European Union Aviation Safety Agency

FAQ n.142995

FAQs:

Higher Airspace Operations (HAO)

Question:

What is the difference between suborbital and orbital flight?

Answer:

The distinction is based primarily on velocity and trajectory, not altitude alone.

- Suborbital flight: Follows a trajectory that reaches very high altitudes, potentially even exceeding 100 km, but does not achieve orbital velocity and returns to Earth without completing an orbit.
- Orbital flight: Achieves sufficient horizontal velocity to remain in continuous free-fall around the Earth. Sustained Low Earth Orbit (LEO) typically occurs from approximately 160 km and above.

These distinctions support operational classification and regulatory considerations and do not define legal boundaries.

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Link:

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