

Pilot first steps

A guide for sim-pilots as member of vACC Switzerland



1. Preliminary remarks

The pilot training department (PTD) welcomes you to vACC Switzerland, the Swiss branch of the worldwide VATSIM community. You seem to have registered with vACC Switzerland as a pilot. We appreciate you becoming part of our community and we hope you will enjoy online flying as much as we do.

Online flying is certainly one of the most fascinating hobbies for air traffic enthusiasts, but definitely not the most trivial one. Learning to fly an aircraft as well as operating it safely and correctly in a realistic online environment is demanding, takes a lot of effort and hours and hours of learning and never-ending improvement of skills.

However – it is most rewarding and we are happy to see our community grow month by month through people like you, who decided to join this exciting world.

This guide is intended to help you through the first steps in order to become a skilled and experienced online pilot at the end of the day. As such you will contribute to a joyful experience for all participants, pilots and air-traffic-controllers and of course yourself. However, don't be light-minded – it will take quite some effort. Don't be disappointed neither – every big journey starts with the first step and we all have gone through this rewarding experience.

Should you face persistent obstacles on your way – feel free to ask for advice. The leaders and trainers of the **pilot-training-department** are here to help you out https://www.vacc.ch/de/f%C3%BCr_piloten/pilot_training_staff/. Nevertheless, we appreciate if you try to overcome yourself the hurdles in the first place and start addressing your questions once you have spent a little effort yourself already. This involves searching and reading.

VATSIM is a learning environment and it is ok not to know everything by the first instant. We all appreciate members who are eager to improve and to engage their best effort to avoid making mistakes a second time again.

2. Languages

Communication within vACC Switzerland is done in multiple languages. The official one is English; the vast majority of the documents are written in English. Most of our members speak one of the Swiss official languages. As such it is likely, that colleagues, trainers, mentors can be communicated to in German or French; courses and lessons are often also provided in German. When a group of people meet, we use the language **everybody** is at ease with. In many instances this may be English.

3. Overview of the document

This document consists of a number of elements, some of which will be exciting to you, some others you may consider as cumbersome or boring. Catch them all – they are relevant. The topics covered are:

- vACC Switzerland and its communication channels
- Rules and regulations
- Approved software
- Prepare for your first online flight
- The pilot training department and its offers
- How to contribute to vACC Switzerland in the future

4. vACC Switzerland and its communication channels

vACC Switzerland is operated through 7 departments, each one run by a leader and its deputy. Selected members support the leaders in managing the duties. The departments cover topics like membership, ATC Training, Pilot skills improvement, documentation and procedures, communication and events and finally information-technology.

Members of vACC Switzerland communicate through a number of channels. Although there might be a preference by each member to use his/her preferred channel, we ask to use the channels depending on their purpose.

4. A. Webpage (<https://www.vacc.ch/en/home/>)

On the webpage you shall find information regarding actual activities, members and the basic knowledge required.

4. B. Forum/Board (<https://forum.vacc.ch/>)

In the forum are posts of useful information sorted into categories. The forum posts are persistent and can be reviewed again at any time.

4. C. Discord (<https://discord.vacc.ch/>)

Our discord channel is meant for casual interaction among members. Most of our members, when being active online are also online on discord at this very moment. You can post in different channels and send direct messages. Discord shall not be used for information of permanent relevance, as most posts are simply in sequence of issuing and will disappear from the visible part of your screen after very soon.

4. D. E-Mail (https://www.vacc.ch/en/about_vACC-Switzerland/contact/)

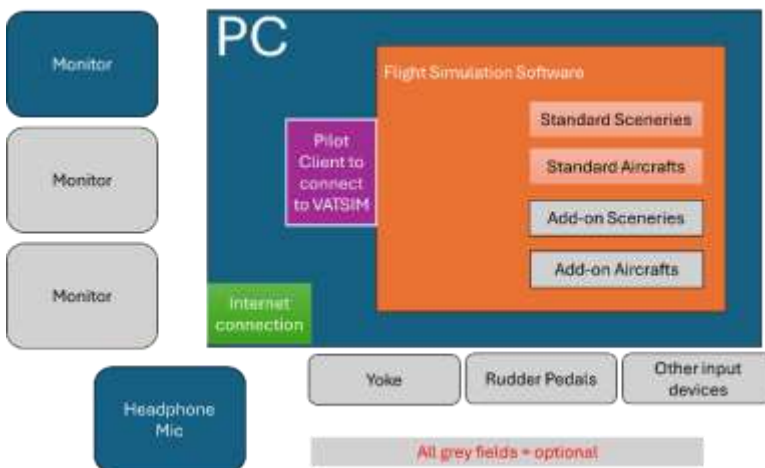
Staff members and departments can be reached via e-mail. The addresses are on the webpage.

5. Rules and regulations

VATSIM unifies some 140'000 active members worldwide. Such a vast network needs some rules and regulations. Without listing them all here, have a look at the inventory at VATSIM's code of conduct. Other policies may be found at the same place.

<https://vatsim.net/docs/policy/code-of-conduct>

6. Approved software



Air traffic simulation needs the following minimum equipment:

- PC with monitor
- Flight simulator software
- Pilot client
- Internet connection
- Headphones and Microphone

6. A. PC

The PC should be powerful enough to provide a frame rate of >25 frames per second. If you have already a PC, try it out first before buying a new one. Bear in mind, that re-installing a complete flight simulation environment on a new PC may take several hours of work.

6. B. Flight simulator

There are a number of flight simulators available on the market. It is not our intention to give recommendations on which one is the best. Even within our community opinions differ significantly. The most used simulators are:

- MSFS 2020
- MSFS 2024
- X-Plane
- Prepar3D

6. C. Pilot client

The pilot client connects your flight simulator to the VATSIM network. It thereby transfers voice and text as well as location and vector data among the online ATC's and aircrafts on the network. The approved pilot clients ([Approved Software](#)) actually are:

- [vPilot](#) for FSX/P3D, and MSFS
- [xPilot](#) for X-Plane
- [swift](#) for X-Plane, FSX, P3D and FlightGear

6. D. Internet connection

Depending on the type of flight simulator you use, the bandwidth requirement of your internet connection varies. Check with the instructions of your software.

7. Prepare for your first online flight

7. A. VATSIM is a learning environment

In real life pilots as well as ATCO's (air traffic controllers) undergo an extensive amount of training, topped with frequent skill tests in order to be ready to execute their challenging duties successfully and error free. Additionally, after graduating, they fulfil the job under the supervision of an expert for a period of time.

In VATSIM the same applies to ATCOS, although their amount of training is a bit less extensive than in real life. Nevertheless, ATCOS spend a significant amount of their free time in making themselves fit to serve pilots and create an environment, where everybody can enjoy this fascinating hobby.

For pilots in VATSIM things are quite different. There is almost no formal training and skill tests required before you start flying online. The purpose of VATSIM is to learn while doing. However, let us point out clearly, there are limits to the apparent freedom of this principle.

I am happy to list some requirements any pilot should be able to fulfil, before starting to fly online. Don't forget, your simulator does not have to be connected to VATSIM all the time. There is the possibility for you to fly offline and train yourself, without being confronted to a realistic simulation environment, where everybody (ATCOS and fellow pilots) depends on you being skilled enough to be part of a joyful environment for everybody.

7. B. Personal and Flying skills required

Required flying skills when flying IFR ([VATSIM Pilot Basics](#)). As a pilot you must be able to:

- fly your aircraft permanently within the safety limits of the flight envelope (<https://skybrary.aero/articles/flight-envelope>)
- fly a heading according to instructions by ATC
- change your flight level and maintain the new one
- adhere to a specific speed instructed or to inform ATC if you were not able to maintain the requested speed
- any SIDs, STARs and transitions correctly and according to charts adhering to the restrictions published (speed and/or altitudes)
- fly a holding according to its published parameters
- with ATC using the correct phraseology
- execute instructions from ATC within seconds!!

Personal skills:

- stay attentive all the time and immediately identify radio calls, which are directed to you
- understand and read back instructions to you and execute them immediately
- never leave the cockpit without permission from ATC. Don't request anything longer than 5 minutes (a biological break is ok, grabbing a coffee is ok, a full dinner will not fit into 5 minutes) – ATC needs you to comply with their instructions to avoid conflicts with other planes
- be sure you understand ATC instructions correctly, therefore we suggest
 - o to permanently consider, what may come next from ATC
 - o to study the charts carefully, also when in the air and maintain your situational awareness all the time ([Situational Awareness | SKYbrary Aviation Safety](#))
 - o to ask for repeating a message if you have doubts of its meaning ("say again")

It is obvious that junior pilots will struggle with some of these requirements in the beginning. This is how you can make your life easier:

- Practice your flying skills in offline mode until you reach a level, where you feel comfortable and are permanently "ahead of your plane"
- Don't start flying online at a busy airport or one with complex layout and procedures
- Chose a quiet airport, put your plane on a remote stand and do nothing else than listen to the frequencies, trying to understand the messages and the readbacks.

7. C. Let ATC understand that you are new

When you feel ready, start flying online. To indicate your stage of juniority, put "new to VATSIM" into the remark section of your flight plan.

When initiating a radio call with an ATCO, you can add the word "student" prior to your callsign, but only once per station on the first transmission

GENEVA APRON, STUDENT SWR78HJ, REQUEST PUSH AND START

Always keep in mind:

- being junior is a privilege VATSIM offers to its pilots
- being junior allows for learning on the job and making one or the other mistake if not avoidable
- but being junior is not a free-pass to be poorly prepared, insufficiently trained, unfriendly, ignorant or excessively demanding

7. D. Simulation parameters

In a simulation, where several participants share the same virtual environment, it is important that some parameters are set consistently equal by all aircrafts on the network, in order to avoid traffic conflicts and misunderstandings. In VATSIM the following parameters have to be used:

- Real-life weather conditions at present position
- Real-life actual barometric pressure at present position
- Real-time simulation rate (never use faster or slower simulation rate)

8. The pilot-training-department and its offers

The Pilot-Training-Department (PTD) of vACC Switzerland offers a range of useful information for junior and seasoned pilots. Specifically our monthly bulletin (pilot tips and tricks) enjoys high attention by airmen, who strive to permanently improve their skills. (https://www.vacc.ch/en/for_pilots/pilot_docs/). Have a look and continue learning!

On the practical side, we offer check-flights on a one-to-one or one-to-few basis, where pilots can train a specific topic while a trainer looks over their shoulder and is ready to offer hints or useful information. https://www.vacc.ch/en/TMSv2/-_lesson_requests/ - choose "pilot check ride"

We no longer offer neither basic trainings, with the aim for pilots to learn how to fly and how to operate their aircraft, nor courses to obtain a VATSIM pilot rating (P1-P4). The vast majority of pilots does the basic training in self-study/self-training considering this as an essential part of the fascination of our hobby. The internet is full of tutorial documents and videos. Pilot

ratings are offered by a number of ATO's (approved training organisation). Have a look at them, should you be interested. <https://prams.vatsim.net/atos>

Pilot Training Department of vACC Switzerland	
- on the website	https://www.vacc.ch/en/for_pilots/
- on our forum	https://forum.vacc.ch/forums/106-Pilots
- on discord (pilot questions)	https://discord.com/channels/760583811548577812/1282687292955426827
- by email	pilot-td@vacc.ch
- first steps document	https://www.vacc.ch/file/484

9. How to contribute to vACC Switzerland in the future

Your most important participation can start as of today – come and fly to/from our Swiss airports and contribute to create a vivid environment for yourself and our ATCO's - as often as you can make it.

Join our discussions on discord and in the forum. Provide your view or ask your questions; other members will most likely know how to answer.

Take part in our social events. In addition to the yearly vACC weekend we meet physically every now and then for a casual dinner in various towns in Switzerland. Details can be found in the forum (<https://forum.vacc.ch/forums/93-RL-Events-Stammtische>).

Make yourself available to become a member in one of the departments. As mentioned before, the departments of vACC Switzerland are underpinned by members, who are willing and able to support their duties with some hands-on support. After a first period with vACC Switzerland you may feel motivated to do so as well. You can always get in touch with the department leaders in order to understand, what support they are looking for. Or sit down and sketch your own proposal, on how you would like to help the community to develop.

Whatever your ambitions may be, we would like to close this document in wishing you always joyful hours among the members of vACC Switzerland and we are happy to meet you on the frequencies or personally at one or the other get together.

Pilot-Training-Department

vACC Switzerland

Version	Issue date	Status	Edited by	Function
Revision 0.4	18 march 2025	Final draft	Hans Peter Baumgartner	Leader PTD
Revision 1.0	20 march 2025	Published	Hans Peter Baumgartner	Leader PTD