

Procedural Notes

An important consideration to make during your flight planning is whether or not you are able to fly your chosen departure procedure as charted.

DP Responsibilities

Responsibility for the safe execution of DPs rests on the shoulders of both ATC and the pilot. Without the interest and attention of both parties, the IFR system cannot work in harmony, and achievement of safety is impossible.

ATC, in all forms, is responsible for issuing clearances appropriate to the operations being conducted, assigning altitudes for IFR flight above the minimum IFR altitudes for a specific area of controlled airspace, ensuring the pilot has acknowledged the clearance or instructions, and ensuring the correct read back of instructions. Specifically related to departures, ATC is responsible for specifying the direction of takeoff or initial heading when necessary, obtaining pilot concurrence that the procedure complies with local traffic patterns, terrain, and obstruction clearance, and including DP as part of the ATC clearance when pilot compliance for separation is necessary.

The pilot has a number of responsibilities when simply operating in conjunction with ATC or when using DPs under an IFR clearance:

- Acknowledge receipt and understanding of an ATC clearance.
- Read back any part of a clearance that contains “hold short” instructions.
- Request clarification of clearances.
- Request an amendment to a clearance if it is unacceptable from a safety perspective.
- Promptly comply with ATC requests. Advise ATC immediately if unable to comply with a clearance.
- You are required to contact ATC if you are unable to comply with all-engines-operating climb gradients and climb rates. It is also expected that you are capable of maintaining the climb gradient outlined in either a standard or non-standard DP. If you cannot maintain a standard climb gradient or the climb gradient specified in an ODP, you must wait until you can depart under VMC.

When planning for a departure, pilots should:

- Consider the type of terrain and other obstructions in the vicinity of the airport.
- Determine if obstacle clearance can be maintained visually, or if they need to make use of a DP.

- Determine if an ODP or SID is available for the departure airport.
- Determine what actions allow for a safe departure out of an airport that does not have any type of affiliated DPs.

By simply complying with DPs in their entirety as published, obstacle clearance is guaranteed. Depending on the type of departure used, responsibility for terrain clearance and traffic separation may be shared between pilots and controllers.

Departures From Tower-Controlled Airports

Departing from a tower-controlled airport is relatively simple in comparison to departing from non-towered airport. Normally you request your IFR clearance through ground control or clearance delivery. Communication frequencies for the various controllers are listed on departure, approach, and airport charts, as well as the Chart Supplement (CS). At some airports, you may have the option of receiving a pre-taxi clearance. This program allows you to call ground control or clearance delivery no more than 10 minutes prior to beginning taxi operations and receive your IFR clearance. A pre-departure clearance (PDC) program that allows pilots to receive a clearance via data link from a dispatcher or a data link communications service provider, e.g. ARINC, is available for Part 121 and 135 operators. A clearance is given to the dispatcher, who in turn, relays it to the crew, enabling the crew to bypass communication with clearance delivery, thus reducing frequency congestion. Once you have received your clearance, it is your responsibility to comply with the instructions as given, and notify ATC if you are unable to comply with the clearance. If you do not understand the clearance, or if you think that you have missed a portion of the clearance, contact ATC immediately for clarification.

Departures From Airports Without an Operating Control Tower

There are hundreds of airports across the United States that operate successfully every day without the benefit of a control tower. While a tower is certainly beneficial when departing IFR, most other departures can be made with few challenges. As usual, you must file your flight plan at least 30 minutes in advance. During your planning phase, investigate the departure airport’s method for receiving an instrument clearance. You can contact the Flight Service Station (FSS) on the ground by telephone, and they will request your clearance from ATC. Typically, when a clearance is given in this manner, the clearance includes a void time. You must depart the airport before the clearance void time; if you fail to depart, you must contact ATC by a specified