

# A Guide to Flying with Musical Instruments in Canada



Prepared by The American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada,  
operating in Canada as the Canadian Federation of Musicians (CFM)

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*The Honourable Marc Garneau, P.C., M.P., Minister of Transport  
Maja Cholich, Vincent Millette, Rachel Pop, Christopher Raymond, Daniel Stephen, Colin Stacey, Sara Wiebe, Fred Woo, Greg Zawadzki, National Air Services Policy Transport Canada*

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The House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure & Communities  
The Senate Standing Committee on Transport and Communications*

*The Air Transport Association of Canada  
The National Airlines Council of Canada*

*Musicians Association of Ottawa Gatineau (Local 180 AFM)  
Dr. Buffy Sainte Marie, Artist*

*Honorable Lisa Raitt, P.C., former Minister of Transport and staff Veronica Gerson  
The Honourable David Emerson, Chair, The Canada Transportation Act Review and his staff  
Duncan Dee, Member of the CTA Review.*

# AIR PASSENGER RIGHTS

The entire text of changes regarding Air Passenger Protection Regulations can be found here <http://www.gazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p2/2019/2019-05-29/html/sor-dors150-eng.html>

Each airline is now obligated to publish terms and conditions applicable to musicians travelling with musical instruments. Links to the major airlines are provided below. Passengers are encouraged to check the airline website directly in the event of changes from the time of this publication.

## Musical instruments

24 (1) A carrier must establish terms and conditions with regard to

- (a) musical instruments that may be carried in the cabin or that must be checked, including
- (i) restrictions with respect to size and weight,
- (ii) restrictions with respect to quantity, and
- (iii) the use of stowage space in the cabin;
- (b) fees for transporting instruments; and
- (c) passenger options if, because a flight will occur on a different aircraft than expected, there is insufficient stowage space in the cabin.

## Obligation to carry

(2) A carrier must accept musical instruments as checked or carry-on baggage, unless accepting an instrument is contrary to general terms and conditions in the carrier's tariff with respect to the weight or dimension of baggage or to safety.

## Direct links to Airline Websites regarding Musical Instruments

<https://www.aircanada.com/ca/en/aco/home/plan/baggage/special-items.html>

<https://www.westjet.com/en-ca/travel-info/baggage/musical-instruments>

<https://www.flyporter.com/en/travel-information/baggage/special-items>

<https://flyflair.com/travel-info/baggage/>

<https://www.flyswoop.com/baggage/>

IT IS ADVISED TO CHECK DIRECTLY WITH YOUR AIRLINE IN THE EVENT OF CHANGES FROM THE TIME OF THIS PUBLICATION

## OBLIGATIONS OF PASSENGERS

A passenger travelling with a musical instrument will ensure their musical instrument is in a proper travel case at the time of check-in. This includes a proper hard travel case with regard to musical instruments that will travel as checked baggage.

A passenger travelling with a musical instrument will notify the air carrier at least 24 hours in advance of their travel, and confirm with the air carrier any requirements that may be necessary prior to travel.

## BEFORE YOU PURCHASE YOUR TICKET

Your instrument is one of the most valuable tools of your musical career. Purchase insurance for your instrument. Damage and/or destruction can lead to missed performances and/or a longtime disassociation between you and your valuable work tool. Some airlines disclaim liability altogether for loss or damage to musical instruments.

Airlines that have liability or damage recovery allowances normally do not cover the cost of replacement.

If your instrument should be lost, damaged, or delayed, there is a limit on the airline's liability. Hence, it is up to the artist/musician to be prepared with his or her own insurance.

Measure and weigh your instrument (in its case). Determine the size in linear inches.

Linear inches refer to the sum of the three dimensions.

(For example, if your case has dimensions of 20" x 10" x 10", the linear measure would be 40".)

# CHOOSING AN AIRLINE AND MAKING YOUR RESERVATION

When selecting an air carrier, call to inquire about the process of traveling with a musical instrument on their airline; inquire as to whether the size of the aircraft might limit your ability to fly with an instrument in cabin or in the cargo hold (have on hand the exterior dimensions of your instrument's case). Confirm again, at least twenty-four hours prior to traveling that you will be flying with an instrument. Things to keep in mind are the size of overhead bins which vary from one aircraft type to another, and reservation agents may not be able to specify the type of aircraft in advance of travel.

**ALL CANADIAN AIRLINES ARE REQUIRED TO PUBLISH THEIR POLICY IN THEIR TARIFF WITH REGARD TO THE TRANSPORT OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS.**

Be sure to click the links on the airline website to view the full airline policies for further detail.

CFM suggests to print a copy of the policy from the airline web page and take it with you.

When making your reservation, consider options for early boarding. Some Canadian air carriers offer pre-boarding for musicians travelling with instruments. If this is not offered, politely ask for additional time to board in order to stow your instrument safely and securely. Depending on individual airline policies, paying extra for early boarding or requesting a seat assignment at the back of the plane may provide more time to stow your instrument, and more space options.

Paying for early boarding may be well worth the cost if it means space will be available for your instrument.

Special fees may not be charged for carrying an instrument, but fees that apply to all carry-on or checked items will apply to instruments. For certain airlines, passengers seated in the rear of the aircraft are boarded immediately after first class and special needs passengers. Find out how the airline you will fly with determines its boarding order. Asking for pre-boarding at the gate is risky and may be too late. Make as many of your boarding arrangements as possible before you arrive at the airport. Notify reservation agents of oversized items.

For space and safety reasons, many airlines limit the number of oversized items allowed in-cabin.

Flight crews have to ensure that oversized items such as large musical instruments occupying a passenger seat do not block passenger views of safety signs (e.g., "Fasten Seat Belt"). Even if you paid an additional fee or booked a seat for your instrument, ask the reservation agent to record that you are traveling with an oversized musical instrument.

# PACKING AND CARRYING YOUR INSTRUMENT

## **Limit the number of carry-on items.**

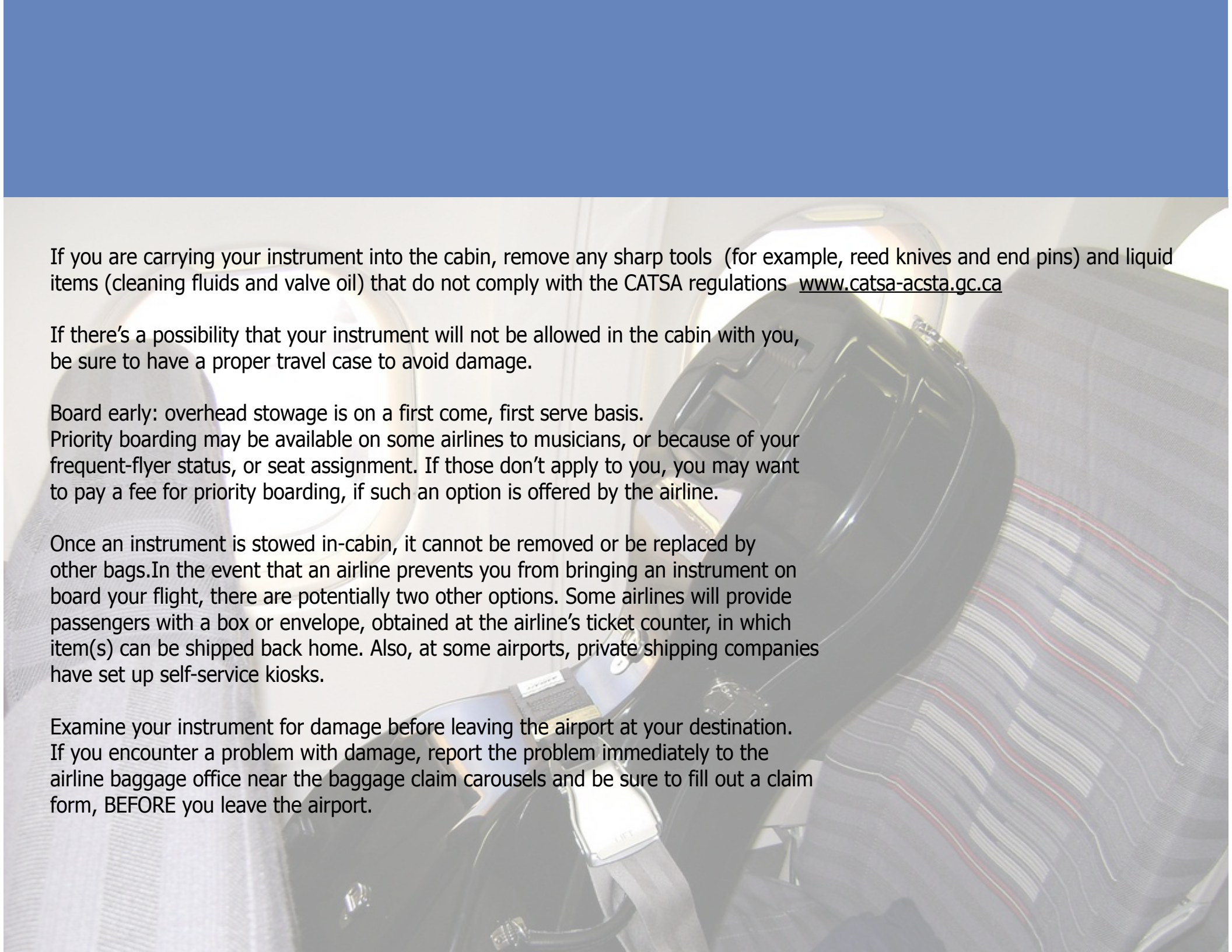
On most airlines, passengers are permitted one carry-on bag (stored in the overhead bin) and one personal item (stored under the seat). Your instrument will be counted as one of these items. The new policy does not require exceptions to this rule. If your instrument is equivalent in size to a "personal item," then you may also bring another carry-on item. On the other hand, if your instrument is too large to be deemed as a "personal item," or too large to fit under the seat, the airline is allowed to treat the instrument as the allowed carry-on item instead of "personal item," and in that case, you may have to check your carry-on item and pay any associated fees for checking that bag.

## **Remove all extraneous items from the case.**

If you plan to carry your instrument into the cabin, all tools and other items should be checked or carried separately to simplify the screening process. What are completely familiar items to you—cleaning fluids and tools, valve oil, end pins, reed knives, mutes, tuners, metronomes—may seem threatening to screening personnel. Know what items are prohibited in carry-on bags by Canadian Air Transport Security Authority (CATSA) regulations. If you are unsure whether an item is permitted, the safest course is to keep it in your checked baggage.

## **Have a backup plan.**

Prepare yourself for the possibility that you may not be able to travel with your instrument in-cabin — even if you have followed all possible procedures. What will you do? Are you willing to send your instrument by air courier? Pack your instrument accordingly just in case. If you must check your instrument, insist that it is put in the temperature controlled section of the cargo hold where pets are placed. If it goes in the regular baggage hold, changes in temperature may cause serious damage. Be sure that you have a hard-sided travel case, but simply placing an instrument in a hard case is not enough. Use foam rubber blocks, bubble wrap, Styrofoam chips ("popcorn") or compressed soft paper to keep the instrument from moving.



If you are carrying your instrument into the cabin, remove any sharp tools (for example, reed knives and end pins) and liquid items (cleaning fluids and valve oil) that do not comply with the CATSA regulations [www.catsa-acsta.gc.ca](http://www.catsa-acsta.gc.ca)

If there's a possibility that your instrument will not be allowed in the cabin with you, be sure to have a proper travel case to avoid damage.

Board early: overhead stowage is on a first come, first serve basis.

Priority boarding may be available on some airlines to musicians, or because of your frequent-flyer status, or seat assignment. If those don't apply to you, you may want to pay a fee for priority boarding, if such an option is offered by the airline.

Once an instrument is stowed in-cabin, it cannot be removed or be replaced by other bags. In the event that an airline prevents you from bringing an instrument on board your flight, there are potentially two other options. Some airlines will provide passengers with a box or envelope, obtained at the airline's ticket counter, in which item(s) can be shipped back home. Also, at some airports, private shipping companies have set up self-service kiosks.

Examine your instrument for damage before leaving the airport at your destination. If you encounter a problem with damage, report the problem immediately to the airline baggage office near the baggage claim carousels and be sure to fill out a claim form, BEFORE you leave the airport.

# DEALING CALMLY WITH PROBLEMS

It is crucial as a traveling musician that you be aware of several important facts:

- The most important responsibility of airport and airline staff is security.
- The most important responsibility of gate agents and flight attendants is safety.
- The most important responsibility of the captain is safety AND security.

Your instrument may be an unusual and unexpected item to aviation personnel.

Gate agents and flight crews have a very short period of time to seat passengers in an aircraft.

You (and your instrument) are only one of many passengers that will likely have special needs.

However, you have the right to travel with your instrument in the cabin in the manner described in this brochure.

Don't take it personally if a gate agent or a flight crew member seems indifferent to your concerns.

Their time is limited. In many cases, the problem may be resolved easily.

Remain calm and polite, and consider these options when encountering difficulty:

**1) Calmly and quickly** state your understanding of the new airline policy (showing the copy you printed to carry with you) and explain the precautions you have taken to prepare your instrument to safely travel by air.

**2) Be accommodating** by suggesting the instrument be placed in the rear of the cabin, or secured with cords or ties provided by the airline. (Do not bring your own, as they may not be permitted as an approved restraint.)

**3) DO NOT block the way of boarding passengers.**

**4) If necessary, immediately ask to deplane** so that you can resolve this matter with a customer service representative or airline supervisor. Remember that you have limited time to resolve this issue before the plane backs away from the gate. If your flying experience runs counter to the policies posted by the airlines, you are strongly encouraged to submit a complaint to both the airline and the Canadian Transport Agency. Please keep copies of all correspondence and copy communications with [www.cfmusicians.org](http://www.cfmusicians.org)

Start with a complaint to the airline. Canadian Transport Agency requires airlines to acknowledge consumer complaints within 30 days of receiving them and to send a substantive response within 60 days. Next, submit a copy of your complaint to the Canadian Transport Agency [www.otc-cta.gc.ca](http://www.otc-cta.gc.ca) , so that they have a record of the difficulty musicians encounter when flying.

CTA monitors complaints for patterns or egregious cases that warrant actions to hold airlines to laws and regulations.



# ADDITIONAL WEBSITE RESOURCES

[www.afm.org](http://www.afm.org) [www.cfmusicians.org](http://www.cfmusicians.org) [www.otc-cta.gc.ca](http://www.otc-cta.gc.ca)



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