Types of Airfares - Rules and Regulations for Airline Tickets

1. What is a Fare?
Airfares are most often based on one-way or round-trip travel. Fares may be published, unpublished and/or negotiated fares (corporations, or government agencies/organizations may have fares negotiated with an airline at a lower rate). Unpublished fares are also known as consolidated fares and are offered by consolidators or bucket shops.

2. Published Fares: A published fare is one that is available for purchase by anyone. An unpublished fare works a bit differently.

3. The ABC’s of Airfares
When booking a ticket, regardless of whether it is using a published or unpublished fare, there are letters that are assigned to different fares. These letters indicate the class of service, not simply indicating economy or business class, but rather the type of fare that was purchased.

4. Types of Published Airfares
Explanations for the different types of airfares such as APEX and full fares.

You don’t always know what you are going to get when you purchase an airline ticket. Why is it that every person on a flight may have paid a different price to fly? Can you change or cancel your tickets, and if so, at what cost? The airlines have a seemingly secretive formula for constructing airfares. Knowing what types of airfares exist, and how they apply to your travel may not mean that airfares make sense, but you can at least make sense of them.

Simply put, an airfare is the price a passenger pays in order to travel by air. The types of fares, rules and restrictions, taxes, etc., are all components that complicate the price involved for a passenger to fly from one place to another.

Fares are most often based on one-way or round-trip travel. Fares may be published, unpublished and/or negotiated fares (corporations, or government agencies/organizations may have fares negotiated with an airline at a lower rate). Unpublished fares are also known as consolidated fares.

The following is a list of the main types of published airfares - and are based on round-trip or one-way travel:

- **APEX fares** are discounted international fares. Such fares usually require tickets to be purchased in advance (such as 7, 14, or 21 day minimum advance purchase), and will have other restrictions - non-refundable, change fees are just a few of the possible restrictions.
- **Discount Fares** are fares that tend to have a smaller price tag, and are offered for a limited time (seat sales would fall into this category). They usually have a long list of restrictions such as specific travel dates, minimum and maximum stay (for example, a minimum Saturday night stay, a maximum 30 day stay), etc. Unlike most published fares, it is important to make sure that you are aware of the fare rules and restrictions on discount (seat sale) fares. Keep a copy of the rules because seat sale fares come and go quickly, and the rules and restrictions can be harder (sometimes impossible) to retrieve online.
- **Excursion fares** are lower priced fares that involve restrictions like advance purchase, time of year, minimum/maximum stay, etc.
- **Unrestricted, Flexible, or Full Fares** are the titles given to the most expensive tickets. You pay for a ticket that allows you to refund or change the ticket as necessary for fares that can be purchased at any time, even the same day of travel.
• **Joint Fares** are offered by airlines that have some sort of partner relationship on select routes. They essentially give a passenger a price break when you are using more than one airline to get somewhere. Joint fares have their own set of restrictions, not unlike those already mentioned for excursion and discount fares.

• A **through fare** is a fare to a destination reached by traveling through a gateway city. It could be combined with any of the fare types listed above, and is used to obtain a lower price when you are not simply flying from point A to point B, but are rather connecting through other points to get to your destination. If you are traveling from Atlanta to Athens via Frankfurt, you may be offered a through fare, so that instead of paying for Atlanta to Frankfurt and Frankfurt to Athens, you pay one fare for Atlanta through to Athens.

For the sake of profits, airlines will not offer every seat on an aircraft at the seat sale fares, or excursion fares. As flights fill, the least expensive fares disappear regardless of how far in advance it is. Unless you are on a full fare ticket you can be certain that there will be any number of restrictions involved with your airfare - minimum/maximum stay; time of day; weekday, weekend price differences; change fees; mileage (on through fares you may be restricted to a certain number of miles to get you to your destination), advance purchase; youth/child/senior rule differences; etc.. So many fare types, even more fare rules. Considering that airline tickets are contracts between passengers and airlines it is important to know what you are looking for.

A **published fare** is one that is available for purchase by anyone. You could call the airline, or check for prices online, and published fares will be immediately available for purchase.

The rules of such fares are readily available and if there is more than one airline offering the same fare you can count on the rules being virtually the same. A non-refundable fare requiring an advance purchase of 14 days and a minimum Saturday night stay would be just a few of the possible rules of a published fare.

**Seat sales** launched by airlines are considered published fares as well since (subject to seat availability) such airfares are offered to the public.

**Unpublished fares** are an entirely different beast. They may be seats that a consolidator purchased and can offer at highly discounted rates. The fare rules could literally contain anything from absolutely no changes allowed to free changes as long as availability exists. They may or may not allow for advance seat selection or the accumulation of frequent flyer miles.

If you called an airline looking for the rules to an unpublished fare you would be out of luck. They are not offered for sale by the airline online or over the phone with the airline.

When booking a ticket, regardless of whether it is using a published or unpublished fare, there are letters that are assigned to different fares. These letters indicate the class of service, not simply indicating economy or business class, but rather the type of fare that was purchased. Without getting into the particular rules of each fare type, letters are assigned by the airlines to indicate the kind of ticket that has been purchased.

**F, P** are the letters most commonly used to indicate First Class.

**J, C** are the letters most often used to represent Business, or Executive Class.
is almost universally used to indicate a full fare economy ticket.

are just some of the letters indicating subclasses (reduced, restricted, and/or discounted fares). These letters vary by airline and in value. On one airline B may be indicative of a more expensive ticket. On another airline L may represent a ticket booked on a seat sale.

are a few of the letters commonly used to indicate a fare purchased from a consolidator.

If you have booked a discounted fare and are interested in the subclass you are holding, the letter immediately follows the flight number on your ticket and will fall under the heading of Booking Class or some similar, shortened version.

In times of emergency when you have to fly for a family funeral, or to see a terminally ill relative, shopping around for airfares is probably the last thing you want to think about. Many airlines have an answer for this - the bereavement fare, or compassionate fare, which is offered to family members traveling for a death in the family, or imminent death.

So what should one know about bereavement fares?

• They are not always the lowest fare, but are last minute fares that can be booked right up until departure time.
• They are offered for family members traveling to a funeral.
• They can also be offered for family members in the case of imminent death, where a family member is gravely ill.
• Bereavement fares usually entail a discount off of a full fare (unrestricted fare), and are often more expensive than the cost you would pay for a seat sale ticket.
• Bereavement fares tend to be very flexible, permitting free changes and stays of up to 30 days with no minimum stay requirements.
• You can usually secure the discount prior to travel if you provide the required information. A few airlines will only refund the value of the discount after travel is completed. However, all airlines that offer bereavement fares will allow you to apply for a refund after travel is completed (usually you must apply for a refund within 90 days after completion of all flights, along with the required documentation).
• Discounts range from 10 to 75 percent off of full fare prices. The discount most often offered is 50 percent off of full fare.
• Discounts usually apply for one airline only. In effect, if you need more than one airline to get to where you need to go, you will need to buy separate tickets and ask about each airline’s policy.
• Bereavement fares may not be available to all destinations offered by an airline. There are less bereavement fares offered for traveling internationally.
• Where bereavement fares are offered for international travel, the value of the discount may only be given upon return with death certificate because information is harder to verify. Bereavement fares for imminent death in the case of international travel are less common because of the difficulty for the airline to verify information.
• Bereavement fares are offered over the phone or in person at the airline’s ticket counters.
• Bereavement fares MUST be done via the Airline Directly and not via a GDS.
• A bereavement fare is not always the lowest fare available, if you are able to have flexibility in terms of your travel times and dates then ask first if a seat sale fare is available and applies to your travel plans. In larger travel markets it can be useful to have a travel agent who can call around and find the best options for fare and flights.
Air Lingo and Definitions

**A – Bul**

**Actual flying time**: **Definition**: The actual time that an aircraft is in the air - does not include time on the ground (waiting in line for take-off, for example).

**ADCOL**: **Definition**: Also ADCOLL - The abbreviated form for additional collection.

Used by computer reservations systems, airports, and travel agencies. ADCOL is used to collect additional fees.

For example, paying to upgrade a ticket from economy to business class would require an

**ADT**: **Definition**: The abbreviated form for Approved departure time.

**Airline designator**: **Definition**: The code designated by IATA to represent the name of an airline (UA is United Airlines, QF is Qantas, etc.).

**Airport codes**: **Definition**: Three letter codes used to identify airports (ex. YVR is Vancouver, Canada; EWR is Newark, New Jersey, etc.).

**Air rage**: **Definition**: When passengers become violent towards crew members or passengers.

**AOG**: **Definition**: Act of God - also known as a `force majeure'. This encompasses situations where airlines are not legally responsible to provide lodging, transport, or other expenses that travelers may incur as a result of an AOG. Inclement weather, civil disruptions, and other unanticipated events may be classified as an AOG.

Sometimes is also used to state the Aircraft is On the Ground - when an aircraft urgently needs some sort of maintenance on the ground when it is supposed to be in the air.

**APEX**: **Definition**: Abbreviated form for Advance Purchase Excursion Fare. Usually refers to international fares that have been discounted.
**ARNK:**  **Definition:** Pronounced Arunk - The abbreviated form of Arrival Not Known.

Used in computer reservations systems to indicate a portion of an air travel itinerary that does not involve a flight.

A passenger travels from Boston to Madrid. He makes his way to Barcelona by train. He flies back to Boston from Barcelona. The portion from Madrid to Barcelona is an ARNK.

**ATA:**  **Definition:** The abbreviated form for actual time of arrival of a flight.

**ATC:**  **Definition:** The abbreviated form for Air Traffic Control.

**AVIH:**  **Definition:** Indicates that an animal is in the cargo hold, and not in the passenger cabin of an aircraft, used in computer reservations systems.

**Back to back ticketing:**  **Definition:** Considered an illegal practice by the airlines. When a passenger does not meet the requirements of a discounted ticket (usually the Saturday night stay requirement), and is traveling more than once to a destination on business, a passenger may purchase two tickets.

For one ticket, the city of origin is the starting and ending point of the ticket. For the other, the destination city serves as the starting point of the ticket. Airlines that discover back to back ticketing may issue a warning; confiscate the ticket; assess a fee; etc.

For example; a passenger is traveling from Houston to Cleveland two weeks in a row from Monday to Wednesday both times. The first ticket would read Houston-Cleveland (first Monday), and Cleveland-Houston (second Wednesday). The second ticket would be Cleveland-Houston (first Wednesday), and Houston-Cleveland (second Monday).

**Base fare:**  **Definition:** The price of a ticket before any taxes have been added.

**Bereavement fare:**  **Definition:** A discounted fare offered to family members traveling because of an imminent death or death in the family. Most airlines that offer bereavement fares will require information about the situation.

**Also Known As:** Compassionate Fare
**Black box:** Definition: Also known as the Cockpit Recorder or the Flight Data Recorder.

Records all of the data transmissions such as altitude, air speed, etc., and the voice and sound transmissions.

Black boxes are not black; they are brightly colored in order to find them more easily amongst the wreckage after an accident.

**Blackout dates:** Definition: Also known as Blackout Periods.

The dates on which certain fares or certain types of tickets are not permitted.

Blackout dates can also extend to issues like baggage or cargo restrictions (for example, there may be winter blackout dates on specific aircraft, not permitting animals to be accepted in the cargo hold).

Blackout dates often apply during peak travel periods or over holiday travel periods.

**Bucket shop:** Definition: The British term for a consolidator. A bucket shop deals in discounted fares.

**Bulkhead:** Definition: The physical walls on an aircraft that separates the plane into different sections (such as business class and economy class).

**Bulkhead seating:** Definition: The seats on an airplane that are immediately behind the bulkhead (see definition of bulkhead). These seats usually have limited storage, and may have either more leg room or sometimes less leg room.

**Bu - Exc**

**Bumping:** Definition: Passengers that are denied a seat on the flight they originally booked on due to a flight being oversold. They will then be `bumped` to another flight.

**Call sign:** Definition: The title used to identify an aircraft for communication purposes. An example would be Air Canada 856 (A flight from Toronto to London).

**Carry-on:** Definition: Luggage that is permitted to be brought on to the aircraft by the passenger.
**Circle trip:** Definition: A trip that involves more than one destination.

An example would be London to Milan, then Milan to Frankfurt, and return to London (with Milan and Frankfurt both being destinations).

**Cockpit:** Definition: The compartment at the front of the plane containing all of the devices required to fly an aircraft.

**Code share:** Definition: An agreement between airlines to sell space on each other's flights.

The flights will have both the operating carrier's flight number (the airline that is using its aircraft for the flight), and the code sharing flight number (the partner airline in the agreement sells space on the flight as if it were its own, and has its own flight number).

For example, Air Canada operates flight AC812 from Chicago O'Hare to Toronto Pearson. United code shares on this flight, selling space as UA3094.

**Commercial airline:** Definition: An airline that transports passengers.

**Comp:** Definition: The abbreviated form of Complimentary - any freebies or complimentary extras.

**Connection:** Definition: The additional flight(s) required to get from the airport of origin to the final arrival airport.

For example, Salt Lake City to London with a connection in Chicago means a change of planes in Chicago.

**Consolidator:** Definition: A company that negotiates the purchase of blocks of tickets from an airline and sells that space (at some sort of discount) to the traveling public.

Also Known As: (sometimes) Bucket shops

**Contract of carriage:** Definition: The legal contract between the passenger and the airline, issued with the ticket.

**DALPO:** Definition: The abbreviated form of do all possible, used in computer reservations systems.

**Destination:** Definition: The place a person is traveling to.
**Direct flight**: **Definition**: A flight that stops at another airport, but passengers do not change planes.

An example of a direct flight is a passenger taking a direct flight from Boston to Dublin. The flight first stops at Shannon Airport and then continues to Dublin, with the passengers traveling to Dublin staying on the same plane.

**Discount fare**: **Definition**: A lower priced fare, usually offered for a limited time.

**Double booking**: **Definition**: Booking two or more reservations when only one will be used. Doing this can lead to all reservations involved being canceled.

**ETA**: **Definition**: The abbreviated form of Estimated Time of Arrival, used in computer reservations systems, airports, and by the travel industry.

**E-tickets**: **Definition**: Also known as Electronic Tickets or Ticketless Travel.

A ticket that is not physically printed on ticket stock, and is instead stored in the computer reservation system of an airline.

E-ticket holders are issued a receipt, contract of carriage, and flight itinerary as proof of travel documents.

**Excess baggage**: **Definition**: Luggage that exceeds the airline's allowable limit for weight or number of pieces. Passengers are usually charged extra for excess baggage, if excess baggage is permitted at all.

**Excursion fare**: **Definition**: A lower priced fare with restrictions, like advance purchase, non refundable, etc.

**Ext - Int**

**Extra section**: **Definition**: A second flight added to a flight schedule in order to accommodate additional passengers.
**Fare basis:**  **Definition:** Representing a specific fare and class of service with letters, numbers, or a combination of both. For example, the letter Y on its own represents full fare economy.

**FIM:**  **Definition:** Abbreviated form of Flight Interruption Manifest.

FIMs are flight coupons that are given to passengers when some change in their flight itineraries has occurred at the airport.

For example, if a passenger volunteers to take a later flight in an oversold flight situation and the new flights involve a different connection city, a FIM (which acts as a ticket) will be issued so that the passenger has a ticket to fly on the new flights.

**Final approach:**  **Definition:** A common term for landing an aircraft at the end of a flight.

**FIRAV:**  **Definition:** The abbreviated form for First Available Flight used in computer reservations systems.

**FLIFO:**  **Definition:** The abbreviated form for Flight Information used in computer reservations systems.

**FQTV:**  **Definition:** The abbreviated form for Frequent Traveler used in computer reservations systems.

**Fuel surcharge:**  **Definition:** A fee added to a ticket by an airline to cover the increased cost of fuel. Usually lumped onto the cost of a ticket as if it were a tax.

**Fuselage:**  **Definition:** The central body of the aircraft.

**Gates:**  **Definition:** The physical areas of the airport where flights depart and arrive.

**Hidden Cities:**  **Definition:** When a passenger books an itinerary that is further than his/her destination in order to get a lower fare.
The passenger then ends travel by getting off the plane, and not connecting to the city that ensured the lower fare.

Let's say that there is a seat sale between Chicago and San Francisco, but you want to travel to Denver and there is no seat sale that is as low as the one to San Francisco. If you booked the ticket Chicago to San Francisco with a connection in Denver, and got off in Denver, you would be practicing the `hidden cities' process (which the airlines consider illegal).

**HK**: **Definition:** Also KK and GK - the most frequently used codes to indicate confirmed space on a flight, used in computer reservations systems.

**HL**: **Definition:** The abbreviated form of have waitlisted (HL is a code representing wait listing), used in computer reservations systems.

**Holding pattern**: **Definition:** When Air Traffic Control has a flight turn away from the airport and remain at an assigned altitude instead of landing. The pilots then await further instructions.

**Hub**: **Definition:** An airport where an airline bases many of its major flight operations, and uses many of the gates for its aircraft.

**IATA**: **Definition:** The abbreviated form of International Air Transport Association.

**Illegal connection**: **Definition:** Connections that do not adhere to the minimum connection time, and are thus not legal connections because it is deemed that there is not enough time to connect.

**Inbound**: **Definition:** The return flight portion of a ticket.

**In-flight**: **Definition:** Services provided during a flight.

**In transit**: **Definition:** A passenger is currently traveling to his/her destination.

**Inv - Off**

**INVOL**: **Definition:** The abbreviated form of Involuntary denied boarding.

Refers to passengers who do not volunteer to take a later flight due to an oversold
flight situation (and are compensated for doing so), but are forced to take a later flight.

**Itinerary**: **Definition**: A list of flights that a passenger is scheduled to take.

**Jet lag**: **Definition**: The tired, often disorienting way a passenger feels after traveling through many time zones in a short amount of time.

**Joint fare**: **Definition**: An agreement between certain airlines to charge specific fares when a passenger uses more than one airline.

These fares are agreed on by the airlines involved and would be closer to the fares that could be charged if a passenger was only traveling on one airline to get to their destination.

**Landing fee**: **Definition**: A fee that the airlines pay for the right to land at an airport.

**Layover**: **Definition**: Usually an overnight stop during the flight portion of a trip, involving a change of airplanes or another form of transportation.

**Leg**: **Definition**: One single flight portion of an itinerary.

**Low season**: **Definition**: The times of year when prices of tickets decline because it is a less popular time of year to travel to a destination.

**MAAS**: **Definition**: The abbreviated form for Meet and Assist, used in computer reservations systems. Indicates that the passenger needs to be assisted in some way by an airline agent.

**MCO**: **Definition**: The abbreviated form of Miscellaneous Charge Order, used by airlines and travel agencies.

It is widely known for its use as a travel voucher. Can also be used for collecting miscellaneous charges such as excess baggage and change fees.
**Minimum connection time**: Definition: The legal minimum time necessary to change planes at a given airport. If this is ignored, the connection is called an illegal connection.

**Min/max**: Definition: The abbreviated form for Minimum/Maximum stay - refers to the minimum and maximum times allowed for travel on a ticket.

Minimum and maximum stays are restrictions often imposed on discounted fares.

Weekend fares are examples of tickets with minimum and/or maximum stays. A weekend fare will typically allow a passenger to begin travel on a Friday or Saturday, and return Monday or Tuesday. In this example, the minimum stay would be a Saturday night, with the maximum stay being the Monday or Tuesday.

**NN**: Definition: The abbreviated form of need or require space on a flight or another air travel related service, used in computer reservations systems.

**Non-refundable**: Definition: If a passenger does not use a ticket, none of the money paid for the ticket will be returned.

Many airlines will allow such unused, non refundable tickets to be used as a credit towards future travel after paying a fee to change the ticket.

**Non-stop flight**: Definition: A flight that does not stop at another airport before reaching its point of arrival

An example of a non-stop flight is a flight from Boston to Dublin. The flight goes to Dublin without stopping at another airport.

**Non-transferable**: Definition: The only person who can use the ticket is the one who has his/her name on the ticket.

**NOOP**: Definition: The abbreviated form for Not Operating used in computer reservations systems. In other words, the flight is not operating because it has been removed from the airline's schedule, or has been canceled.

**NOREC**: Definition: The abbreviated form for No Record used in computer reservations systems. Indicates no record of a passenger's booking can be found.

**NOSHO**: Definition: Also known as No Show. A passenger who doesn't show up to take the flight that he/she is booked on.
**On - Sh**

**Off-line connection**: Definition: A connection that not only involves a change of planes, but a change of airlines as well.

**On-line connection**: Definition: A connection that involves a change of airplanes but not a change of airlines.

**Open jaw**: Definition: A flight itinerary where the departure city is different on the way out than the return.

Or alternatively, the destination city that a passenger arrives in is different than the one that is departed from on the return portion of a flight itinerary.

An example would be a traveler starting at New York's LaGuardia flying into San Francisco International, and then returning to Washington Dulles airport instead of New York.

**Open ticket**: Definition: A ticket with no date specified and the passenger books a flight when ready to travel. These are usually full fare tickets, as opposed to a discounted, restricted fare.

**Outbound**: Definition: The portion of the trip where a passenger is leaving the first city of a flight itinerary and is traveling to a destination, or destinations.

**Overbook**: Definition: When an airline takes more reservations for a flight than it has seats on an aircraft.

This is based upon the assumption that there will be passengers who will not show up for their flights. Thus, it is assumed, there will be enough space on the flight for the overbookings.

**Oversell**: Definition: As with overbooking, it is when an airline takes more reservations than it has seats on an aircraft.
**PAX:** **Definition:** Also PSGR - The abbreviated form of passenger, used in computer reservations systems.

**PIL:** **Definition:** Also known as Flight Manifest.

The abbreviated form for passenger information list.

A PIL contains the list of all persons on board and contains details such as special meals, additional assistance requirements, and/or other information.

**PNR:** **Definition:** The abbreviated form for Passenger Name Record or Personal Name Record used in computer reservations systems.

A PNR contains all of the passenger's information contained in a specific booking like flights, phone numbers, etc.

**Published fare:** **Definition:** A fare that is available for purchase to anyone.

**Record locator:** **Definition:** A combination of letters, numbers, or both forming a unique code which identifies a passenger's booking.

**Red eye:** **Definition:** An overnight flight that arrives early the following morning.

**Revalidation sticker:** **Definition:** Also known as a Validation Sticker. A sticker placed on a flight coupon in order to indicate a change in flight number, time, class of service, etc.

**Rmks:** **Definition:** The abbreviated form for Remarks, used in computer reservations systems.

Remarks may include that the passenger has been advised of the rules of the fare, or other information that is not vital information for airport agents, but may be important for reservation agents.

**Roundtrip:** **Definition:** A flight itinerary that involves flying to a single destination and back.

**Routing:** **Definition:** The sequence of airports used (whether it be connections or destinations) in order to build an airfare.
**SC**: **Definition**: The abbreviated form for Schedule Change, used in computer reservations systems. Indicates some sort of change in the arrival or departure times of a flight.

**Segment**: **Definition**: As with Leg, it is a single portion of a flight itinerary.

**Short haul**: **Definition**: Shorter flights, both in terms of distance and duration.

**Shoulder season**: **Definition**: The travel season that falls between low and high seasons, offering fares that also fall somewhere between low and high seasons.

**St - Zu**

**Standby**: **Definition**: The procedure of waiting for a seat to open up on a flight on which a passenger is not booked/confirmed.

**Stopover**: **Definition**: A planned stop of at least one night (or more than 4 hours domestically), and then continuing the next part of a flight itinerary.

**Through fare**: **Definition**: The fare to a destination reached by traveling through a gateway city.

For example, traveling from Atlanta to Oslo via London. The fare is given all the way through from Atlanta to Oslo, and is not broken into a fare between Atlanta and London, and London and Oslo.

**Ticket**: **Definition**: A contractual travel document between a traveler and an airline.

**Ticket stock**: **Definition**: Blank airline tickets.

**UM**: **Definition**: The abbreviated form for unaccompanied minor, used in computer reservations systems. An unaccompanied minor is a child traveling without a parent or guardian.

**Unrestricted fare**: **Definition**: A more expensive airfare that offers greater flexibility (allowing changes, refunds, etc.).
**UTR**: **Definition:** The abbreviated form for unable to reach, used in computer reservations systems.

Usually a comment added to a file when some part of a passenger's flight itinerary has changed, and the airline has not yet been able to reach the passenger to advise them.

**VOL**: **Definition:** The abbreviated form of Voluntary denied boarding refers to passengers who volunteer to take a later flight due to an oversold flight situation (and are compensated for doing so).

**WK**: **Definition:** Code used to indicate space was confirmed on a flight but no longer is, used in computer reservations systems.

WK means that the original flight has somehow changed. Some reasons include - it is now a different flight number, departure time, date of travel, or canceled.

**XCL**: **Definition:** Also XXL - The abbreviated form of canceled, used in computer reservations systems.

**Zulu time**: **Definition:** Also known as UTC (Universal Time Co-ordinated), was GMT (Greenwich Mean Time) - Zulu time is the standard time used for flight operations globally.

### Deciphering Airline Fare Codes

Recently, we heard about a man, who wrote that he had bought a round-trip ticket from Atlanta to Kuwait from Northwest Airlines, operated by KLM, for the bargain basement price of $1175 round trip (this fare usually starts at $1500). Knowing that a low fare like this would be heavily restricted, he assumed he'd pay a penalty plus the difference in the fare if he needed to change his flight dates. But he didn't expect to be told, "Use it or lose it" by the airline when he tried to make a change, over a week in advance, to fly a day later than his ticket was scheduled. As in: No changes, not even for a penalty, and if you purposely "miss" your flight? No stored value for you. (Incidentally, there were seats available at the same price on the later flight.)

We contacted NWA's call center to ask about the flight and were told, "Well, it was a 'T' fare, so of course he couldn't store the value." Actually, this isn't quite accurate. We checked with NWA spokes person, who confirmed that, while T class fares are usually quite restricted, they're not always "use it or lose it." The lesson here: While it would have been smart to thoroughly check the restrictions first, one class of airfare doesn't always hold the same restrictions within even a single airline. And one airline's "T" fare class could be another airline's "K."

Sound confusing? It can be. And it's certainly possible to simply cruise through airfare booking, never learning a thing about fare codes. But there are a couple of reasons to familiarize yourself with the basics: Anecdotal evidence is that, with airlines cutting capacity and in a constant state of financial flux, you'll be seeing more fares, like Ken's Northwest Airlines fare, that come with far heavier restrictions. Naturally, the most
restricted airfares almost always come with the most attractive prices. But if you're always succumbing to price alone, you can miss out on some benefits that come with certain fare classes, such as bonus mile offers, elite status miles, special promotions, or quirky upgrades (which we'll get to later).

Why not just sell first and coach class tickets, and call it a day?

Before we get into the intricacies of class of service codes, here's a little background. Of course you know of the major classes of airline service: first, business, and economy. Those classes are subdivided into a variety of sub-classes: restricted business, full-fare economy, discounted economy, deeply discounted economy, etc., based on restrictions. A full-fare economy ticket will have fewer restrictions, such as advance purchase, minimum stay, or penalty-free refund than a discount economy ticket, but you'll pay for the privilege.

That's the reason you could find yourself sitting next to someone in coach who paid $200 less for his seat than you did, while waiting the same number of infuriating hours on the tarmac and buying the same overpriced snack boxes as you. But we digress. It's all part of inventory control. In order to stay profitable, years ago airlines began subdividing their seats, allocating a certain number of seats (or a "bucket") at each fare level per flight. The number of these seats depends on complicated formulas that factor in the route, the time of year, the expected breakdown of leisure vs. business passengers, and the time of day, among other things. The inventory control department will release certain "buckets" at different times, tightening or loosening the spigot as needed to capture as many potential passengers paying as much as possible. And no, the airlines don't make public how many buckets they've created in any subcategory.

What fare codes look like

The letter that denotes class of service is only one in a string of letters and numbers the airline puts together to describe the fare you've bought. You'll find the fare basis code in the fare basis box on a physical ticket, or on most e-ticket confirmations. Here's an example: Say you bought a ticket with the fare basis code KL14LNR. The letter K refers to the class of service for booking; the L refers to low season; the 14 refers to a 14-day advance booking; and the NR means non-refundable. More than one fare may exist for each class of service. For example, there might be two "K" fares - one for midweek travel and one for weekend travel.

Searching by class

The first letter of the string is the one you'll want to search for. Generally, first class fares are coded as F or P, business class is C or J, and full-fare coach is Y. After that, economy class fares run the gamut of alphabet letters, with the hierarchy varying from one airline to another. Here's a chart of major airlines' codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Airline</th>
<th>First</th>
<th>Restricted First</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Restricted Business</th>
<th>Coach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delta</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>J,C</td>
<td>D,I</td>
<td>Y,B,M,H,Q,K,L,U,T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F,P</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>C,Z</td>
<td>Y,H,Q,V,K,L,T,V,W</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Commercial Airlines Standby Policies

- Commercial Airlines such as United, Delta and American Airlines allow military passengers to fly standby on a space-available basis on an earlier flight than their original, ticketed flight while retaining their spot on their original, confirmed flight. United Airlines allows any passenger to fly standby, while Delta requires an extra fee unless the passenger has an elite or premium status. American Airlines allows active U.S. military personnel and dependents traveling on orders or personal travel to fly standby at no additional charge.

For any flight a military passenger has requested to fly standby, the gate or ticketing agent will allow all confirmed passengers to board first and then will accept standby passengers until all seats are filled. A military passenger whose standby request cannot be fulfilled will be bumped to the top of the standby list for the next flight.

### Commercial Airlines Military Discount Fares

- Commercial airlines such as Delta and United offer unpublished military fares to active military personnel. These fares are lower than published fare prices and must be booked with an airline reservation agent over the phone. Although charges are usually assessed to book a ticket with an agent over the phone, this fee is waived for military personnel. Continental Airlines offers special military fares for leisure travel as well.

### Military Airlines

- Space available flight (also called "space A" or "military hops") is a special privilege offered to active duty and retired military personnel and their families. These people can book flights on unused seats on Department of Defense-owned or controlled aircraft. Seats are made available after all required or duty passengers and cargo are filled. Although finding and making reservations has become more cumbersome since 9/11, space available travel is still an economical option for active duty or retired military personnel and their families. Space A travel requires time and flexibility and should only be undertaken when the service personnel has the appropriate amount of leave time. If a time sensitive trip needs to be booked, it should be made with a commercial airline.