



The (Just in Case) Tool Bag

There are many things a guitarist needs to prepare for before playing a gig, open mic night or rehearsal. However, many guitarists are not organised enough when it comes to preparing for breakdowns with their guitars or equipment while playing live. It is prudent to have a tool bag handy with all of the things you might need on a gig just in case anything should go wrong. It is Murphy's Law that you will break a string when you haven't got any spares handy, or the battery will go flat in your tuner when the nearest shop is 50 kilometres away.

The reason I am writing this article is a few months ago a guitarist, who was playing at the bar across the road from our gig, came over and wanted a top E string for his guitar. He had broken his and had no spares. All the music shops were shut, but luckily I had a spare set to lend him. Never let yourself be in this situation. While it is normally only minor issues that crop up if you look after your equipment, they can ruin your night and possibly your reputation.

Some of the things that many top players carry with them are:

- **Spare strings** – Always have at least one spare set of strings on hand, but two or three spares would be better. If you carry acoustics and electrics with you, like I do, you will need spare strings for each instrument.
- **Spare straps** – It is surprising how often the spare strap comes in handy because one of the guys left their's at home. Sometimes I get people who want me to play their guitar, but the strap is not right for me, so I get my spare.
- **Picks** – It is surprising how these little things vanish. Buy them in bulk and always buy bright coloured picks as they are easier to see if you drop one while playing.
- **Screwdrivers** – You will need both Phillips and slot screwdrivers.
- **Pliers and vice grips** – Both normal and long-nose pliers will come in handy as will the vice grips for those difficult situations.
- **Microphones** – I have seen microphones dropped, which then don't work and the band haven't got any spares. Don't you be caught out.

- **Allen keys** – A lot of music related equipment use screws that need Allen keys to undo them – like on floating bridges.
- **Wire cutters** – Handy for when your guitar leads need fixing and cutting off the ends of strings.
- **Tape** – Both electrical and duct tape. Gaffa tape is also great for keeping leads fixed to the floor so no one can trip or fall over them.
- **Extension cords** – Both long and short ones. I even have a 20m extension cord that gets used quite a bit.
- **Power strips** – You can never have enough of these. The best ones are with the double plugs on the ends, extra space for the larger adapters – and have surge protection.
- **Spare tubes and fuses** – It is easy to damage tubes while transporting your gear around. If the tubes get damaged your amp won't work, simple as that. Make sure you know what tubes and fuse sizes your amps need before you need them and get some replacements.
- **Batteries** – Many musical devices like tuners and pedals require the standard 9 volt square battery. It is always best to run them by power if you can, but always have a spare plus any other batteries that are required for your other devices.
- **Torch** – A large torch is good for in the dark car park after the gig or on the dark stage, while a small one comes in handy for looking in the back of the rack units and other small spaces.
- **String winder** – It is much quicker to change strings using a winder than to wind them by hand. With a bit of practice you can get very quick at changing a string while the band is still playing.
- **Soldering iron and solder** – The more serious repairs require a soldering iron, but they also come in handy for the simple job of fixing a cable.
- **Guitar stands** – Most cheap stands are a bit flimsy and can break easily so it is best to buy the stronger more expensive types. Having a spare in the back of your vehicle will pay off.
- **Music stands** – These come in handy if you are on a reading gig and quite often someone leaves their's at home.

- **Perspex screen** – these are handy to stop your music blowing away on a windy outside gig. A glass business will cut one to fit your music stand. Many musicians use clothes pegs, but they don't work very well in these situations.
- **Tuners** – I always carry two or three tuners with me.
- **Towels and polishing cloths** – Towels are great for when idiots spill drinks over your gear, and polishing cloths can make your guitar sparkle under the lights and look like new again.
- **Band aids** – When speedily changing a string you can often prick your finger taking the old bits of string off and it is surprising how much your finger can bleed. The band aid will save you having to clean your guitar the next day.
- **Spares** – Many professional players also carry large spare items like guitars, amplifiers, CD or mp3 players, mixers, speaker cabinets, etc. There are many other spares you might think of which you need to take to the next gig as well, so make a list of all the things you can think of. Once you have all these items ready it is important that you know how to use them quickly. It is surprising how many musicians carry a soldering iron around with them, but don't know how to use it.

Carrying out routine maintenance on all of your equipment will save you some major stress and should be carried out by competent repair people when you have some down time in your schedule. Always arrive at the gig early enough to set up then if any of your equipment is not working properly you'll have time to sort it out.

One thing I have learnt after many years in this business is to always expect the unexpected – sooner or later it will happen to you. I recall working with a sax player friend of mine, Larry, who had a bag with the label 'Just in Case' on it. It included all his spares, etc, and a bottle of his favourite tippie with two glasses. Some guys are really prepared.

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