

Unable Transcript

Effective communication between controllers and pilots can be improved by the mutual understanding of each other's operating environment

It also requires knowledgeable understanding of the roles and responsibilities on both sides of the mic.

Air traffic controllers give instructions with the expectation that the pilot is able to understand and comply, or that the pilot will advise if they are unable to do so.

But what happens when a pilot requires more preparation time, feels uncomfortable, or is not ready to comply with the instruction.

All pilots must be aware that the Pilot-in-Command, P-I-C, of an aircraft is directly responsible for, and is the final authority as to, the operation of that aircraft. It is very important that pilots of all experience levels fully understand and assume their role as P-I-C.

An Air Traffic Controller is always prepared to repeat, provide clarification or alternative instructions when requested.

The final decision to act on A-T-C's instruction rests with you. If you cannot safely comply with an A-T-C instruction, inform them by stating "UNABLE."

As stated in the Pilot/Controller Glossary, "UNABLE" indicates inability to comply with a specific instruction, request, or clearance.

Let's analyze a replay of a real-life event involving a newly, certificated private pilot, which could have been prevented by advising air traffic control they were "Unable".

On a fall evening, a pilot of a single engine aircraft requested to taxi. The pilot receives instructions from A-T-C to taxi to Runway Two-One at Taxiway Gulf, and to expect a three-to-five-minute delay before a take-off clearance would be issued. The pilot reads back the instructions correctly and exits the ramp.

Pilot: xxx holding short at golf um at Two-One.

Upon reaching the runway, the tower controller issues take-off clearance for Runway Two-One at Taxiway Gulf, without the need for a three-to-five minute delay, as previously advised.

Controller: xxx turn no further right than heading two-six-zero, wind two-one-zero at niner gust one four Runway Two-One at golf cleared for takeoff traffic is a Medevac four miles away.

Pilot: No further, no further three-three-zero ah Two-One cleared for take-off xxx.

Controller: No further right than two-six-zero.

Pilot: No further right than two-six-zero, xxx.

Surprised by the quicker than expected take-off clearance, the pilot felt rushed, however accepts the clearance instead of advising A-T-C they are not ready, or 'Unable'.

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Feeling rushed, the pilot entered the runway and turned in the wrong direction. Without verifying the compass heading prior to moving the throttle forward, they depart in the wrong direction resulting in the aircraft not having adequate runway to reach a safe take-off speed. The aircraft then runs off the end of the runway onto the grass.

Controller: Medevac xxx turn right heading, correction continue flying straight.

Medevac Pilot: We'll continue flying straight Medevac xxx.

Controller: xxx ah do you need any assistance?

What can we learn from this event? Let's take a look at what happened.

The controller gave instructions to the pilot of the single engine aircraft to depart from Runway Two-One at Taxiway Gulf. The pilot was also told to expect a three-to-five minute delay prior to a take-off clearance.

The pilot planned to use the expected delay time for final preparations before taking off and was not adequately prepared to accept the take-off clearance.

Upon reaching the runway, the tower controller issues take-off clearance without the expected three-to-five minute delay.

The pilot was caught off guard upon receiving the take-off clearance and became distracted as they were still preparing for departure. The pilot became disoriented and did not verify their alignment. The pilot began departure roll on the runway, in the wrong direction, and veered off the end of the runway onto the grass.

As Pilot-in-Command, the pilot could have not accepted the take-off clearance by replying "Unable" to the controller upon receiving the clearance.

Make sure you're also following these best practices:

Stay focused – maintain a cockpit free from distractions.

Be a proactive listener – active listening helps you to clearly understand instructions.

Communicate effectively – say what you mean, do not just parrot back an instruction on readback.

Use proper phraseology – make sure you're speaking aviation phraseology, per the Pilot/Controller Glossary.

Understand and write down the instruction.

Understand runway signs, markings, and lighting.

Stating "Unable" when not prepared is your responsibility and authority as Pilot-in-Command.

Remember to share these recommendations with other pilots in your community and review C-F-R Part Ninety-One dot Three and the Pilot/Controller Glossary for more information.

Know before you go.
