Teaching decision-making skills has become an integral part of flight training. The word "decision" is used several times in each ACS and applicants are judged on their ability to make a decision as well as their ability to perform a task. Thus, it is important for flight instructors to remember that decision-making is a component of the ACS.

Assessing SRM Skills

A learner's performance is often assessed only on a technical level. The instructor determines whether maneuvers are technically accurate and that procedures are performed in the right order. In SRM assessment, instructors should learn to assess on a different level. How did the learner arrive at a particular decision? What resources were used? Was risk assessed accurately when a go/no-go decision was made? Did the learner maintain situational awareness in the traffic pattern? Was workload managed effectively during a cross-country flight? How does the learner handle stress and fatigue?

Instructors should continually evaluate learner decision-making ability and offer suggestions for improvement. It is not always necessary to present complex situations, which require detailed analysis. By allowing learners to make decisions about typical issues that arise throughout the course of training, such as their fitness to fly, weather conditions, and equipment problems, instructors can address effective decision-making and allow learners to develop judgment skills. For example, when a discrepancy is found during preflight inspection, the learner should be allowed to initially determine the action to be taken. Then the effectiveness of the learner's choice and other options that may be available can be discussed.

Opportunities for improving decision-making abilities occur often during training. If the tower offers the learner a runway that requires landing with a tailwind in order to expedite traffic, the learner can be directed to assess the risks involved and asked to present alternative actions to be taken. Perhaps the most frequent choice that has to be made during flight training is the go/no-go decision based on weather. While the final choice to fly lies with the instructor, learners can be asked to assess the weather prior to each flight and make a go/no-go determination.

In addition, instructors should utilize SBT to create lessons that are specifically designed to test whether learners are applying SRM skills. Planning a flight lesson in which the learner is presented with simulated emergencies, a heavy workload, or other operational problems can be valuable in assessing the learner's judgment and decision-making skills. During the flight, learner performance can be evaluated for workload and/or stress management.

SRM grades are based on these four components:

- Explain—the learner can verbally identify, describe, and understand the risks inherent in the flight scenario. The learner needs to be prompted to identify risks and make decisions.
- Practice—the learner is able to identify, understand, and apply SRM principles to the actual flight situation. Coaching, instruction, and/or assistance from the flight instructor quickly corrects minor deviations and errors identified by the flight instructor. The learner is an active decision maker.
- Manage/Decide—the learner can correctly gather the most important data available both within and outside the flight deck, identify possible courses of action, evaluate the risk inherent in each course of action, and make the appropriate decision. Instructor intervention is not required for the safe completion of the flight.
- Not Observed—any event not accomplished or required.

Postflight, collaborative assessment or learner centered grading (LCG) also discussed in Chapter 6, Assessment, is a vital component of assessing a learner's SRM skills. As a reminder, collaborative assessment includes two parts: learner self-assessment and a detailed assessment by the flight instructor. The purpose of the self-assessment is to stimulate growth in the learner's thought processes and, in turn, behaviors. The self-assessment is followed by an in-depth discussion between the flight instructor and the learner, which compares the flight instructor's assessment to the learner's self-assessment.

An important element of SRM skills assessment is that the flight instructor provides a clear picture of the progress the learner is making during the training. Grading should also be progressive. During each flight, the learner should achieve a new level of learning. For flight one, the automation management area might be a "describe" item. By flight three, it would be a "practice" item, and by flight five, a "manage-decide" item.