

Truss Rod Safety Cheat Sheet

The Rules That Protect Your Guitar

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0.1 Truss Rod Safety Cheat Sheet

Keep this at your workbench. When in doubt, stop and read it again.

0.1.1 What the Truss Rod Does

The truss rod is a steel rod inside your guitar's neck. It counteracts the pull of string tension to keep the neck at the correct curvature (called "relief").

- **Tightening** (clockwise) = straightens the neck = less relief
 - **Loosening** (counter-clockwise) = allows forward bow = more relief
 - **Target relief:** 0.010" (0.25mm) gap at the 8th fret
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0.1.2 The DO List

DO turn a maximum of 1/8 turn (45 degrees) at a time — never more

DO retune to pitch after every adjustment — the reading changes with tuning

DO re-measure the gap after each turn — small changes make a big difference

DO use the correct wrench size for your guitar (see table below)

DO wait 5–10 minutes between adjustments if the neck feels stiff

DO support the neck while adjusting — don't let the guitar hang unsupported

DO keep a record of how many turns you've made and in which direction

0.1.3 The DON'T List

DON'T ever force a truss rod that won't turn — stop immediately

DON'T make more than 1/2 turn total in a single session

DON'T use the wrong wrench size — close-but-not-exact strips the nut

DON'T adjust without tuning to pitch first — slack strings give false readings

DON'T skip retuning between adjustments — every turn changes string tension

DON'T panic if the neck doesn't respond instantly — some woods take hours to settle

0.1.4 Know Your Wrench

Guitar Model	Wrench Size	Location
Mexican Fender / Player Series	4mm Allen	Headstock
American Professional / Ultra	1/8" Allen (3.18mm)	Headstock
American Vintage / AVRI	1/8" Allen (3.18mm)	Headstock
Vintage / Squier Classic Vibe	Phillips screwdriver	Heel (remove neck)
Squier Affinity / Bullet	4mm Allen	Headstock

Warning: A 4mm wrench is NOT the same as 1/8" (3.18mm). Using the wrong size can strip the truss rod nut. Check your model before starting.

0.1.5 Which Direction Do I Turn?

Neck has too much relief (gap larger than 0.010"):

- Strings feel high and spongy in the middle of the neck
- Action feels inconsistent — higher in the middle, lower at the ends
- **Fix:** Tighten — turn **clockwise** (righty-tighty)

Neck has too little relief (gap smaller than 0.010"):

- Fret buzz on frets 1–5, especially on wound strings
 - Notes choke out or rattle in the first position
 - **Fix:** Loosen — turn **counter-clockwise** (lefty-loosey)
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0.1.6 When to STOP and See a Luthier

Stop adjusting immediately and consult a professional if:

- The truss rod **won't turn** despite reasonable force
 - You hear **cracking, popping, or grinding** sounds
 - The nut feels **stripped** and the wrench spins freely
 - You've made **1/2 turn total** with no visible change
 - The neck has a visible **twist** (one side higher than the other)
 - Your guitar is **pre-1985 vintage** — older rods are more fragile
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0.1.7 Seasonal Reminder

Wood moves with humidity. Check your neck relief:

Season	What Happens	Likely Adjustment
Spring/Summer (high humidity)	Neck bows forward (more relief)	May need to tighten slightly
Fall/Winter (low humidity)	Neck straightens or back-bows	May need to loosen slightly

Best practice: Check relief at each string change, or at minimum twice per year (spring and fall).

0.1.8 Quick Measurement Reminder

1. Capo at 1st fret
 2. Press the low E string at the last fret (or where neck meets body)
 3. Check the gap between the string and the top of the 8th fret
 4. Target: a 0.010" feeler gauge should just slide through
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Your guitar was designed to be adjusted. Small turns, patience, and the right wrench — that's all it takes.

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