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RECORDING

Studio Session Preparation

Complete checklist and guidelines for preparing for professional recording sessions.

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FOREWORD

Make the most of your time in the studio.

Whether you're recording in your own space or booking time at a professional studio, proper preparation will help you capture better performances, stay efficient, and keep creativity flowing. Studio time can be expensive and fast-paced, so being organized beforehand lets you focus entirely on the music once the session begins. These are guidelines, not gospel. They're refined over time, and there's more than one way to get a great result.

1. Know Your Songs Inside Out

Rehearse Thoroughly

Practice every part until it feels second nature.

You should know your lyrics, arrangement, and transitions so well that you can perform confidently without relying on guesswork.

Tip: The more relaxed and prepared you are, the more time you'll have to experiment and capture emotion instead of problem-solving.

Lock In the Arrangement

Decide on structure, tempo, and key *before* the session.

If you're still unsure, make rough demos or voice memos and finalize those decisions in advance.

Use a simple structure guide:

- Intro
- Verse 1
- Pre-Chorus
- Chorus
- Bridge
- Outro

Having this mapped out helps everyone stay on the same page.

2. Prepare Backing Material and Files

Bring Session Files (If Applicable)

If you're bringing existing recordings or instrumentals, make sure:

- All files are clearly named
- They start at bar 1 or 00:00:00
- The **sample rate** and **bit depth** are correct
- The **BPM** and key are noted

Example naming inside your **DAW**:

- Instrumental Full
- Click Track
- Backing Vocals
- Guide Guitar

Include a **rough mix** or demo to show the song's intended energy or feel.

Print or Export Lyrics and Notes

Have a printed or digital copy of your lyrics, chord charts, or arrangement notes. This helps you stay organized and allows the engineer or producer to follow along easily.

Example:

- Lyrics_TrackName.pdf
- Chord Chart - SongTitle.pdf

Prepare a Click Track (If Needed)

If your song is recorded to a grid, make sure your **click tempo and time signature** are finalized. If it's live and freeform, let your engineer know ahead of time so they can plan mic setups accordingly.

3. Equipment and Setup

Instruments

Check that all instruments are in proper working condition:

- Fresh strings on guitars and basses
- Tuned drums with solid heads
- No crackling cables or loose jacks

Guitar and Bass Setup

For string instruments, tuning is everything. Even the tightest performance will fall apart if the tuning drifts, and it often does.

- Always **tune before every take**, sometimes even between sections of the same song.
- Check tuning immediately after tracking. If it's off, redo the take. It's worth it.
- Use a reliable tuner (clip-on or pedal), and make sure everyone tunes to the same reference (usually A=440 Hz).

A fresh set of strings should be installed **right before recording**, ideally on the same day.

A good player can usually record **two songs per set of strings** before tone and stability start to degrade.

Avoid the old myth about "stretching" new strings by pulling on them. Instead, tune the guitar repeatedly during the first few minutes of playing. The strings will naturally stabilize without unnecessary wear.

Bring spare sets of strings, batteries, drumsticks, and picks. They're small items, but they can save an entire session when something breaks mid-take.

Personal Gear

If you're bringing your own gear (instruments, pedals, mics, laptop), make a short checklist:

- Guitar Pedalboard
- Audio Interface
- Laptop + Charger
- In-Ear Monitors

Label everything clearly and test cables beforehand.

4. Vocal and Performance Prep

Rest and Hydration

Your voice is an instrument. Treat it like one.

Get enough rest the night before, stay hydrated, and avoid caffeine, alcohol, and dairy leading up to the session.

Warm Up

Spend at least 10–15 minutes warming up before recording.

Even a few scales, light stretches, or breathing exercises make a noticeable difference.

Mental Preparation

Recording can be emotionally and creatively intense.

Take a few minutes to center yourself before stepping into the booth or picking up an instrument.

Bring any lyrics, inspiration, or notes that help you connect with the song's meaning.

5. Communication and Collaboration

Share Your Vision

If you're working with a producer or engineer, describe what you're aiming for:

- **Reference tracks** that match your sound or mood
- Details about tone, atmosphere, or vocal treatment

Examples of useful references:

- Reference - ArtistName Song1
- Reference - ArtistName Song2

Be Open to Feedback

Studio sessions are collaborative.

Trust your engineer or producer. They might suggest mic placements, takes, or tonal adjustments that elevate your performance.

The best results come from mutual trust and creative openness.

6. Logistics and Time Management

Plan Enough Time

If possible, don't pack too much into a single day.

Schedule setup, tuning, and warm-up time.

A realistic plan might look like:

- Setup and soundcheck – 1 hour
- Recording main takes – 2–3 hours
- Overdubs and harmonies – 1–2 hours
- Listening and notes – 30 minutes

Being time-aware prevents stress and helps maintain focus.

Bring Essentials

A small checklist can make the day smoother:

- Water and light snacks
 - Notebook or phone for notes
 - Charger for your phone/laptop
 - Backup USB stick or SSD
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7. After the Session

Backup Everything

Ask for a copy of your session or take home a USB backup before leaving the studio. Accidents happen. Don't rely on the studio alone to store your work.

Review and Notes

After the session, listen critically and take notes on what you love and what might need another take or tweak.

Write down timestamps for feedback if revisions are planned.

Final Checklist

- ☐ Songs rehearsed and arranged
- ☐ Files labeled, **click track** ready
- ☐ Gear checked and working
- ☐ **Reference tracks** and lyric sheets prepared
- ☐ Hydration, rest, and warm-up done
- ☐ Session backed up after recording