

## ***Training Tip***

### **Area Forecasts**

One of the most common questions on practical tests is what forecasts an applicant should use when determining the weather at an intended destination. In most cases, the first answers to come up are the terminal aerodrome forecast (TAF) and the aviation routine weather report (METAR - which, of course, technically isn't a forecast).

But if there's no TAF for the airport the applicant intends to go to, his choice isn't as clear-cut. Often, he'll mention that he'll use the "nearest TAF," but these products are only valid for a certain geographic area, and the "nearest" may be more than 100 miles away. With that bit of information, he may draw a blank stare. He's forgotten about the area forecast.

Valid over specific areas of the country, a region, or a specific section of a state, the area forecast is the product we use to get weather forecasts for airports that don't have a specific forecast for them. This covers the majority of the airports general aviation pilots use.

While they're less specific in nature than a TAF that covers a specific airport, they can provide good information for both visual flight rules and instrument flight rules (IFR) flight. For IFR flights, it may be the only product that gives us information to determine if we need an alternate airport while filing a flight plan or if an airport can be used as an alternate airport at all. The area forecast is one of the few places we can use to get forecasted cloud-top information, too.

Help your students remember that the area forecast is a useful tool in their weather decision-making. It's commonly missed, and during a checkride, it may be an important tool to figuring out other answers to what your student's examiner is asking.

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