FAR 61.109 Flight Experience

In preparation for the private pilot's certificate, certain minimum flight requirements must be met. First, you must meet the basic aviation knowledge requirements found in FAR 61.107 (b)1(i-xii). These minimums specify the aeronautical knowledge required to make you an educated pilot.

The FAA requires a minimum of 40 hours total flight time to be eligible for the private certificate. This must include a minimum of 20 hours of flight training (that's time with an instructor), and 10 hours solo flight training (that's time alone in the airplane). Realistically, most people take anywhere from 45 to 70 hours of total time to obtain their certificates. This varies depending on where the training occurs. If you learn to fly in Los Angeles, for instance, you will probably need a few extra hours of preparation. L.A. is a beautiful place (during a cease fire), but it's also one of the most complicated, crowded, and communication-intensive chunks of airspace in the country.

The dual flight time must include three hours of cross country instruction and three hours of night instruction with 10 takeoffs and landings and one night cross country flight of over 100 nautical miles total distance. At least three of the 20 hours of dual time must be used in preparing you for the flight test within 60 days prior to that test. Additionally, you'll need three hours of instrument instruction (this is where the instructor clamps a plastic device to your head and limits your vision to the instrument panel).

The 10 hours of solo time must include at least three solo takeoffs and landings to a full stop at an airport with an operating control tower. Writers of the regulations are interested in exposing you to control tower operations before you get your pilot certificate. Most pilots experience a little anxiety when talking with air traffic control. Often, is seems that as soon as the microphone button is pushed, the human brain disconnects from the mouth. One instructor in Portland, Oregon told me about a student he had just introduced to the radio. The instructor said to the student, "Simply tell the controller who you are, where you are and what you want to do." The student nodded in acknowledgment, transmitted and said, "Ahhh, tower, this is 32 Bravo, Who am I? Where am I at? And, what do I want to do?" A calm came over the tower and a voice said, "Well, 32 Bravo, we give up! You stumped us!" Find solace in knowing that everyone has trouble understanding tower controllers at first, but you'll soon become used to their staccato speech and special aviation language.

A minimum of five hours of solo cross country flight time is also required for the private pilot certificate. To count as cross country flight time for this certificate, there must be a landing at an airport that's at least a *straight-line distance* of *more than* 50 nautical miles away from the *original departure airport*. In other words, there can be numerous stops between these two airports, but the distance between them must be *more than* 50 nautical miles.

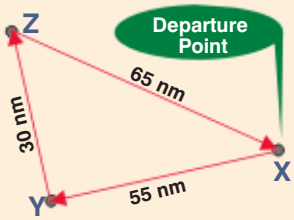
As *part* of this five hour solo cross country flight requirement, you must make one solo cross country flight that's at least *150 nautical miles* in total length. Full-stop landings are required at a minimum of three points, and one *segment* of the flight must consist of a straight-line distance of *more than* 50 nautical miles between the *takeoff* and *landing* locations. This is unofficially known as the "big cross country." Figure 24 depicts several variations of this requirement. (Note: I recommend *every* solo cross country flight have a stop more than 50nm from the original point of departure so that the cross country time is applicable toward the instrument rating and commercial pilot certificate.)

Figure 24, Example A shows a flight with landings at three different airports having a total distance of 150 nautical miles. This flight meets the "big cross country" requirement since one segment (X to Y), has a straight-line distance of more than 50 nautical miles. Figure 24, Example B also meets these requirements despite having more than three stops (you only need three but can have as many as you want as long as one segment's straight-line distance is more than 50 nautical miles). Figure 24, Example C depicts a flight not meeting the requirements of this section. Although it has a total distance of 150 nautical miles, there is no straight-line segment more than 50 nautical miles in length.

THE "BIG" 150 NAUTICAL MILE CROSS COUNTRY FLIGHT REQUIREMENT

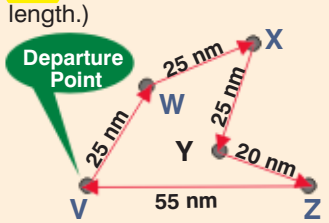
Example A

Total distance is 150 nm with 3 stops (the departure airport is considered one of the stops). One segment (X to Y) being more than 50 nautical miles between the takeoff and landing location.



Example B

Total distance is 150 nm with 5 stops and one segment (Z to V, the last segment of the flight) is more than 50 nm. (Note: you can have as many stops as you desire as long as one straight-line segment is more than 50 nautical miles in length.)



Example C

Total distance is 150 nm with 4 stops but there is no straight-line segment more than 50 nm distance between any two airports (X to Y to Z doesn't count since it's made up of two segments, not one). This flight doesn't meet the "big cross country" requirement.