

TAKE ONE:

AN INSIDE LOOK BEFORE YOUR FIRST STUDIO SESSION

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Whether you're booking your first session at a home studio or at a professional commercial space, there's a handful of things that need to be sorted out BEFORE the session starts. It's very rare that any Artist gets all of this right the first time around (I sure as hell didn't). This list is a straightforward guide that will help you get on the right track, so you can walk into your first session confident and ready to focus on what really matters, the music.

1. BE HONEST ABOUT WHAT YOU NEED:

Before you book a session with a Producer/Engineer you need to ask yourself one question:

"What do I actually need help with in my music?"

- If you are an artist/producer who has a full track built out and just needs assistance mixing and mastering, then you should probably be seeking out a studio with an Engineer that can fulfill this need.
- If you are a singer/songwriter who only has vocals and one guitar track written, then you'll likely need a studio that has a Producer/Songwriter that can fulfill this need.
- Not all Engineers are Producers/Songwriters, and in turn, not all Producers are Engineers. (Although the Producer/Engineer combo has become far more frequent in the past decade, which is actually the role I play at Wave Theory Studios) So it's always good to specify to make sure you're choosing the correct studio.
- A Producer/Songwriter does anything from producing instrumentals (beats, full band and other instruments) to producing vocals (melodies, lyrics, cadence etc.)
- An Engineer's abilities can range from tracking, editing, mixing and mastering depending upon their skill set. Not all engineers mix and master, and it's actually better to have one Engineer do the mixing, and another do the mastering (if your budget allows)
- Regardless of where you book you should still specify the genre of music you intend to create. It would be a poor decision as a hip hop artist to book a studio that specializes in folk or rock music.

2. YOUR BUDGET AND THE STUDIO'S RATE:

This is where it always gets hairy... *money*. It's quite common for Artists attending their first session to not take this part seriously. *If we talk about money before the session it'll kill the vibe, so we should probably wait 'til after right?!?!? WRONG!!!* If this has crossed your mind don't feel bad, but it's incredibly important that this gets handled FIRST. It will save both parties a lot of heartache to get it sorted from the jump.

- Transparency is key. You need to know how much you're paying. Whether it's a flat rate, block rate, hourly rate, daily rate, WHATEVER!!! Make sure this isn't left open ended. Make sure you know how much time you're allowed for the session, and lastly do your best to GET IT ALL IN WRITING!!! Even an email between the two parties will work, this holds everyone accountable to the agreement. Discussing payment can also help gauge the level of professionalism on BOTH ends.

- If you act sketchy when a they bring up payment, you will come off as unprofessional. If you immediately ask for discounts or "promotional" (free) work you'll raise some red flags. They're just like you, trying to make a career in music, don't shorthand them and disrespect their business.
- If you discuss payment and the Producer/Engineer get's sketchy, only giving you vague open-ended estimates, then this may be an indication that they aren't operating in a professional manner. If you've properly detailed the scope of work, there's no reason they shouldn't be able to give you a detailed estimate/invoice.

Some studios may offer a flat rate but give 2-3 days to finish the track, anything beyond 3 days gets switched to an hourly fee. This is not uncommon or unprofessional, as long as clearly stated. It is simply instated as a motivator to make sure both parties are focused and on task during the beginning 2-3 day period.

3. HAVE A PRODUCTION AGREEMENT:

It's very important to discuss potential royalty splits before the session
(Royalties are money received from the distribution and sales of the track)

Many may argue that you're already paying for the session so why give the Producer/Songwriter backend royalties?

- *Here's the difference.* When you pay for the session, you pay for *their time*. Backend royalties compensate them for their critical/creative input that was deemed necessary when you chose to collaborate with a Producer/Engineer to produce/write the song. Many new Artists don't realize that by involving a Songwriter/Producer, you're essentially adding another member to your group or band. If they contribute their intellectual property (song ideas like: vocal melodies, lyrics, beats/instrumentals etc.) then they're entitled to a percentage of the royalties.

You have to ask yourself this question:

"Would the song be as good without them?"

- If you honestly feel the answer is *YES* then maybe you should seek out another Producer.
 - If the answer is *NO*, then you should definitely compensate them for their critical and artistic input!
- Since it's unlikely that you'll have access to an entertainment lawyer at this point ask the Producer/Engineer if they have a standard production agreement. This is another chance to gauge their level of professionalism. If they don't have one, drafting a crude self-written agreement is better than nothing, and will help to hold both parties accountable.

(Just to give a ballpark number, it's not uncommon for Producer/Songwriters to ask for 10-15% of the royalties for a track, and sometimes upward of that based upon their level of involvement)

4. KNOW YOUR PARTS!!!:

Just because you're working with a Producer/Engineer doesn't mean they should do all of the work. You should have all your parts on lock too!

- For Vocalists: If you're a singer, rapper or anything in between, practice your pitch, breath control, timing and cadence. Show up to the session warmed up and ready to go.
 - For instruments: Thoroughly rehearse your parts. Make sure your instrument is ready to go as well. Don't assume the studio has everything you need, ask them first and if you have to borrow an instrument, get that set up prior to the session.
- This should be an obvious one but you'd be surprised by the number of artists who go to the studio underprepared and then wind up looking unprofessional because they can hardly perform their own song.

5. HOW YOU CAN HELP THE PRODUCER/ENGINEER:

- If you've pre-recorded any demos of the song, even if it's just a voice memo, it won't hurt to send it to the Producer/Engineer before the session starts.
- If you're an Artist/Producer who has pre-recorded files that could potentially make the final mix, then you should send them to the Producer/Engineer.
- Including things like the tempo/BPM and key of the song will really help speed the session up and keep things running smoothly. Check with the Producer/Engineer on their preferred track labeling and format.

This will definitely set you apart and speak volumes to your professionalism. The more you have prepared for the session, the more opportunities you will have to build the song and not trying building the session. It will greatly help with the session preparation and the Producer/Engineer will really appreciate it.

6. MINDSET AND REST:

If you're trying to do this as your job, then you gotta treat it like one. This means getting the appropriate amount rest and being in a creative and positive mindset when you show up to the session.

- You need to make sure your mind is sharp to perform at your best. You need to make a strong impression and show that you're dedicated and serious about your craft. If you're a vocalist, you need to make sure you've taken the appropriate preparations to rest your voice and your mind. Besides you aren't going to the studio just to hang out, you're going to work!!! Except this is a job you love, so you've gotta give an incredible performance! You probably won't be able to do this very well if you were up until 3 AM watching Netflix, so get some rest!!!

7. BEHAVIOR AND ETIQUETTE:

BE RESPECTFUL! Just because you're paying for the studio session doesn't mean you should act like you own the place. If your session is at a home studio or a commercial studio, you should behave as though you are a guest in someone's home.

- Ask if drinking, smoking or vaping is allowed. Don't just show up with a crew of friends unless you've asked if guests are allowed. Only allow people in the session if they're going to aid you in the creative process, or if you trust their opinion.
- If you roll up with all of the bros cutting farts and chugging beer without checking first, not only will it come off as disrespectful, but you'll also look as though you're not very committed to the project.
- You should also remove unnecessary distractions like Facebook and Instagram. Be present in the session. These distractions kill the creative vibe and also make you look like you're not invested in the session.
- If your session is with a newer Producer/Engineer and you're not thrilled with the results you're getting during the session, voice your concerns in a respectful way. Do your best not to be rude or demeaning. Remember, they are there to *support you*, not to be *belittled by you*.
- Lastly, BE ON TIME!!! Make sure you have the appropriate location before the session and you've calculated how much time it will take you to get there. Artists are notorious for being 30 minutes to sometimes HOURS late. Don't add to this negative stigma. If you're running late, communicate it to the Producer/Engineer and give them an ETA on your arrival. Producers/Engineers value their time, so don't disrespect them off the jump by being late! Also, don't assume the session will run later since you showed up 30 minutes late with a Starbuck's cup in hand.

(conversely, don't show up to the session 30 minutes early either, it is during this time the Producer/Engineers need to set up the session, and just because you got there early, doesn't mean the session will start early)

8. FOLLOWTHROUGH!!!

Once the session is completed, both parties have a few things left to attend to.

- The Producer/Engineer has to send you the completed files from the session. You need to let them know exactly what you need from them. Whether it's just the final mix with their mastering added, or if you're getting it mastered elsewhere. Let them know if you will be needing stems from the session (the individual tracks that make up the mix) ASAP.
- It would be smart to get an ETA for the final mixes. Some Producer/Engineers like to leave this part open ended. Do your best to get a solidified date, or at least a 3-5 day window in which they agree to deliver the final files. Some Producer/Engineers can be notorious for taking weeks even months to complete a single song. It's not a professional practice, but it sometimes happens. If you clearly voice an agreed upon timeframe, then it will be easier to hold them accountable.
- Lastly, if you want to keep the working relationship going after your first session, *show your appreciation*. Let them know that you enjoyed the experience. Tell all of your fellow Artist/Musician friends about it, and if you can submit a review of their services anywhere, such as google reviews, then do so!!! If you communicate your appreciation it will likely be reciprocated and you can forge a lasting working relationship.

In closing:

Some of these items may seem like common sense, but it's very easy to let them slip by the wayside if left unattended.

Get all of this right and you'll have a better understanding of how to conduct yourself as a professional in the studio and create solid working relationships!

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