

FAQ - Joining SPARKS and/or learning to fly R/C

Q. What does it take to join the Club?

A. An interest in model aircraft (planes, helicopters, multi-rotors). Some people like to build, some like to fly, some like scale planes, some like acrobatic planes, some like the electronics aspects of the hobby, etc. There are a significant number of interesting areas to be found in the hobby and being pursued at the Club. Some think flying is secondary to simply meeting others with a common interest!

Q. How much does it cost?

A. The current cost to be a member of the Club (and for the required AMA membership) is \$150 a year (SPARKS dues: \$75 + AMA membership: \$75). There is also a SPARKS lifetime initiation fee of \$50. For yearly renewals, the Club fees are discounted if you pay your dues early. Joining AMA is required by the Club as it provides liability insurance (if you are over 65 years of age, AMA membership is only \$65). Planes and radios run from a couple hundred dollars to thousands depending on size, complexity and what you want to pursue. Most people start out with trainer planes and then see what interests them as they learn to fly.

Q. Are there any shortcuts or aids to learning to fly?

A. There are a number of simulators that can be used on a computer. These are a great way to get used to flying. If you crash, you just push the reset button and you get a new virtual plane. It is much cheaper than crashing and buying a real plane. Being proficient on a simulator does not guarantee you will be able to fly right off, but it will help immensely. Flying a real model airplane is always a little different, given the site, winds and other variables real conditions introduce. RealFlight is a simulator used by many people, but there are other brands.

Q. What if I already know how to fly?

A. All new Club members must pass a proficiency flight test. There is a form that has all the requirements of the flight, but it essentially asks the pilot to land and take off, and do maneuvers that show control of the aircraft.

Q. Do I have to know how to fly to join the Club?

A. No. The Club is also a place to learn to fly. The Club has members who volunteer their time to help you learn to fly. There is no cost for that help. Until you are proficient you will be a student. After you have had a successful check out flight, you will become a full pilot. Until you become a full pilot, you are required to fly with an instructor or full pilot member.

Q. How do I learn more about the hobby, planes, helicopters, electronics, etc.?

A. There are a number of sites on the Internet devoted to almost any aspect of the hobby. RCGROUPS is a free forum that has threads on almost any subject. It has ads for buying and selling all gear and also has reviews of most planes and accompanying hobby equipment. RCUNIVERSE is another popular forum. There are others. We suggest you take a look through the sites for many answers. Of course these are forums, so you will find differing opinions on every subject, but reading through a thread will give you good information on that subject. Both above sites do not require login to just read. To contribute or ask about problems, you have to

create an account (i.e. join the forum), but it is still free. Please do take the time to use these resources.

Q. Are there any special rules?

A. There are safety rules which must be followed. There are also boundaries to where you can fly at the Club. Flying is only from dawn to dusk, due to restrictions on the land our Club is on. Specific Field Safety Rules are contained in a document posted on the Club web site, which is www.sparksc.org (note it is .org and not .com!), and on the bulletin board at the field.

Q. Where do I buy gear for this hobby?

A. Your local hobby shop can be a good source to buy gear, but the number of shops in the area is small. Many people buy their gear from online sites. Members of the Club often buy and sell each other used gear. Tower Hobbies, Horizon Hobby, Motion RC, Hobby King are just a few sites that have been around for a few years and have lots of model aircraft and associated gear. There are literally hundreds of online stores, with many specialized ones. We suggest you talk to others in the hobby to learn about the various online stores and experiences they have had.

Q. Should I buy an electric plane or a fuel plane?

A. Electric models are probably easier for beginners. If you are comfortable with fuel engines, then gas or glow models may not be an issue for you. Trainers for both types abound. There are many new functions coming out all the time to help beginners. Most of these functions help the new pilots avoid getting into difficult situations they cannot recover from.

Q. How long till I can fly by myself?

A. Some people pick up flying very fast, some people require more practice, a very few people just never seem to get the hang of it. So it is very hard to give a simple answer about how long it will take. Again, a simulator will help you get the "stick time" that it often takes to become proficient.

Q. Is it hard to fly?

A. Flying is the easiest aspect to learn. Taking off is probably the next easiest skill. Landing smoothly and on the landing strip is by far the hardest skill to master. Some planes are easier to fly than others. The speed and weight of the plane will be major factors in flying the plane. The faster and heavier the plane the more skill it takes.

Q. Where can I find more information about the Club?

A. A good place to start is the Club's website, which contains general information, forms, rules, bylaws, fees, etc. Point your web browser to www.sparksrc.org and review its contents. Next, just stop by at the field and talk to members. Most of them will be eager to give you the information you need and possibly a lot more!

If you have more questions or want to contact the Club's Officers, send email to: sparksrc1@gmail.com