

# Dream Jobs: Airline pilot

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Captain Karen Stahl flies planes for United Airlines. She is pictured here in the cockpit of a plane, ready for flight! Photo from: Karen Stahl.

Karen Stahl is a pilot at United Airlines. She flies Boeing 767 and 757 airplanes all over the world. Captain Stahl first started flying in 1986 and was hired as a pilot for United in 1995. Her two favorite places to fly are Paris and Hawaii.

Newsela asked Captain Stahl a few questions about her work.



### **How did you end up becoming a pilot?**

When I was growing up, my stepdad was a pilot with American Airlines. I remember seeing that he was home a lot, he traveled, he did something interesting and he made good money. There were many things about his job that intrigued me, but I never really thought about flying until I was in college. I thought about what I wanted in a job. I knew what I didn't want. I didn't

want a routine, and I didn't want to work in an office. I started narrowing it down and realized I was describing my stepdad's job. I came home from college that summer and started flying lessons.

### **What is an ordinary day like for you?**

As a pilot, my day starts way before I get on the plane. The pilots meet an hour or more before the flight to discuss the flight plan. We used to carry a fat bag of plane manuals around, but now all the information is on an iPad, which is pretty amazing! We also have information about the weather, the plane we're going to fly that day and the route.

If the flight is in the United States, there are usually two pilots. If we're flying to another country, there are one or two extra pilots. Overseas flights are long, so we take turns resting. When we get to the plane, we split up. One pilot walks around the outside of the plane to check things out, while the other sets up the computer and prepares for the flight. We talk to air traffic control and the flight attendants.

When we're ready to go, airport workers hook us up to a tug underneath the plane and push us back from the gate. Then, we taxi out to the runway for takeoff and fly to where we're going. We land, taxi in and pull up to the gate. We stay at a hotel and get a good night's rest for the next day.

### **What type of training do you need to become a pilot?**

There are two ways to become a pilot. You can either be trained in the military or as a civilian. As a civilian, you get your flight hours outside the military. You start out flying small planes and progressively move up to bigger ones. With each plane, you take flight classes, fly and train. To earn your license, you have to take exams in the plane and on the ground. Almost all the pilots at major airlines have a college degree, too.

### **What is it like in the cockpit?**

It depends on the size of the plane! Some planes have very small spaces and some have roomier flight decks.



## Do pilots get to take breaks when they're up in the air?

It depends on the length of the flight. If you're flying to a faraway place like India, you get more breaks because there are more pilots. If you're flying somewhere close, there are fewer pilots so you get fewer breaks.

**What is your favorite part of the job?**

I have great co-workers, I love traveling and I have a beautiful office view!

**Have you ever been in an emergency situation where you had to keep your wits about you?**

Yes, but that is where flight training comes in. United Airlines uses simulators to keep pilots sharp and prepared for emergencies. The simulators put pilots in all types of scenarios — equipment failures, terrible weather and other possible emergencies. It is so realistic that you feel like the emergency is happening right then. So, when things happen in real life, you're ready for it.

**What advice would you give kids about choosing a career?**

If you're interested in a particular job, take little steps in that direction every day. Visit an area airport if you want to be a pilot. Get to know the people there. Sign up for pilot ground school at a community college. When you start working toward your goal, doors will open that you didn't even know were there.

You don't have to be the smartest kid to be a pilot. The main thing is to work hard and be tenacious. That's true of almost anything, not just piloting!

## Quiz

1 One MAIN idea of the article is that teamwork is an important skill for pilots.

What is another MAIN idea of the article?

- (A) Pilots get to use iPads and other technology.
- (B) Hard work can help you fulfill your dreams.
- (C) Pilots have a great office view from the plane.
- (D) Pilots take fewer breaks when they fly shorter trips.

2 Read the sentences below summarizing the MAIN ideas of the article.

*Karen Stahl became a pilot when she realized she was interested in that kind of lifestyle. She travels a lot, has plenty of training experiences and gets along well with other pilots.*

Which answer choice would BEST complete the summary?

- (A) She had to work hard and not give up to achieve this goal.
- (B) She has to take breaks on longer flights.
- (C) She has had training in how to handle an emergency, too.
- (D) Flight manuals used to be printed on paper, but now she uses her iPad.

3 Why did Karen Stahl decide to take flying lessons?

- (A) She wanted to be able to travel a lot without paying for plane tickets.
- (B) She didn't want to take any more college classes so she learned to fly.
- (C) She wanted to be able to use an iPad at work every day.
- (D) She realized she was interested in the kind of job her stepdad had.

4 According to the section "What advice would you give kids about choosing a career?" how should kids begin working toward their dream job?

- (A) They should sign up for classes at a community college.
- (B) They should visit an airport and become a pilot.
- (C) They should do small things that will help them get their dream job.
- (D) They should study to become the smartest kid.