

Code of Conduct

This document has been produced in response to occasional situations where Pilot members have disagreed with, or been frustrated by VATSIM controllers' actions. If not handled properly, such disagreements can develop into more serious arguments. It is worth setting out the situation that exists in the online world, in order to better understand how important it is to conduct yourself professionally on line.

Age and Experience

Flight Simulation on line differs from real world experience, but it is all too easy to forget this fact in our enthusiasm to "do it properly". It is not a job, it's a game at its simplest, and is marketed as such by Microsoft. We the players have elevated it to hobby status by adding more and more elements of real world aviation practice such flying in accordance with real world aviation law, and in having created the parallel hobby of Air Traffic Control, and so on. We try to make it "as real as it gets" but it falls short of reality because ultimately there is no responsibility involved. There is always an easy way out if the pressure gets too much to handle. You simply disconnect and switch off, without any real responsibility to others on line.

Both pilot members and VATSIM controllers have a very wide range of age and experience. Club members and VATSIM controllers may be complete novices, or may be real world pilots or ATCOs. They may be 15 or almost 90 years old. Although we live in an age where youth is seen as a Holy Grail, not for nothing do the Chinese venerate the elderly. With age comes wisdom as well as experience.

Aviation, real or virtual, operates at a more measured, disciplined pace than, say, football. You may regularly see young members overflowing with enthusiasm whose energy exceeds their knowledge, and which results in some unorthodox actions. These are balanced, often very successfully, by older members with greater knowledge but less energy, who patiently show the younger members how things should *really* be done. At the same time, the energy of the young infuses the older members and helps to keep them interested in the hobby. There are not too many clubs or hobbies where members under 16 and over 80 happily and productively co-exist. However, every so often the balance is upset, and this is where problems can arise.

Controller and Pilot Qualifications

All VATSIM controllers have to pass exams under experienced instructors, but these exams are taken in and only relate to the simulation situation. They are a bit like the real world driving test - if you pass you are qualified to continue learning and gaining experience by yourself. As the controller gains experience, the exams get harder.

In contrast, there are no exams for pilots. This means that even a novice controller has more knowledge about what he is doing than does a novice pilot who, when he



VFR Club

first starts out on the on line path, may not even know that there is such a thing as controlled airspace. You can buy flight simulator, join Vatsim, and go on line flying a Boeing 747.

Human nature being what it is, being an on line Air Traffic Controller or the pilot of a virtual 747 inbound to Heathrow gives one a sense of power. With power comes responsibility in the real world, but on VATSIM that may not be the case.

Sometimes controllers may appear to be overly officious, or may forget what they learned before passing their exam, or seem to act irresponsibly. Sometimes pilots will place their aircraft in totally unrealistic situations. This can cause problems for other people, especially if there is a large experience gap between pilot and controller.

Doing things in the simulated airspace environment differently from the way they are done in the real world is not necessarily wrong. It may be that some things are better done differently, especially because the traffic levels are rarely anywhere near the same.

Technicalities

There are known to be network delays which cause views of any situation to be different to each player. Experience in the 2-4-CIX team with formation flying has shown that two pilots claiming to be close behind a third, may both see each other as half a mile behind. Similar discrepancies will be seen between pilots and controllers.

Both pilots and controllers can suddenly “disappear” due to a computer crash, software or connection problems. If this happens, the disconnected player has no way of informing the system that this has happened, and reconnections are by no means rapid. Flight Simulator can take over 10 minutes to load on a slow machine.

VFR Flights

VFR flights on VATSIM are still very much in the minority. Most of the controller training relates to the more popular IFR flights. Many controllers seem to be uneasy about anything other than normal VFR circuits since that is largely the sum total of their VFR training. Many of them struggle with the procedures for zone entries and departures, nor know the differences between a Flight Information Service (FIS), a Radar Information Service (RIS) or a Radar Advisory Service (RAS). As a consequence, Club members may know more about the correct procedures in a situation than the controller they are working, another potential cause of tension.

Code of Conduct

As a result of all the above situations, Club members are encouraged to adopt the following guidelines when flying on line. Doing so will enhance your reputation as a pilot, and also enhance the Club's already good reputation on VATSIM for being a highly responsible body which tries to behave professionally while having as much fun as possible.



VFR Club

- 1) Although it is not a requirement in the real world to file a flight plan for VFR flights, it is a VATSIM requirement, and Club members should always do so. There are benefits for Club members in that
 - a) for a flight to qualify as a Club Flight, a flight plan must be filed (see Club Rule 8)
 - b) Members can only file a Pilot Report (PIREP) in the Club PIREP system if they have complied with Club Rule 8)
- 2) As a pilot on VATSIM, if you are told to do something that you feel is wrong, you are allowed to query it. If the response is to confirm the instruction, you should comply, even if you know it would be wrong in the real world. Only if it puts you in immediate danger of conflict with another aircraft should you take avoiding action and then make an “unable to comply” call. In the real world the phrase used for pilot guidance in difficult situations is: - *Aviate, Navigate, Communicate*.
- 3) Remember that the most serious offence on VATSIM is being abusive, and disrupting other peoples’ enjoyment. Don’t start a slanging match on line - it could lead to you yourself being banned, and ultimately it is you who looks silly.
- 4) When you have a problem with someone else’s behaviour, remember the situations outlined above. The controller may be new and inexperienced, or out of practice. He may be young, and the power of his position may distort his judgement. So above all be patient. Be very patient.
- 5) You may come across a controller who is an active or a retired real world controller and you might feel overawed if you are inexperienced. If you feel intimidated, send him a private message explaining that you are a new pilot and would appreciate it if he gave simple instructions clearly, and one at a time as much as possible. (Many controllers “gabble” and rattle off long strings of instructions which they think sounds professional, but which truly does not happen in the real world). Do not be frightened to say “Say again more slowly please”; more than once if necessary.
- 6) If you feel you are getting a raw deal in spite of your attempts to simplify or clarify the situation, then try to resolve the matter by making a constructive comment. It is probably not wise to explain what is done in the real world on the air, and it wouldn’t conform to the approved ATC phraseology in CAP 413 either, but you can certainly do so by private text message. In other words, to use the old phrase, “Don’t wash your dirty linen in public”.
- 7) If ultimately you do feel the need to make a complaint, you must collect as much evidence as possible. Make notes of what happened and when, with names of others who witnessed the problem, and who could support your case. You would need to make a clear case that it happens often enough to be beyond coincidence and that there may be an underlying problem. You would need to convince the VATSIM staff that it is not just a personality clash.