



The 6-Month **ATPL** Study Plan

A pilot-to-pilot guide to passing the EASA ATPL theory exams, built around retention instead of one-pass completion.

Inside: the study method that actually sticks, a week-by-week rhythm, a realistic six-month map, and a straight-talking breakdown of every subject, what each one is really testing, where people lose marks, and how to attack it.

Every subject

Weekly rhythm

Retention-first

Exam-day tactics

A free guide from SkyStudy · skystudyatpl.com

How to use this plan

The ATPL syllabus is large, so the people who pass are rarely the ones who study hardest for one week. They are the ones who keep returning and protect what they have already learned. This plan gives you a repeatable weekly rhythm so earlier subjects do not fade while later ones are still being added.

Six months is a realistic pace for steady part-time study. If you have more or less time, keep the structure and stretch or compress the blocks. The exact dates matter far less than the habit. Two non-negotiables: practise questions from day one, and review old subjects every week.

The principle

New learning plus short, frequent review. Every week pairs one main subject with quick retrieval practice on the subjects you finished earlier, so nothing goes stale.

The trap to avoid

Finishing a subject once and never revisiting it. By exam week it has faded, and relearning from cold costs far more time than a few minutes of weekly review would have.

Why this works: how memory actually sticks

You do not need theory for the sake of it, but four ideas decide whether six months of effort survives to exam day. Build your week around them.

1. Active recall beats re-reading

Re-reading notes feels productive and mostly is not. Forcing your brain to retrieve an answer, by doing questions or covering the page and explaining it from memory, is what builds durable recall. If you can only do one thing, do questions.

2. Spaced repetition fights forgetting

You forget fastest right after learning. Reviewing on a widening schedule, roughly a day later, then a few days, then a week, then a few weeks, then a month, resets the forgetting curve each time for very little effort. A spaced-repetition tool does this scheduling for you so you only review what you are about to forget.

3. Interleaving beats blocking

Studying one subject for days straight feels smooth but transfers poorly. Mixing a few subjects across the week is harder in the moment and far better for retention and for telling similar topics apart.

4. Your wrong answers are the syllabus

Every question you get wrong is a precise instruction about what to study next. Keep a running list of weak topics and let it, not the calendar, decide your weak-area sessions.

The subjects: what each is really testing

A straight-talking map of every subject: what it tests, where students lose marks, and how to attack it.
Heavier-maths subjects (031, 032, 033, 061) reward early, repeated practice, do not leave them until the end.

Subject	What it really tests	Where marks are lost	How to attack it
010 Air Law	Recall of rules, definitions, ICAO annexes, airspace and light signals.	Sheer volume; confusing similar limits and definitions.	Short, frequent recall and flashcards. Do not cram; spread it across all six months.
021 Airframe, Systems & Power Plant	How aircraft systems work and fail: hydraulics, electrics, pressurisation, fuel, ice protection, engines.	Breadth; memorising facts without understanding the system.	Learn each system as a story of normal operation then failure. Understanding makes the facts stick.
022 Instrumentation	Pitot-static, gyros, compass behaviour, EFIS, autoflight and FMS.	Compass turning and acceleration errors; instrument error logic.	Master the error rules cold and sketch the diagrams. Pairs naturally with 081 and 062.
031 Mass & Balance	Centre-of-gravity calculations, load sheets and the CG envelope.	Arithmetic slips, unit mix-ups, and mis-read moments.	Adopt one fixed method for every problem and drill it. Speed and accuracy come from reps.
032 Performance	Take-off, climb, cruise and landing performance, plus the V-speeds and segments.	Chart and graph reading under time pressure; definitions.	Drill graph interpolation until it is automatic and learn the definitions word-perfect.
033 Flight Planning & Monitoring	Fuel planning, route and chart work, and the integrated flight plan.	Long multi-step problems and running out of time.	Practise complete problems end to end, not fragments. Timed reps build the speed you need.
040 Human Performance & Limitations	Physiology, perception, health, and decision-making.	Underestimating it because it "reads easy"; precise thresholds.	Respect it and learn the specific facts. It is high-yield for the time it takes.
050 Meteorology	The atmosphere, pressure systems, icing, thunderstorms, climatology and chart reading.	Breadth and chart-interpretation questions.	Build one mental model of the atmosphere, then hang detail on it. Use the free SkyStudy weather decoders to read real charts.
061 General Navigation	The triangle of velocities, chart projections, plotting and time/distance maths.	Arithmetic and plotting errors; nav-computer fumbles.	Own the nav computer and the triangle early, then plot until it is fast and clean.
062 Radio Navigation	VOR, DME, ILS, ADF, GNSS and radar: principles, coverage	Coverage and error detail; RMI and ADF	Understand each aid's principle and limits, then

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	and errors.	bearing interpretation.	practise bearing problems. Builds on 061.
070 Operational Procedures	Operations, dangerous goods, fire, security, contamination and low-visibility ops.	Rote operational detail that fades quickly.	Spaced recall, and link it to Air Law (010), they reinforce each other.
081 Principles of Flight	Aerodynamics: lift and drag, stability, high-speed flight and limitations.	Conceptual depth, plus some maths and graph work.	Build genuine understanding of the forces; do not just memorise curves. Underpins 022 and 032.
091 Communications (VFR)	Standard radiotelephony phraseology and VFR procedures.	Imprecise phraseology and procedure order.	Short, frequent practice. Learn it alongside 092.
092 Communications (IFR)	IFR radiotelephony, clearances and emergency communications.	Phraseology under pressure and procedure sequencing.	Practise with 091 so the two reinforce each other.

Your weekly template

Repeat this shape every week and just change which subject is the main block. Aim for consistency over volume: four focused hours beat eight distracted ones.

Block	What you do
Main study (60%)	Learn new theory for this week's primary subject, then immediately practise questions on what you just read. Read, then test.
Retention (25%)	Short question sets on older subjects. Let a spaced-repetition tool surface what you are about to forget rather than guessing.
Weak-area fix (10%)	Revisit the specific topics your wrong answers exposed this week, not whole subjects you already know.
Review & plan (5%)	Five minutes at week's end: note weak topics and choose next week's primary subject.

A sample week (about 15 hours)

Day	Time	Focus
Mon	2.0 h	New theory, primary subject
Tue	2.0 h	Primary-subject questions + 15 min review of an old subject
Wed	2.0 h	New theory, primary subject
Thu	2.0 h	Primary-subject questions + spaced-repetition review
Fri	1.5 h	Weak-area fix from this week's wrong answers
Sat	3.0 h	Mixed review across older subjects (interleaving)
Sun	2.5 h	Longer practice set or, later on, a timed mock + 5 min planning

Tip: question practice is not just a test. Every wrong answer tells you exactly what to review next, which is far more useful than re-reading notes you already understand.

The 6-month outline

A suggested order. Subjects that reinforce each other are paired, and the review load grows as more subjects come online. Adjust to your own strengths, but keep the maths subjects early.

Month	Primary focus	Running retention
Month 1	010 Air Law, then 070 Operational Procedures	Light: review Air Law while learning Ops.
Month 2	081 Principles of Flight, 040 Human Performance	Weekly question sets on 010 and 070.
Month 3	021 Airframe & Systems, 022 Instrumentation	Rotate 010 / 070 / 081 / 040.
Month 4	061 General Navigation, 050 Meteorology	Keep earlier subjects warm; start light single-subject mocks.
Month 5	062 Radio Navigation, 031 Mass & Balance, 032 Performance	Heavier retention; full timed mocks on finished subjects.
Month 6	033 Flight Planning, 091/092 Communications, exam polish	Mostly mock exams and weak-area targeting across the full set.

Mock exams: when and how

Timed mock exams are most useful once a subject is stable enough that pacing pressure teaches you something, usually from around month 4. Used too early they mostly measure what you have not learned yet. Used at the right time they build exam stamina, expose careless errors and calibrate your timing.

- Start with single-subject timed sets on subjects you have finished.
- Move to mixed, full-length mocks in the final six to eight weeks.
- Review every wrong answer the same day, while the reasoning is fresh.
- Treat a mock as a diagnosis, not a grade: the value is in what it reveals.

Exam-day tactics

- **You need 75% to pass each subject.** Aim comfortably above it in practice so a bad day still clears.
- **Watch your pace.** Know roughly how long you can spend per question and stick to it; do not let two hard questions eat the time for ten easy ones.
- **Flag and move on.** Mark anything slow, bank all the easy marks first, then return to the flagged ones.
- **Answer everything.** EASA ATPL exams are not negatively marked, so never leave a question blank, make your best choice.
- **Read the whole question.** Many wrong answers are right answers to a slightly different question. Watch units, "except"/"not", and limits.
- **Do not second-guess.** Change an answer only if you have a concrete reason, not a vague feeling.

Plan your exam window early. Once you start, you have a limited time window, a limited number of sittings, and a limited number of attempts per subject. These are set by regulation, so confirm the current figures and the order you are allowed to sit exams with your ATO before you book, and sequence your subjects to fit them.

Why ATPL study plans fail (and the fix)

The failure	The fix
Studying for completion, never reviewing old subjects.	Bake weekly retention into every week from month one.
Treating every subject as equal in time and difficulty.	Give the maths-heavy subjects more reps and start them early.
Memorising mock answers instead of understanding them.	Read the explanation for every wrong answer; learn the why.
Re-reading notes and calling it studying.	Switch to active recall: questions and explain-from-memory.
No rhythm, so motivation runs the schedule.	Use the fixed weekly template; show up even on low-energy days.

Monthly checkpoints

At the end of each month, you should be able to tick these:

- ☐ **Month 1:** Air Law and Ops first pass done; daily-ish recall habit established.
- ☐ **Month 2:** Principles of Flight and Human Performance covered; weekly review of month 1 subjects running.
- ☐ **Month 3:** Systems and Instrumentation covered; comfortable with compass and instrument errors.
- ☐ **Month 4:** General Navigation and Meteorology covered; nav maths fast; first timed sets started.
- ☐ **Month 5:** Radio Nav, Mass & Balance and Performance covered; full mocks underway on finished subjects.
- ☐ **Month 6:** Flight Planning and Comms done; scoring consistently above 75% on mixed mocks across the full set.

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