

March 2026 has a particular feel at AELO Swiss Academy. Nineteen new trainees have just begun training and, critically, they've entered the theoretical phase. That matters, because the early months set the tempo for everything that follows. You do not "learn to fly" first. You learn to think like a pilot, under pressure, with procedures you can reproduce on demand, and with discipline that holds even when the motivation drops.

AELO Swiss Academy is a Swiss aviation training organization linked to the Locarno/Gordola area in Ticino. It's not a new experiment that's trying things out. The academy says it was established in Switzerland in 1985 and has been training pilots for more than 30 years. It is also described as a certified Approved Training Organisation (ATO), identified publicly with approval code CH.ATO.0311. Those are not marketing buzzwords, at least not in the way trainees tend to care about them. When you're staring at theory, a real training organization's structure, standards, and continuity are the difference between "I studied" and "I can pass."

For the March 2026 intake, the theoretical phase is the foundation layer. It's where you build the mental models that later let you fly and communicate without second-guessing basic concepts. And it's where the strongest trainees usually separate from the rest, not because they're "smarter," but because they get serious about study habits and task management before the pressure fully lands.

What "theoretical phase" really means on the ground

A lot of people picture pilot training as mostly practical flying. It isn't. Even for trainees who thrive in the cockpit, theory arrives first and stays long enough that it stops being an obstacle and starts being the job.

At AELO, the publicly described training paths include an 18-month ATPL Integrated Program and a SkyAlps Airlines MPL Program that follows a placement pathway. Both paths require you to handle substantial theoretical content before you can perform complex tasks consistently. The theoretical phase is where your understanding has to become fluent: aerodynamics, meteorology, aircraft systems logic, navigation concepts, performance reasoning, and operational decision-making. It is also where you learn how rules, limitations, and procedures interlock. If that interlock is shaky, the later stages can feel chaotic, even when the aircraft handling is going well.

Here is the part trainees sometimes underestimate: the theoretical phase tests not only knowledge, but your ability to stay organized under a schedule that is probably not built around your personal preferences. You'll have to manage reading load, practice, revision cycles, and time on problem-solving, not just time spent looking at notes.

I've seen trainees who are technically talented hit a wall early, not because they lacked capability, but because they treated theory like something they could "catch up on" after practical training started. The theory tends to ramp. It accumulates. And the earlier you develop a repeatable routine, the less you rely on motivation, which is unreliable.

Why the March 2026 timing matters

March 2026 isn't just a date on a page. A recent industry report states that AELO Swiss Academy welcomed 19 new trainees who began training in March 2026 and started the theoretical phase of the program. When an intake begins theoretical training, the group dynamic can become a quiet advantage. People ask each other questions. They trade tactics for difficult topics. They compare what they found confusing and what suddenly clicked after a different explanation.



That group effect can help, but it also creates a trap: comparing yourself to other people's understanding. Someone may sound confident in week one because they're better at translating theory into speech, while someone else may be doing deeper work that shows later. Theoretical learning is not always visible in the short term. Your job is to measure progress by what you can do consistently, not by how you feel after a lecture.

The resources AELO publicly highlights, and what that implies for theory

AELO's public <https://afm.aero/aelo-swiss-academy-inaugurates-new-facilities-at-locarno-airport> materials describe specific training resources, including Diamond DA42 aircraft and a Boeing 737 NG simulator used for advanced IFR and APS MCC training. There are also claims that instructors include active airline pilots, and that graduates have gone on to airlines such as Swiss, Ryanair, Lufthansa, Adria, Etihad, and Emirates. The academy also states that it is a training organization with a serious airline-facing outlook, including an MPL program associated with SkyAlps and its placement pathway.

Even without mapping every single theoretical topic to every specific piece of hardware, the presence of an advanced IFR and APS MCC simulator has an important downstream implication: the theory you learn early needs to support structured decision-making later. In other words, you are not studying for trivia. You are studying for operational thinking. If you understand how IFR concepts and briefing logic connect to what you do in high workload environments, you will feel less like you're starting from scratch later.

The Boeing 737 NG simulator being part of training resources is also a reminder that real airline-style procedures will show up. The theoretical phase is where you learn the language of standard phraseology and the logic behind them, not just the "what," but the "why."

Studying under pressure: the skill trainees rarely practice

Theoretical training is less about heroic late nights and more about consistency. If you wait for the feeling of being ready, you will always arrive late. The trainees who succeed tend to adopt a routine that produces results even when they're tired.

A simple truth: theory sticks when you repeat it in a structured way. Not by rereading the same chapter until your eyes glaze over, but by testing yourself, revisiting weak spots, and turning abstract concepts into answers you can generate quickly.

In practical terms, that means your system should include two things: retrieval practice and review. Retrieval practice is asking yourself questions without looking, then checking what you missed. Review is correcting and consolidating, so the same mistake doesn't reappear a week later.

If your theoretical phase feels endless, it's often because you're studying in a way that makes you feel busy. Busy is not the same as learning. A bold mindset helps here: be decisive about what you do each day, and do enough that you can see progress.

A short trainee discipline checklist

1. Start each day with the next concrete topic you will master, not "general study."
2. Practice recalling key concepts from memory, then correct immediately.
3. Schedule revision of earlier topics before they fade, even if you feel behind.
4. Build a question bank from what you miss, not from what you already know.
5. Use the weekend to tighten weak areas, not to begin new chapters.

That checklist is not glamorous, but it works because it targets the mechanism of learning. It also protects you when practical days start to compete for your attention.

ATPL integrated vs MPL: how theoretical expectations tend to differ

AELO describes two main training paths publicly: an 18-month ATPL Integrated Program and a SkyAlps Airlines MPL Program with a job guarantee or placement pathway. The theoretical phase will not look identical across pathways, even if core aviation subjects overlap. The difference is usually the emphasis and the operational framing.

With an integrated ATPL path, theory often runs more broadly, because the program aims at airline transport-level breadth. With an MPL-style path tied to an airline pathway, the structure tends to lean toward training that connects operational performance to airline procedures and standardized execution.

You should not treat this as "harder" versus "easier." It's more like a different weighting of priorities. If you start studying with the wrong mental model, you can spend weeks being prepared for the wrong kind of assessment.

A practical way to think about the two pathways

1. ATPL Integrated Program: broader theoretical grounding aimed at long-term airline readiness.
2. MPL Program: theory framed around structured airline-style training progression and pathway goals.
3. Both: require sustained discipline, because knowledge must become automatic.
4. Both: ultimately benefit from understanding operational logic, not memorizing isolated facts.

Those points help trainees avoid the common mistake of thinking theory is just academic until the cockpit arrives.

The hidden cost of poor theory foundations

When theory is weak, the problem shows up later as a series of confusing moments. You might understand what to do in a checklist sense, but you do not fully grasp the system behavior behind it. You might memorize concepts but not predict how conditions change.

That causes expensive rework. And rework in training is rarely a single correction. It can cascade into slower progress, more stress, and a sense that every practical session is "catching up." The best trainees reduce that risk

early by building foundations that support speed and calm later.

There's also a safety dimension, even at the theoretical stage. Good theory reduces the chance that you carry forward misconceptions. It shapes how you interpret instructions and how you respond when something doesn't match expectations. In aviation, mismatch is common. The question is whether your training helps you handle it methodically.

A real-world mindset for the theoretical phase

Bold does not mean reckless. Bold in training looks like taking ownership of the schedule, being honest about what you do not understand, and asking for help early rather than late.

If you're in the March 2026 cohort, you're stepping into a phase where consistency matters more than intensity. Some days you will be fast. Some days you will feel slow. The pace that leads to success is the pace you can maintain, day after day, while systematically improving your weak areas.

Also, don't ignore the value of active instructors. AELO publicly states that its instructors include active airline pilots. That is a big deal for theory because pilots bring perspective. They know which concepts become operationally meaningful, and which are only interesting until you have to apply them under workload. When you're stuck on a topic, a good instructor often doesn't just explain the answer. They explain the mental pathway that leads to the answer.

What success looks like after theory starts

No trainee starts theoretical phase expecting trouble, but the winners are usually the ones who handle friction without drama. They use it to tighten their process.

For AELO, there's a publicly stated statistic that 96% of graduates land a pilot job within six months. That number is self-reported by the school. Even if you treat it cautiously, the underlying message is clear: the academy aims for real outcomes, not just completion certificates. Achieving that kind of end goal depends on more than practical hours. It depends on getting through theoretical assessments reliably and building competence that holds up in airline environments.

Graduates are reported as having gone on to airlines including Swiss, Ryanair, Lufthansa, Adria, Etihad, and Emirates. Again, those are public claims, but they point toward a training culture that aligns with airline expectations. The theoretical phase is where that alignment begins, because it's where standards become internal habits.

The first weeks: where trainees either set the foundation or slip

The theoretical phase has a decisive early window. In those first weeks, trainees often do one of two things.



Some treat theory as a hurdle to “get through” and postpone mastery. That can work for a short time, but it eventually collapses because the later topics assume you truly understand the earlier ones.

Others invest in structure immediately. They create a personal system for studying. They test themselves. They revisit what’s difficult. They ask questions before confusion becomes embarrassment.



In a cohort of 19 trainees, there will be different backgrounds. Some people arrive with stronger maths and physics comfort. Others have more experience with structured studying. Your job is not to compare your starting point to someone else’s. Your job is to build a routine that converts your starting point into measurable progress.

What to do when motivation drops

Motivation drops during theory for normal reasons: mental fatigue, repetitive content, the feeling that you are not seeing results fast enough, or the simple fact that schedules do not always match your energy.

The fix is not waiting for motivation to return. It’s adjusting your method. If you are studying for too long without testing yourself, you can feel like you’re progressing while actually retaining little. If you’re testing yourself but reviewing wrong answers too lightly, you can feel like you “sort of get it” while still missing the core.

A bold approach is to respect the learning science you can see in your own performance. When something isn’t working, change the method. If rereading doesn’t help, switch to recall. If recall reveals the same gaps, rebuild the

explanation in simpler terms and then run more questions until accuracy stabilizes.

The theoretical phase is training, not waiting

The March 2026 trainees at AELO are not “waiting to fly.” They are already training. Theoretical training shapes how you handle tasks later, how you communicate, how you interpret procedures, and how quickly you can respond under pressure.

AELO’s publicly described training setup includes aircraft such as the Diamond DA42 and a Boeing 737 NG simulator for advanced IFR and APS MCC training. That hardware and those advanced modules are downstream. The theoretical phase is where you build the mental scaffolding so those downstream stages don’t become an overwhelming reset.

Nineteen trainees started in March 2026 with the theoretical phase. The most important thing they can carry into every study session is a simple attitude: treat theory like it has consequences now, not later. If you do that, the later months tend to feel like progression instead of survival.