

BM.

MASTERING

Preparing Files for Mastering

How to prepare your final mix for the mastering process to achieve the best possible results.

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FOREWORD

The final polish starts with a balanced, dynamic mix.

Before sending your mix for mastering, it's important to make sure your mix is properly prepared. The goal is to give the mastering engineer enough headroom, clarity, and consistency to bring your track to its full potential without distortion or compromise. These are guidelines, not gospel. They're refined over time, and there's more than one way to get a great result.

1. Preparing the Mix

Leave Headroom

Ensure your final mix peaks between **-6 dBFS and -3 dBFS** on the **master bus**. This gives the mastering engineer room to apply EQ, compression, and limiting without distortion.

Do not normalize your mix or use a limiter to push it close to 0 dBFS.

Tip: If your mix is **clipping**, lower your track or bus volumes instead of adding a **limiter**.

Avoid Processing on the Master Bus

Remove or bypass any processing on your master channel that affects the overall tone or loudness, such as:

- Limiters
- Maximizers
- Mastering compressors
- Stereo wideners

If you've used subtle mix-bus EQ or glue compression that's part of your sound, it's fine to keep it, but make sure the mastering engineer knows.

Check for Clipping and Noise

Listen through your mix and confirm:

- No clipping on individual tracks or the master bus
- No unwanted clicks, pops, or hum
- Fades and silence are intentional at the start and end

If there are intentional noises (like a vinyl crackle or amp hum), mention it in your notes.

2. Export Settings

File Format

- **File Type:** WAV
- **Bit Depth:** 24-bit (or 32-bit float if your mix session supports it)
- **Sample Rate:** Keep the same as your mix session (e.g., 44.1 or 48 kHz)
- **Channels:** Stereo interleaved

Do not **dither**. Your mastering engineer will handle that at the final export stage.

File Naming

Use clear names to identify the song and version:

Examples:

- `ArtistName_SongTitle_Mix_v3.wav`
- `SongTitle_24bit_48kHz.wav`

If you're submitting an EP or album, include track numbers and desired order in a text file.

3. Provide Context

Reference Tracks

Include 1–2 songs that reflect how you'd like your track to sound in terms of loudness, tonal balance, and vibe.

Label these files clearly:

- Reference_Artist_Song1.mp3
- Reference_Artist_Song2.wav

Notes for the Mastering Engineer

Provide any relevant notes in a simple text file or email, such as:

- "I'd like the vocals to sit upfront like in the reference track."
- "Please keep the low end punchy but not boomy."
- "The song should translate well on streaming platforms."

The more details you give, the closer the final master will align with your vision.

Consistency Across Tracks

If you're mastering multiple songs (EP or album), check that:

- Volume levels between tracks are consistent
- Tonal balance feels cohesive
- Transitions or fades are as intended

If possible, listen to the entire sequence before sending it off.

4. Double-Check Everything

Before exporting, make sure that:

- The mix sounds balanced on multiple systems (studio monitors, headphones, car)
 - There are no missing plugins or offline files
 - Your exported file plays correctly from start to finish
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Final Checklist

- ☐ Peaks between -6 and -3 dBFS
- ☐ No limiter or heavy master-bus processing
- ☐ 24-bit WAV, correct sample rate
- ☐ No clipping or unwanted noise
- ☐ Reference mix and notes included
- ☐ File clearly named and labeled