

ATC: Mike Tango, King Air departing prior to your arrival, Medivac.

Landing Pilot: Mike Tango, we got him in sight.

ATC: Bravo Tango, Ground.

Student Pilot: Ground, go ahead, Bravo Tango.

ATC: Yep, I see you. Make a right turn there on Lima and then Lima, Delta, Foxtrot to Runway 3.

Student Pilot: Lima, Delta, Foxtrot to Runway 3.

Landing Pilot: Mike Tango, just had a rag-wing go across the runway right in front of me.

ATC: Ground, Bravo Tango hold your position.

Student Pilot: Bravo Tango, holding.

On a clear winter day just before 5:00 p.m., a student pilot on a cross-country called ground control with a request for taxi. The ground controller correctly identified the small tail dragger aircraft and issued taxi instructions from the general aviation area, near the fuel pumps to runway 3. The student pilot read the clearance back correctly. However, on taxi out, the student pilot turned left instead of right, and taxied out across runway 1 in front of a landing aircraft.

At airports like in this example, where there are two runways with acute crossings and multiple taxiways and turns to arrive at the runway thresholds for departing traffic, there's always the possibility of making a wrong turn if a pilot is not completely prepared. In this case, a student pilot, not based at this airport, who thought he knew the basic layout of the field, tried navigating without an airport diagram.

With a correct read back on his taxi clearance, the controller felt confident in the pilots understanding of the instruction, but when faced with a turn, left or right at taxiway Delta, a correct turn to the right, appears to go back into the hanger area that he had just emerged from. The wrong turn, to the left, has a clear view of the airfield and runways. Intuitively, a wrong turn to the left, looks right.

This is where a good understanding of airfield signs and markings pays off. The student pilot should have seen the runway one-one-niner red and white sign, and the holding position surface paint markings indicating he was about to enter a runway not on his taxi clearance.

If a runaway crossing isn't included in the clearance, you should know not to taxi past the red and white sign. Set the brakes. It's an easy call to the ground controller for clarification.

Finally, it never hurts to look left and right before you enter a runway, regardless of whether you've been cleared to enter it or not. Look for traffic, and when in doubt, call the tower and ask.

It's always better to know before you go.