Aircraft recognition is an important aspect of general service knowledge for cadets in the CCF (RAF), but it’s just as relevant – and interesting – for cadets in Royal Navy, Royal Marines and Army sections. After all, many sections of different services will use or deploy aircraft, and cadets on camp at the busiest Royal Navy or Army bases are just as likely to come across planes and helicopters as those at an RAF station.

The Air Cadet syllabus focuses on 31 current and historical aircraft fulfilling a number of different roles (see ACP 34 for more details). Many of these look similar, however, especially from long distances – and memorising a long list of technical features can prove challenging and repetitive. Instead, there is a handy system cadets can use to help them remember the key identifying features of each aircraft they learn about.

Flying Officer Coralie Young, an Air Cadet officer in London explains how using the WEFT (wings, engine, fuselage, tail) system can help cadets remember the important features of any aircraft. Give them a picture of the plane, then ask them to characterise it based on the following features:

“THERE IS A HANDY SYSTEM CADETS CAN USE TO HELP THEM REMEMBER THE KEY IDENTIFYING FEATURES OF EACH AIRCRAFT THEY LEARN ABOUT”
WINGS

» Wings or rotors? An obvious first step is to classify whether the craft is a plane or helicopter.

» Shape. Are the wings straight, elliptical, swept, delta or variable? Certain aircraft, such as the Typhoon or Spitfire, have a distinctive wing shape that will help you spot them straight off.

» Position. Are the wings high or low? Are they flat or angled? Planes designed to fly at very high speeds often have swept wings – angled backwards from their roots – as this can reduce drag.

FUSELAGE (body of the aircraft)

» Is it long or short? Or if it’s a rotary craft, how big is the cabin? The RAF flies both small helicopters, such as the Squirrel, as well as much larger ones like the multi-rotor Chinook.

» Can you see a large or small cockpit?

» Is it a distinctive shape? Historic craft such as the Bristol Blenheim have an easily recognisable nose shape.

» Does the plane have a radar dish? RAF Sentry and Sentinel planes both have distinctive shapes because of their large radar dishes, which are used by the crew for surveillance.

TAIL

» Distinctive tail styles include the twin tail and T-tail. The size of the tail fin and position of the elevators can also give you clues.

AIRCRAFT RECOGNITION PICTONARY

1. Split cadets into two teams.

2. List the names of the aircraft they have learnt about on slips of paper, then have cadets from each team take it in turns to pull a name from a hat.

3. Each cadet must try and draw the aircraft, based on what they have learnt.

4. Give each cadet two minutes to attempt to draw many as they can. Their team gets a point for each aircraft drawing they identify within the time limit.

TRY THIS

ACF 34 is available to download on Bader and gives more detailed information about many different aircraft.

DID YOU KNOW?

The RAF museum has handy guides and quizzes about aircraft.rafmuseum.org.uk

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