How to Land an Airplane

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By an eHow Contributor

*Passengers rate a pilot's competence and expertise based largely on the smoothness of the landing. Pilots know this is an unfair assessment due to the complexity of flight, but practice airplane landings to increase their experience level. These steps will help you to land an airplane with a softer and smoother approach.*

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Instructions

1Determine the wind direction at the airport. You can easily check this by asking the tower controller to tell you the wind information over the radios, or by looking at the windsock on the airfield. Choose the runway most directly aligned into the wind to land with the slowest ground speed possible.

2 Look at the airspeed indicator to see at what airspeed you will fly the approach. Most light general aviation airplanes have a white arc on the airspeed indicator; the bottom of the white arc represents the airplane's configured stalling speed. Fly no faster than the high end of the white arc in the pattern, and fly your final approach 30 percent faster than the slow end of the white arc.

3 Run a "before landing" checklist, found in the aircraft manufacturer's Operating Handbook, prior to the final leg of your pattern. A good general checklist is the GUMPS (Gas, Undercarriage, Mixture, Propeller, Seat belts) check. Select the appropriate "gas" tank and turn the boost pump on, make sure your "undercarriage" or landing gear is down and locked, place the "mixture" to full rich, set the "propeller" RPM to full and make sure your "seat belts" are fastened.

4 Fly your final approach at a 3 degree glide slope, making a nice and smooth descent. Fly too steep of a descent and your passengers will feel they are plummeting to the Earth; fly too shallow of a descent and they will feel as if they are going to land short of the runway.

5 Maintain your glide slope angle by using the VASI (Visual Approach Slope Indicator) system installed along the runway. If you see a set of red lights over a set of white lights on the VASI system, you are on the proper glide slope. If the runway you are landing on doesn't have approach lights, you should be 300 feet above the ground 1 mile prior to landing.

6 Stabilize your final approach and pick a spot on the windshield, such as a dead bug, that is inline with the runway numbers. Use the controls to keep that spot on your runway aim point. As you cross the runway threshold, smoothly bring the power to idle and shift that same spot to the very end of the runway. This is called the “round out”.

7 Rotate the airplane into a flare attitude about 5 to 10 feet off the runway. In most small airplanes, do this by putting the top of the glare shield (dash) on the horizon. Hold this attitude and let the airplane smoothly settle onto the runway.