

# psychological testing of pilots in USA



In this undated photo provided by the French Interior Ministry, French emergency rescue services work at the site of the Germanwings jet that crashed on Tuesday, March 24, 2015, near Seyne-les-Alpes, France. The co-pilot of the Germanwings jet barricaded himself in the cockpit and intentionally rammed the plane full speed into the French Alps, ignoring the captain's frantic pounding on the door and the screams of terror from passengers, a prosecutor said Thursday. (AP Photo/French Interior Ministry, Francis Pellier)



By [Alison Grant, The Plain Dealer](#)

[Email the author](#) | [Follow on Twitter](#)

on March 26, 2015 at 3:32 PM, updated March 26, 2015 at 5:12 PM

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Diane Damos, the head of [Damos Aviation Services](#) outside Chicago, has spent 40 years helping airlines hire and screen pilots.

Damos conducts seminars on identifying traits that are most important in pilots; helps airlines, both U.S. and foreign, come up with interview questions and evaluation sheets; has been an expert witness in lawsuits tied to pilot performance and is quoted widely in aviation publications.



Diane Damos

*Damos Aviation  
Services*

She has closely followed the investigation of the crash of a Germanwings jetliner Tuesday in the French Alps. The chief prosecutor in Marseille, France, has said that evidence from the cockpit voice recorder indicated that co-pilot Andreas Lubitz had deliberately locked the pilot out of the cockpit and "intentionally" crashed the plane. Some news reports said that raised the possibility of suicide.

All 150 on board were killed.

Here's what Damos had to say today on pilot screening and selection:

### **Do airlines conduct psychological screening of pilots before hiring them?**

You have to be careful about what you mean by psychological. You are probably referring to psychiatric and the screening we do is cognitive.

Screening varies widely country by country.

We have a law, the Americans with Disabilities Act, that prohibits psychiatric testing until after a contingent job offer has been made [meaning the airline has presented an offer, but has covered itself in the event it discovers information that impedes the ability to do the job].

### **Do airlines conduct psychiatric screening of potential pilot hires then?**

In the U.S., we do not do very much psychiatric screening. At most, in the U.S. at this time, there may be one carrier doing it.

### **Why is it so rare?**

It's not something that airlines, or any employer, likes to do. Number one, it's expensive. And it tells you about the current situation with the person. It's not a predictive measure. And all such testing has some measure of error. So why would you want to do it?

## What kind of pre-hiring cognitive testing occurs?

We test their quantitative ability, spatial ability, verbal fluency, inductive reasoning, psychomotor skills. Those would be the main areas.

## Once pilots are hired, is there any kind of fitness review as they continue to fly for an airline?

Copy of FAA Form 8500-9 (Medical Certificate) or FAA Form 8420-2 Medical Student Pilot Certificate) issued.						<b>FF-</b>	
<b>MEDICAL CERTIFICATE <u>FIRST</u> CLASS AND STUDENT PILOT CERTIFICATE</b>							
This certifies that (Full name and address):							
JOHN DOE 123 STREETNAME DR. ANYTOWN, TN 37130							
12/17/03		70		170		BR BR M	
Date of Birth	Height	Weight	Hair	Eyes	Sex		
has met the medical standards prescribed in part 67, Federal Aviation Regulations, for this class of Medical Certificate.							
Limitations	MUST WEAR CORRECTIVE LENSES						
	Date of Examination		Examiner's Designation No				
Examiner	10/17/42		1013-2				
	Signature						
	Typed Name JOE DOCTOR, D.O.						
Airman's Signature							

Federal Aviation Administration

Class 1 pilots have to pass a physical every six months that includes filling out **medical certificate that goes to a flight surgeon**. These are usually private practitioners designated by the FAA as flight surgeons. A flight surgeon could raise a concern about psychological issues and make a referral.

## What is the best way to detect potential mental instability in a cockpit crew member?

The best method of catching would be by having colleagues, other pilots, report unusual behaviors. If pilots notice someone is depressed, has angry outbursts, they can report that confidentially to the Airline Pilots Association union. There can be an inquiry by ALPA.

## Can a suspect pilot be forced out?

Once they're hired, they have the position pretty much for life. Typically you can't force them out. They have to agree to it.

### **What is the likelihood that the co-pilot on the Germanwings flight was suicidal?**

In general (non-commercial passenger) aviation, we do have suicides by aviation. The pilot in the little Cessna plane. It is very rare. A suicide by airline pilots is extremely rare. To my knowledge, in the history of aviation, there's only been one or two that were even suspected. Think of the Egypt Air flight out of New York. There's been a lot of speculation that that was a suicide. It's never been resolved.

### **Where do you think this crash investigation is headed?**

We'll just have to see. You can bet that it will be a very, very thorough investigation. They're looking at social media. They're in his house. I think within the next 24 hours, we'll have a much better idea of what happened.