

UNDERSTANDING THE ATIS - IT'S REALLY EASY

by Kathleen O'Brien
SPM LGB FSDO

At airports with operating control towers, you will find some kind of information service. ATIS, Automatic Terminal Information Service, is perhaps the one most familiar to you. You can find your way around an airport when everything is not a surprise. Make use of the information available to you before you taxi out or land your plane.

Lately, so much is required to be included on an ATIS transmission, many pilots complain they do not get the important information they need. There is a way to make this easier.

Although it has been changed recently to conform with international standards, ATIS reports are always given in the same order. The first part sets one report apart from the prior one.

WHERE-for instance-
Long Beach Airport
WHAT -Information
Tango
WHEN -0445 universal
time coordinated

These are your identifiers. What is important? Well, is it the right airport? How recent is this report? ATIS is recorded sometime between forty-five minutes after the hour and the top of the hour. It is given an identifier name, in this case TANGO.

What do you need to *remember* from this first group? TANGO. You will use that name in your call up to let the controllers know you have the current airport information.

The next block of information will be the wind. Here you want to listen for its direction and velocity since these facts can impact your decision to land or take off. These facts also help you predict the

runways you are most likely to be cleared for.

The third block, visibility, can be short or long. The greater the visibility, the shorter the information. For instance, sky clear, visibility 25 miles. Do you need to remember that? Not usually.

When the visibility is reduced, the information becomes more detailed. You might hear, "Visibility 1 mile in rain. Ceiling indefinite." If you are an instrument rated pilot, this section is important to your planning. If you are flying by visual flight rules, this information says you will spend some time on the ground.

The temperature and dew point are in the next information block. This information can give you an idea of trends in the weather. Early morning ATIS reports with the number spread between temperature and dew point of two to five degrees let you know you stand a good chance of reduced visibility. Later in the day, you may notice this spread decreasing again giving you the clue there may be low clouds and fog in the evening. How important is it to remember this detail? It is not important once you have registered the trend and applied it to your situation.

The last piece of standard information will be the altimeter setting. You want to remember this setting so you can check or set your altimeter.

The airport remarks can be critical to your safety. It is important you do not tune them out. Listen for runway or taxiway closures, out of service navigation stations, anything that might effect your safety.

When we divide an ATIS report into information we use to verify our status and information we use to make important flying decision, it can be easier to use effectively.

We Verify the place and the time.

We Remember the designator, such as TANGO.

Verify the winds and plan the runway to expect.

Listen to the official visibility and ceiling. It will be most important to instrument pilots. Listen for the temperature/dew point spread for weather trends.

Remember the altimeter setting and set your instrument.

Listen for any remarks that could impact your safety.

By knowing the order of an ATIS report, we can hear it more easily. When you hear, the information becomes available to you. You can apply it and remember what is important for your safety. One more way to be prepared not to have a runway incursion.