Photograph Requirements for a Desktop Aircraft Appraisal

What I Need to Produce a Credible, USPAP-Compliant Desktop Appraisal Report

In a desktop (virtual) appraisal, I do not travel to the aircraft; instead, you or your agent supply the information I would otherwise gather in person. Photographs take the place of my own eyes on the aircraft, so their quality and completeness directly determine how credible the resulting value opinion can be. Clear, complete, current photographs allow me to deliver a strong desktop report at a lower cost than an on-site inspection. Thumbnails, blurry images, a single exterior angle, or a set with little or no interior coverage do not — they force value-reducing assumptions or make a credible desktop appraisal impossible.

This guide describes exactly what I need. It is written so it can be handed directly to whoever will take the photographs. If a complete set as described here is not available, please let me know before the engagement begins so we can discuss options, including an on-site inspection.

1. Technical Quality — Every Photograph

Before the specific shots, a few standards apply to all of the images:

- **Full-resolution files, not thumbnails.** Send the original photos straight from the phone or camera (a modern smartphone is fine). Please do not shrink, compress, or screenshot them, and avoid embedding them in a document — attach the original image files.
- **Sharp focus.** Each image should be clear enough to read placards, labels, and gauge markings. Blurry or motion-shaken images cannot be relied upon.
- **Good, even lighting.** Shoot in a well-lit hangar or in daylight. Avoid heavy shadow, glare, and strong backlight. Turn on cockpit and cabin lighting for interior shots.
- **Well-framed and level.** Fill the frame with the subject, hold the camera steady and level, and keep the whole subject in view rather than cutting it off.
- **Current.** Photographs should reflect the aircraft's present condition, taken recently — not file photos from a prior listing or from years past.
- **Clean and unobstructed.** Where practical, photograph the aircraft clean and clear of clutter, tugs, hoses, and covers so surfaces and components are visible.

2. Exterior — All Sides and Surfaces

I need to see the entire exterior, not one "beauty" angle. Please provide:

Overall views

- The full aircraft from each side: left side, right side, front, and rear — the four elevation views.

- Three-quarter views from each corner (front-left, front-right, rear-left, rear-right), which show how adjacent surfaces meet.

Close detail

- Nose and radome, spinner(s), and each propeller blade (both faces) or fan/inlet area for turbine aircraft.
- Each engine or nacelle exterior; cowlings closed, plus open if access is available.
- Wings top and bottom, leading edges, wingtips, flaps, ailerons, and any winglets.
- Empennage — vertical and horizontal stabilizers, rudder, and elevator.
- Landing gear — nose and main gear, tires (showing tread and condition), brakes, and wheel wells.
- Fuselage belly and any antennas or external equipment.
- Windshield and cabin windows, from outside.

Paint, glass, and condition

- Overall paint condition, plus close-ups of any chips, corrosion, crazing, dents, scratches, patched areas, or prior-repair evidence.
- Registration (tail) number clearly legible in at least one image.

3. Interior — Cockpit and Cabin

Interior coverage is where photo sets most often fall short, yet the interior heavily influences value. Please do not omit it.

Cockpit / flight deck

- The full instrument panel, straight-on, with lighting on and displays powered if possible — avionics and instrumentation are major value factors.
- Close-ups of the avionics stack, radios, and each display unit so make and model are legible.
- Center pedestal, throttle quadrant, and switch panels.
- Pilot and co-pilot seats, yokes or sticks, and rudder pedals.
- Overhead panel where applicable.

Cabin

- Overall cabin views looking forward and looking aft.
- Seats and upholstery (note wear, tears, or staining), carpeting, sidewalls, and headliner.
- Cabinetry, tables, and any refreshment center or galley.
- Entertainment, connectivity, and cabin-management equipment.
- Lavatory and baggage compartment, where fitted.
- Close-ups of any interior damage, wear, or discoloration.

4. Identification and Documentation

A few photographs let me tie the images to the specific aircraft and confirm key facts:

- The data plate (manufacturer's identification plate) showing make, model, and serial number.
- The registration (tail) number, clearly legible.
- The Hobbs and/or airframe hour meter and, where visible, the tachometer, to confirm time in service.
- The airworthiness and registration certificates on board.
- Where possible, the engine and propeller data plates showing their serial numbers.

Note: photographs of the logbooks and a current maintenance-status report are also required, but these are addressed in a separate guide, as they are records rather than condition photographs.

5. Why This Standard Is Necessary Under USPAP

In a desktop appraisal, the photographs are the evidence of the aircraft's physical characteristics and condition. Because an aircraft is personal property, my appraisal is governed by USPAP STANDARD 7 and STANDARD 8. **Standards Rule 7-2** requires me to identify the characteristics of the property relevant to value, and **Standards Rule 7-1** requires diligence to avoid a substantial error of omission. When my knowledge of the aircraft comes entirely from photographs, incomplete or unclear images directly limit my ability to meet those requirements.

The **SCOPE OF WORK RULE** requires that the scope of work be sufficient to produce credible assignment results. A desktop appraisal is a recognized, legitimate scope of work — but only when the information provided supports a credible result. Where photographs are missing or inadequate, I must either rely on an clearly disclosed extraordinary assumption about the unseen areas, which weakens the report and the lender's reliance on it, or advise that a desktop appraisal cannot be completed credibly and that an on-site inspection is needed. A complete photo set as described here is what allows the lower-cost desktop option to remain a credible one.

6. Summary

For a desktop appraisal, the photographs do the work my in-person inspection otherwise would, so their quality is not a formality — it determines whether a credible value opinion is possible and how well it will withstand review. In short: current, sharp, full-resolution images; every exterior side and surface; thorough cockpit and cabin coverage; and the identification and meter photographs that tie the set to the specific aircraft. Providing a complete set at the outset lets me deliver a strong, well-supported desktop report at the lower cost that makes the desktop option attractive in the first place. I am glad to answer questions or review a sample set before the full photographs are taken.

This guide is a general explanation of appraisal practice and USPAP principles prepared for client information. It is not legal advice. USPAP is revised periodically; rule citations herein should be confirmed against the edition of USPAP in effect as of the appraisal's effective date.