Telecaster Setup Checklist

Printable Step-by-Step Reference Card

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0.1 Telecaster Setup Checklist

Print this page and keep it at your workbench. Follow the steps in order.

0.1.1 Before You Start

- [ ] Fresh strings installed and stretched
- [ ] Guitar tuned to pitch (standard or your preferred tuning)
- [ ] Tools ready: feeler gauges, ruler/action gauge, correct truss rod wrench, screwdriver
- [ ] Clean workspace with good lighting

0.1.2 Step 1: Neck Relief (Truss Rod)

Target: 0.010” (0.25mm) gap at the 8th fret

- [ ] Capo at 1st fret
- [ ] Press low E string at last fret (or where neck meets body)
- [ ] Measure gap between string bottom and 8th fret crown with feeler gauge
- [ ] If gap is too large: tighten truss rod (clockwise) — max 1/8 turn
- [ ] If gap is too small: loosen truss rod (counter-clockwise) — max 1/8 turn
- [ ] Retune to pitch after each adjustment
- [ ] Re-measure and repeat if needed

Truss Rod Location	Wrench Size
Headstock (Modern/MIM)	4mm Allen
Headstock (American)	1/8” Allen
Heel (Vintage/Squier CV)	Phillips screwdriver

My measurement: _____

0.1.3 Step 2: String Action (Saddle Height)

Measure at the 12th fret — bottom of string to top of fret

String	Target Height
High E (1st)	1.6mm (4/64”)
B (2nd)	1.7mm
G (3rd)	1.8mm
D (4th)	1.9mm
A (5th)	1.9mm
Low E (6th)	2.0mm (5/64”)

- [ ] Measure each string at the 12th fret
- [ ] Adjust saddle height screws (tiny Allen screws on each saddle)
- [ ] Retune after each adjustment
- [ ] Re-measure until all strings are within spec

> **Tele Note:** If you have a 3-saddle bridge (vintage style), each saddle controls two strings. You'll need to compromise between the two — aim for the average of both target heights.

My measurements: E____ B____ G____ D____ A____ E____

0.1.4 Step 3: Pickup Height

Fret the last fret; measure pole-piece top to string bottom.

Pickup type	Bass side (low E)	Treble side (high E)
Vintage-style single-coil	6/64" (2.4mm)	5/64" (2.0mm)
Standard single-coil	5/64" (2.0mm)	4/64" (1.6mm)

These are Fender's general pickup-type starting points, not a fixed neck/bridge table for every Telecaster. Follow the installed pickup maker's instructions; a covered neck pickup may need a separately specified cover-to-string reference.

- [ ] Record the neck and bridge gaps on the bass and treble sides
- [ ] Identify the mount before adjusting: bridge plate, pickguard or direct to body
- [ ] Suspended plate/pickguard pickup: clockwise raises; counter-clockwise lowers
- [ ] Body-mounted neck pickup: clockwise lowers; counter-clockwise raises
- [ ] View rotation from the screw head; work in quarter turns and remeasure
- [ ] Keep the screws engaged and leave clearance for vibrating strings

Directions: Fender Standard Series manual, PDF page 6.
My measurements: Neck B____ T____ | Bridge B____ T____

0.1.5 Step 4: Intonation

Compare 12th-fret harmonic to 12th-fret fretted note

- [ ] Plug into a chromatic tuner
- [ ] Play 12th-fret harmonic on each string — should read in tune
- [ ] Fret the same string at the 12th fret — compare to harmonic
- [ ] If fretted note is **sharp**: move saddle **away** from neck (lengthen string)
- [ ] If fretted note is **flat**: move saddle **toward** neck (shorten string)
- [ ] Retune the open string after each saddle adjustment
- [ ] Repeat until harmonic and fretted note match within +/- 1 cent

> **Tele Note:** On 3-saddle bridges, intonation is a compromise between paired strings. Compensated saddles (angled or staggered) help significantly.

0.1.6 Final Check

- [ ] Play open chords — listen for buzz or dead notes
- [ ] Play barre chords up the neck — check for choking
- [ ] Bend strings on upper frets — notes should sustain, not die
- [ ] Check tuning stability — strum hard, retune, repeat
- [ ] If everything sounds good: you're done!

Use the applicable maker's instructions for your guitar. The pickup values above are general pickup-type starting points; check the actual hardware and balance by ear.

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