

These pages were excerpted from:

IFR Communications

A Pilot-Friendly[®] Manual



Master IFR Radio Communications with this Simple Guide

Click anywhere on this page to see the complete manual.

Receive a Clearance for a Visual Approach

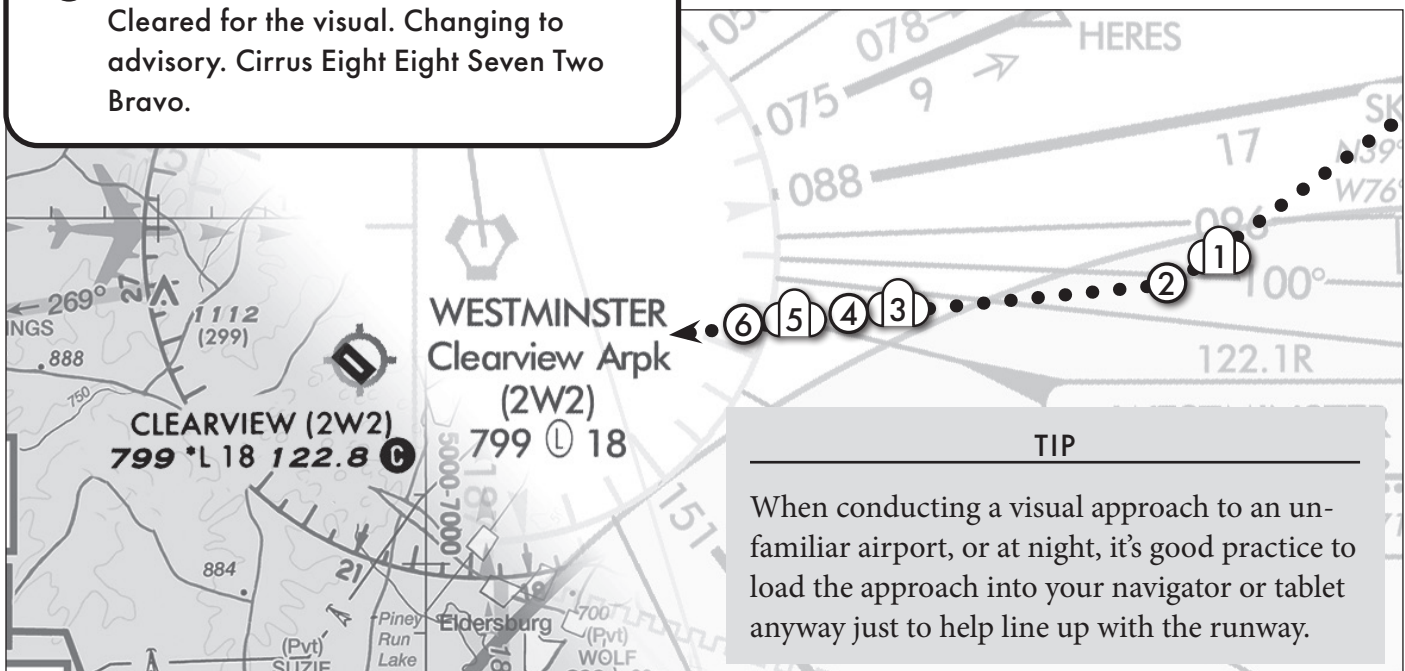
- ① APPROACH CONTROLLER
Cirrus Eight Eight Seven Two Bravo, turn right heading two seven zero, vectors for the visual approach to Clearview Airpark.
- ② PILOT
Right two seven zero. Cirrus Eight Eight Seven Two Bravo.
- ③ APPROACH CONTROLLER
Cirrus Eight Eight Seven Two Bravo, Clearview is at twelve o'clock, one five miles. Report the airport in sight.
- ④ PILOT
We have the airport in sight. Cirrus Eight Eight Seven Two Bravo.
- ⑤ APPROACH CONTROLLER
Cirrus Eight Eight Seven Two Bravo, cleared visual approach to Clearview Airpark. Weather information not available. Report cancellation of IFR on this frequency or on the ground. Change to advisory approved.
- ⑥ PILOT
Cleared for the visual. Changing to advisory. Cirrus Eight Eight Seven Two Bravo.

Because travel under IFR often happens on crystal clear days, many IFR flights end with a visual approach. The “visual” is authorization to proceed to the airport visually, with the exact route and altitude at your discretion. Therefore, a visual approach is not an instrument approach—and there’s no missed approach segment. However, you’re still on an active IFR flight plan.

To be cleared for a visual approach, the reported weather must meet VFR minimums: ceiling at least 1000 feet AGL and visibility three miles or greater. You must report having either the airport or the preceding inbound aircraft in sight. You may request the visual when these conditions exist. An alternative is requesting a Contact Approach (page 100).

ATC may also clear you for a visual approach even if you didn’t request it, once you report the airport in sight. You can even start with a clearance for a published approach, get the airport in sight, and request a clearance for a visual approach instead. Once granted, the clearance for a visual approach frees you from lateral and vertical guidance restrictions (stepdowns) from the published approach—but now you’re responsible for obstacle avoidance.

Clearview Airpark Airport (2W2)
Westminster, MD
Potomac Approach 125.52



NO PUBLISHED APPROACH = NO MISSED APPROACH PROCEDURE

Whenever you request or accept a visual approach, you accept an ambiguity: There's no missed approach segment so if you can't land ... now what?

The simple solution is entering a traffic pattern to return for a normal landing. At a towered airport, that's presumably what Tower will tell you to do. At a non-towered airport, you'd simply announce the move yourself. In the latter case, you'd best have a plan beforehand which way you'll turn to enter that pattern. It's easy to plan for an IFR arrival and skip basic VFR items about the airport such as traffic patterns.

The issue is more complicated if you can't land at that airport, say for a disabled aircraft on the runway. In this case, you have a choice to initiate a true missed approach or proceed visually to another airport.

If you decide to go missed approach at a towered airport, tell Tower your intentions as you clean up and climb. The controller should send you back to Departure, usually with an altitude and heading to fly. You're still IFR, which technically gives you permission to go back into the clouds, but you'll want to get on radar with instructions ASAP. At a non-towered airport, climb and get back in touch with ATC right away.

If you choose to proceed visually, remember that you're still IFR and ATC is waiting for your cancellation. A tower can do this for you, but at non-towered airports, you must contact ATC and cancel IFR yourself.

A complete briefing includes the missed approach—which changes the moment you accept a visual approach.

ATC can vector you for a visual approach ①, however, the weather must be even better. The reported ceiling must be at least 500 feet above the MVA/MIA, with at least three miles visibility. If the destination airport has no weather reporting service, the controller must be reasonably sure that you can descend and fly to the airport visually, and must inform you that weather information is not available.

To help you spot the airport, the controller will give you its bearing and distance from you ③. If there are other airports in close proximity, the controller will point them out to avoid confusion.

At a towered airport, the clearance will include the runway number:

[Call sign], cleared visual approach Runway [Runway number]. [Restrictions (if applicable)].

When told to contact Tower (page 103), you would do so as when flying a published instrument approach, except that you would state you were "On the visual Runway [number]." Tower would observe your landing and cancel your IFR flight plan.

At a non-towered airport, like 2W2, the runway choice is yours:

[Call sign], cleared visual approach to [Airport name], [Required remarks (if applicable)], [IFR cancellation instructions].

Considering the visual approach means you're in visual conditions, you might want to cancel IFR before you land (page 85), or you might not (see "Canceling Your IFR Flight Plan Without a Tower" on page 95).

Visual approaches are the only approaches allowed where there's no published instrument approach. The advantage of flying a visual approach, rather than canceling IFR right away, is that you still have an IFR clearance in the event you can't land (see above). When flying a visual to an airport you don't know well, it helps to load an approach for the landing runway, or put a direct-to course on a runway heading into your GPS to help you find the field.

TIP

Visual approaches require you have at least three miles visibility in flight. However, cloud clearance requirements (FAR 91.155) do not apply. You must simply stay clear of clouds. That said, there may be VFR aircraft in the area. In Class G airspace, they may fly barely clear of clouds, too.

Request a Contact Approach

Hattiesburg Bobby L. Chain Municipal (KHBG)

Hattiesburg, MS

Houston Center 126.8

- ① CENTER CONTROLLER
Cirrus Seven Two Bravo, proceed direct CERNU, descend and maintain three thousand. Verify you have the Hattiesburg weather?
- ② PILOT
We have the Hattiesburg weather and request contact approach to Hattiesburg, Cirrus Seven Two Bravo.
- ③ CENTER CONTROLLER
Cirrus Seven Two Bravo, cleared contact approach to Hattiesburg Bobby Chain airport at or below three thousand. If unable contact approach, proceed direct HILGA, maintain three thousand, report IFR cancellation this frequency or on the ground. Change to advisory approved.
- ④ PILOT
Cleared contact approach at or below three thousand, direct HILGA and three thousand if missed approach, change to advisory. Cirrus Seven Two Bravo.

The contact approach is one of the most versatile, and most underused, tools for the IFR pilot. Once granted, it gives you the freedom to find your own route to the airport maintaining at least one mile visibility and staying clear of clouds. You don't need the airport, or a preceding aircraft, in sight. You simply need reasonable confidence that you can find your way to the airport visually without hitting anything. That's much more lenient than a visual.

If weather conditions are too poor for a visual approach, ATC must plan for a published instrument approach. If you want a contact approach instead, you must request it ②. ATC can't assign them. This can be a huge help when the airport doesn't have any approaches from your current direction of flight. It's also handy if you're being vectored for an approach, and you suddenly see the airport off your wing.

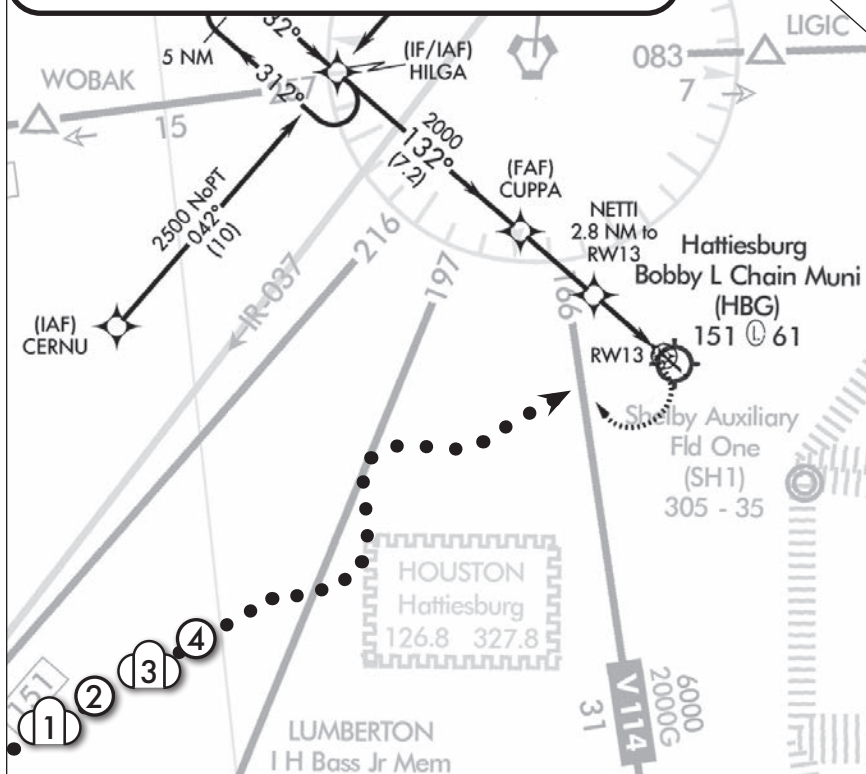
There are some limitations. The airport must have a published instrument approach, so it's not a hack to land at a remote airstrip with no approaches. The reported visibility must be at least one statute mile.

Because you fly your own route to the airport, contact approaches are more often used at non-towered airports where there isn't a steady stream of traffic. That said, you can request one to a towered airport, but the request should include the runway you want for landing.

There's no missed approach procedure, so you should be confident you can find the airport and land. If you can't land, your next move is like a visual approach (page 98), except with worse visibility.

TIP

While a contact approach at night is technically legal, just don't.



Receive a Clearance for a Charted Visual Approach

①) APPROACH CONTROLLER
 Cirrus Eight Eight Seven Two Bravo,
 SoCal Approach. Descend and maintain
 six thousand. Expect the Four Stacks
 Visual Runway One Five. Burbank
 altimeter two niner niner six.

②) PILOT
 Cirrus Eight Eight Seven Two Bravo.
 Leaving seven thousand for six thousand.
 We have Mt. Oat in sight.

③) APPROACH CONTROLLER
 Cirrus Seven Two Bravo, roger. Cleared
 for Four Stacks Visual Runway One Five
 approach.

④) PILOT
 Cleared Four Stacks Visual Runway One
 Five. Cirrus Seven Two Bravo.

⑤) APPROACH CONTROLLER
 Cirrus Seven Two Bravo, contact Burbank
 Tower one one eight point seven.

⑥) PILOT
 Contact Tower. Cirrus Seven Two Bravo.

Charted Visual Flight Procedures (CVFPs) are a hybrid: There's a lateral path you're expected to fly with landmarks, instead of approach fixes. There may be some altitude restrictions, but otherwise altitude is your discretion and obstacle avoidance is your responsibility. CVFPs serve specific runways. There may be published weather minimums (5500 feet and 5 miles in this case), so ATC won't issue the CVFP unless the weather is at or above those minimums. CVFPs also require an operating control tower.

CVFPs are primarily for turbojet aircraft at major airports, but some, such as the Four Stacks Visual, get assigned to light aircraft. You don't need another aircraft, or the airport in sight, to accept a CVFP. You just need to report seeing one of the charted landmarks.

When you're handed off to Tower ⑥, report in that you're "... on the Four Stacks Visual Runway One Five." As with any visual approach, there's no missed approach segment, however some CVFPs include special go-around instructions.

Bob Hope Airport (KBUR)
 Burbank, CA
 Social Approach 134.2

