

3 Boarding

Background

For the cabin crew, boarding is the time when direct contact with passengers begins. As the cabin crew is, in effect, the face of the aircraft, the passengers' first impressions should obviously be good and the service promised in the publicity must now begin. The primary duties here are safety and the comfort and well-being of the passengers. This is evidenced by the many checks (mentioned in the introduction to Unit 2) done on the plane before boarding.

After all checks have been carried out, the Senior cabin crew member will liaise with the pilot and the ground personnel regarding when to board the passengers. All reasonable measures are taken to ensure that no person secretes themselves or secretes cargo on board an aircraft. The cabin crew is responsible for challenging anyone who attempts to board without either a boarding pass or a valid ID card. Whilst passengers are boarding, cabin crew look out for the following:

- **Passengers with reduced mobility (PRM)** These passengers would normally board first.
- **Passengers requiring oxygen** These passengers can fly provided advance arrangements have been made.
- **Unaccompanied minors (UNMINS)**
- **Expectant mothers**
- **Intoxicated passengers**
- **Suspicious and high-risk passengers** Cabin crew must report any abnormal behaviour indicating a suspicious passenger to the pilot.
- **Nervous passengers** Cabin crew are faced with nervous passengers on a regular basis and are trained to treat them with empathy and understanding.
- **Live animals**

Boarding can be a stressful time for cabin crews, who have to deal with a number of possible problems, including lost boarding passes, passengers blocking aisles, disagreements over seating, over-sized luggage and the fact that many nervous passengers want to use the toilet before the facilities can be used. There is sometimes a delay before take-off, which can cause further tension. Cool-headedness and politeness are crucial in these situations.

Vigilance is also key at this stage of the flight and a monthly safety bulletin from The Office of the NASA Aviation Safety Reporting System contains a report of an observant flight attendant who spotted a potentially disastrous build up of ice on a B737 flight. Just prior to boarding, the flight attendant commented that she thought ice was on the wings. The pilot checked and saw there was frost on the upper surface of the entire wing. As the wings were full of super-cooled fuel that frost had formed with no visible moisture on the ground. A co-pilot explains that at no time did it occur to him or the captain to look for ice, and a comment by the flight attendant saved the day.

Another source tells the story of a flight attendant who smelled something strange in some cabin baggage, which turned out to be three cans of acetone-based paint, one of which leaked. The flight attendant secured all three cans in protective plastic bags. The smell faded and there were no reports of adverse physical effects.

Jargon Buster

brace commands These are commands given to the passengers (and other cabin crew members) by a cabin crew member when preparing for a crash. The command is “Brace! Brace!” or “Brace for impact”, meaning passengers should adopt the brace position.

brace position Different countries have varying versions of the brace position (based on their own aviation authority research). There are, however, common features. For a forward seated passenger wearing only a lap belt, common recommendations for the brace position include:

- placing the head on, or as close as possible to, the surface it is most likely to strike, for example, the bulkhead or seat in front
- having the passenger lean over to some degree
- placing the feet flat on the floor, usually with knees together and feet tucked behind the knees.

Activity Assistant

Starter (Part 2)

Possible answers

1

The mother – She has been coping alone with three small children. She has had to go through security checks and passport control, find the gate and deal with toileting, hunger, and behaviour problems. She may also have had to look after the children alone during a journey to the airport. She is probably worried about how the children will behave on the flight and may be unsure what she has to do at the other end. She has also had to deal with luggage. The reason for her flight could be causing her stress.

The women – They may be drunk. They may be very excited. Either of these reasons may well cause them to start conversations with people who do not respond in kind. It is conceivable that they may be teasing the other passenger.

The overweight man – Overweight people, for various reasons, tend to sweat more than thinner people, but he may also have a medical condition. He may suffer from high blood pressure. The cause might be the weight of his hand luggage. He could be a first time flier or find flying a stressful way to travel – because of the flying itself, or the confined space of the airline, or the checks and procedures necessary at an airport. Alternatively, he could be worried about something on arrival. He could, of course, be worried about something he is carrying.

Man in late 20s – Many of the reasons immediately above could apply to this man. He could also be over-tired. The clutching of the passport and ticket may suggest that he is either a first-time flier or very nervous about flying.

2

The mother – She will need assistance with the bag. The children will need special attention, including things to keep them occupied. The children may cause problems for other passengers. The woman herself may need to be monitored to check she is coping and may appreciate being offered a drink.

The women – If they are drunk, they may get over-excited and rowdy and disturb other passengers. They may continue to drink on the flight. They may continue to engage unwilling passengers in conversation, (although there is not much anyone can do about this). One or more of them may vomit.

The overweight man – The man may need some help getting seated. He may need help with his bag. If he has a medical condition (but has permission to fly), this will need to be monitored. He will need to be monitored to check that the sweating and redness does not continue. He may appreciate a glass of water to cool him down.

Man in late 20s – He needs special assistance to make him feel as at ease as possible and will need checking on throughout the flight. He may be prone to panic attacks.

3

The following might be recommended:

- Be vigilant and alert when passengers are entering the aircraft.
- Make sure you are aware of any medical issues (these should be flagged up on the manifest). Some passengers may have had to get special clearance because of the nature of their health issue.
- Check for special needs passengers.
- Make a note of passengers who you feel may need special assistance.
- Make sure you are confident to deal with common medical complaints that may occur.
- Listen carefully to the pre-flight briefing so that you are aware of any weather issues or changes to normal procedure.
- Make sure you are aware of all safety features on an aircraft you may not be familiar with.
- Know which of your colleagues has any special skills/knowledge you may need to draw on.
- Make sure that everyone listens to the safety briefing.
- Know what is in the first-aid kit.
- Make sure that the cabin is fully ready for boarding.

4

Note that many countries have a list of conditions that may prevent people from flying without a medical clearance certificate.