



Airport check-in processes are inconvenient even on the rare occasions when they go smoothly. Savvy senior travelers can't help being angry about it, because ever-tightening security started over 40 years ago.

In the 1970s, a bunch of Cuban and Arab political and/or religious freaks decided to hijack, murder and blow up their own insane butts in passenger aircraft. They believed it would advance their crazy causes.

Then came the horror of 9/11/01, and the growing security mess now affects every flight to anywhere. Even in the worst delay messes, there are ways to make your own check-in process easier. While you can't do anything to change the security system, you can take personal steps to help get through it with less delay and frustration.

Here are some suggestions: Use your computer/smartphone to get boarding passes early. The best way is to click in to the airline website exactly 24 hours in advance of your flight, follow instructions and you'll get a form you can print out at home.

There are several ways to do it. Pre-register on your computer/smartphone, then print your ticket quickly for free when you arrive at the airport from one of your airline's ticket kiosks.

Heed oft-repeated instructions from your airline to arrive at the airport from one to two hours prior to your flight. That will give you plenty of time to get through security during busy times, and go on to your gate without rushing. Call the airline from home within three or four hours of the scheduled flight to get the progress of your flight and any changes in schedules.

If you learn early enough that there are delays, you won't have to go to the airport and find you have a seven-hour wait. Worse, your flight has been cancelled, and you must dash around the airport trying to make other reservations.

Unless you're going on a long cruise or dress-up vacation and need lots of clothes, fly with just carry-on bags. Checking and retrieving baggage is not only time-consuming, but also the fees are ever increasing.

Also, if you must check your bags, when arriving at the airport, see if there's an employee on duty outside to check your bags. It could speed up the process a bit, and you won't have to lug stuff all over the airport until you find a check-in counter.

Security, of course, can be the biggest stumbling block to smooth progress to the boarding gate. When you pack, know what's not allowed on flights, such as certain liquids, mercury thermometers, pointed metal and wooden objects and other potentially dangerous items. If you have questions, call or surf websites of the airline or TSA (Transportation Security Administration) before you leave home.

When approaching the first guard desk before the main security area, be sure to have boarding pass and driver's license in hand. This avoids digging and fumbling while everyone behind you hates you.

Prepare before the moving belt line and x-ray. Along with carry-on, when required, remove shoes and add laptops, belts, coins, earrings, pens and other metal stuff and place all in the plastic box. When you travel by air, wear coats with both outside and inside pockets, so many items can be secured in pockets.

Fight boredom in the waiting area and while in flight. Take printed or virtual crossword puzzles, to make the time go much faster than when just sitting, cursing and fretting. An all-purpose laptop, smartphone or other little electronic doodads can also help pass the time.

If traveling with others, especially small kids, realize they reflect your mood. If you're restless and angry, they'll be, too. Handle all situations calmly, and all will have smoother going.

Keep cool. There's not much you can do to make your check-in, waiting time and flight go any smoother. You hurt no one but yourself by raising blood pressure to boiling. If an alcoholic drink can help, get one at the airport bar. Don't overdo it with a dozen shots, because I certainly don't want you sitting next to me when you need that little barf bag.