autonomous drone during this course, it is important to start with learning how to prevent breaking this fragile and expensive (600 euros) machine. The most common reasons for a drone and/or its battery to break are:

- Low power: when the battery is drained too much the drone will fall down. Sometimes the battery has enough charge to keep the drone in the air, but not enough charge to perform a special manoeuvre such as yawing. It then starts to behave strangely, as the battery can't provide enough thrust for all the motors. This behaviour will start suddenly, so it is important to stop flying in time! The battery of the Bebop will become dangerously low if it is below 11.1 volts.

When you fly too long with a battery not only do you risk breaking the drone, you will definitely break the battery. Flying too long makes the batteries lose capacity, and in the end makes them unreliable. Batteries with low capacities can lead to dangerous situations.

- Lost GPS: knowing its location is important for your drone when it is flying autonomously. When you are navigating on a flight plan your drone tries to reach a certain waypoint. If the location of the drone is not updated it thinks it has to go on and on, until it hits a wall.

During this course the position of the drone is supplied by a computer in the Cyberzoo: the Optitrack system. Sometimes this system can break, or somebody puts the wrong settings in the Optitrack computer, or the connection to your drone is lost. Be sure to always check if the

GPS data is correct before every flight and program an appropriate landing as soon as the GPS is lost. Also be prepared to take over your drone manually at any time.

- Lost Wifi: when this happens the drone receives nothing from your laptop. This means that the joystick commands you give don't reach the drone, and that the GPS is not updated anymore. To prevent this you will need to program a fail-safe mode. Note that you lose wifi more often when there are many laptops or drones in the arena.
- Bad code: Programming the wrong code will mean your drone does something unexpected. Examples are:
 - Not detecting an obstacle and therefore flying into this obstacle.
 - Writing data out of your array, therefore changing a random variable on your drone.
 - Dividing by zero, the whole autopilot will now stop and your drone drops out of the sky.

How to prevent that drones break

All mistakes in the previous section can and should be prevented. Although the Bebop is sold as a toy, it is a very fragile and expensive toy.

- Look at the voltage of the battery. This can be seen in the Paparazzi ground station. Always have a team member check on the battery level while flying. Paparazzi itself will warn you when your battery is too empty by speaking to you, but only if you enable this feature (we will learn you later how). Make sure you enable speech so you can hear all important messages.

- Always check that your drone has a good gps fix. If it loses GPS the drone can start an automatic landing procedure, but only if you program this in the flight plan. Paparazzi also warns you when your GPS is lost by speaking to you, again: you may not fly without using this function.

Unfortunately Optitrack can not track your drone well in the corners of the Cyberzoo. It is therefore important to avoid these places. It is possible to create a procedure when your drone leaves the center of the arena, make sure to turn this on, and make sure it works by testing it. Be sure to always have a trained safety pilot ready to take manual control when things go wrong.

- Practice your drone flying skills in a simulator. If your drone does not do what you expect it to do you can still save it manually. If your flying skills are not good you will cause even more damage while trying so save your drone. As your brain needs to train itself in flying a drone in all positions, using a simulator for a few days will definitely prevent drone crashes. We will tell you more about a good simulator in the next section.
- Always check BEFORE flying that the joystick you plugged in is working, and move the sticks to all extremes before flying. You can check that the joystick is working by changing the mode, if the mode on your ground control station changes you know that it works.
- If you want to check if your experimental module works, check so WITHOUT taking off. If the drone without flying already has a hard time detecting obstacles, your drone will definitely crash.

Using Heli-X

Heli-X is a good simulator that has a free trial version. The two interesting aircrafts in this version are the DJI Phantom (a quadcopter) and the Logo 600. If you can fly the DJI Phantom in the simulator you have a higher chance of recovering your Bebop if something goes wrong in the air. To test your flying skills you should also try out the Logo 600 with rate control. The Logo 600 is harder to control, so if you can fly it in the simulator you have an even higher chance of recovering your Bebop. It is very

important to test if you can fly a drone nose-in (with its nose pointing towards you). When you can do this perfectly you can consider yourself good enough to serve as a safety pilot during this course. To start using Heli-X:

1. Download the program from <http://www.heli-x.info/cms/>.
2. Start the program and select the DJI Phantom.
3. Put the Hobbyking joystick in your PC (we provide several of them during practical sessions), and start the calibration of the joystick
4. Now you are ready to select an aircraft and airfield.