BASELINE AUDIO LABS

THE ULTIMATE PRE-MASTERING CHECKLIST

A GUIDE FOR MUSICIANS, ENGINEERS, AND PRODUCERS

✓ Get rid of all the clicks, ticks, pops, and other extraneous noises from your tracks

It's much easier to take care of these issues in the mixing phase, though we do have special tools for the trickiest problems. Listen to your tracks from top to bottom, one at a time, to make sure that you don't have any accidental noises in them. Edits with no crossfades are sometimes the culprit so you may add very fast crossfades to your edits to prevent clicks. Guitar pedals being engaged, mouth noises, string or bow noises, key clicks, paper shuffling, etc. are all examples of things you want to get out the tracks before they get sent off for mastering.

✓ Listen to your mixes on a variety of systems at a moderate volume

Almost no system is perfect and so if you listen on a variety of systems different things will either stick out, or get lost. If you find that one thing or another is consistently in one of those situations, you will want to adjust your mix accordingly. Try listening on as many of the following systems as possible:

a. Studio Monitors
b. Studio headphones
c. Consumer headphones
d. Your home stereo system (whatever that is, from a Bluetooth speaker to an audiophile setup)
e. Your car stereo
f. Your computer speakers
g. Your phone with the internal speakers
h. Your Phone with ear buds

✓ Listen to your mixes in mono

Even though most systems today are mono, there are several situations where the resulting file may be played back in mono. Lots of club systems are mono, many phones, tablets, and Bluetooth, and smart speakers play back in mono. Radio stations with weak signals often play in mono. If things are out of phase they disappear or otherwise sound quieter when in mono, changing the balance of your mix.

✓ Remove (not bypass) any limiters from the master bus

Often a mix engineer adds limiting or some flavor of "pre-mastering" processing to the mix. Remove any of that processing before bouncing down the files for mastering. Once something is limited, you can't undo that in mastering, and it gives you less flexibility in the mastering process. Especially when considering vinyl, most peak limiting is to be avoided, and baking it into the mixes creates issues down the road.

✓ Remove any EQ from the master bus

Like limiting above, remove any stereo bus master EQ and let this get handled in the mastering process. If there are some specific aesthetic reasons for the EQ, take note of the settings (screenshots or written down) and forward those with the notes that you send to us.

✓ Leave some headroom at the top of the meters

With your master fader at 0, make sure that your mix does not exceed 0dBFS and go into the red on the meters. If it does, reduce all the channel faders by the same small amount until you are peaking at -3dBFS to -6dBFS. That gives us plenty of headroom to make any changes we find necessary during the mastering process.

✓ Do Not add Fades, Crossfades, or Spaces

It is best to add these during the mastering process. If you have specific crossfades, fades, or spacing, create a single long WAV file demonstrating these and include them with your other songs, or send detailed notes with timing as a text file along with your songs.

✓ Export your songs with these parameters in mind

When you bounce them, use the sample rate native to the session, the bit depth native to the session (24bit preferred), and turn off any dithering or noise shaping on the master bus. Make sure you are bouncing to a non-lossy format, such as WAV or AIFF. Also, please label your files consistently, and preferably with the final song titles

rather than working titles, including version numbers (even if only sending one version), with a digit indicating where in the order it is. An example:

06 Rock Song CoolBandName v3.wav

07 Piano Ballad CoolBandName v2.wav

✓ Create alternate versions

Mixing is the time to create your instrumental versions (no vocals), TV versions (no lead vocal, but with background vocals), a cappella (vocals only), vocal up/vocal down, bass up/bass down, etc. These can sometimes come in handy for mastering, and can also be useful in the future for music licensing, etc.

✓ Collect the metadata

Please provide the following at the minimum in an email or a text file along with your mix uploads (spelled correctly with the exact capitalization that you want):

Song Titles
Artist Name
Album Name
ISRC codes and UPC/EAN code if you have them (Baseline can provide ISRC if needed)

✓ Pass along any reference material

If there are records that you compared your mixes to during the mixing process, then mention those in an email to us. If there are records that you like the sound of or are inspiring to you (and they compare to your album) send those along as well.

✓ Make sure your mix is perfect to your ears

While we're confident that your mixes will sound better when we are done mastering them, if there are mixes that you are unhappy with mastering is not going to miraculously make you happy with those mixes. If there are problems with the mixes that you don't think that you can fix, reach out to us so that we can consult on these and try to help you fix them before you send them to us.