

Preparing for Mastering



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Please read through these important issues before your session to help you be best prepared for mastering. Any questions or comments may be directed to info@mikewellsmastering.com.

General Notes:

Digital Processing:

In general, there are a number of tools available to you in your DAW that you want to avoid using on your audio prior to mastering. Therefore, it is not recommended to use the following on your tracks after you have mixed them:

- Limiting / Maximization / Compression
- Normalization
- Fade-Ins or Fade-Outs
- Equalization

Track Sequencing:

You don't need to have your tracks in the proper sequence prior to mastering. The proper track sequence will be created in the mastering workstation at the time of your session. It is, however, a very good idea to have an idea of what order you want the tracks in or a few versions of track order.

If you would like cross-fades to occur between any adjoining tracks in the sequence, it is recommended that you create an example of the crossfades, track sequence, and track ID's as you would like them as an Audio CD. This will greatly aid in the sequence step of the mastering process.

Labeling:

"The more the merrier" is the thing to remember here. The more specific your documentation is, the smoother your session will go. If you are submitting multiple mixes of the same track, please notate the differences on your media. For example:
Track 3 "A New Day" (Vocal +1dB)

Analog Tapes:

If you are providing your mixes to mastering on analog tape, please follow these guidelines:

- Print alignment tones on your tape for 30 seconds/per tone at 0dBu (1kHz, 10kHz, 15kHz, and 100Hz) at the beginning of each reel.
- Keep tapes tail-out to prevent print-through.
- Include the following information on each tape box label:
 - Artist
 - Release
 - Contact information (Name, Phone number)
 - Song titles included on reel
 - Times per song
 - Tape Speed
 - Record level for 0dBu in nw/M
 - Record eq (CCIR or NAB)
 - Stereo or Mono
 - Any notes you would like to add about the tapes

DAT media:

Follow these guidelines when submitting DAT tapes for mastering:

- Create a track ID marker at the beginning of each track on your source DAT
- If you haven't mixed yet, it's a good idea to start recording after the first 2-3 minutes on the DAT, to avoid any bad tape at the head of the cartridge.
- Print a 1kHz tone at 0dBu as it reads on your mixing desk. You will notice a difference in value on your DAT machine (depending on the make/model).
- If you will be mixing to DAT, it is recommend to use (or rent) a high-quality A/D converter to interface with the DAT machine, rather than using the converters built with the machine.
- Include the following information on each DAT tape label:
 - Artist
 - Release
 - Contact information (Name, Phone number)
 - Song titles included on cartridge
 - Start times of each track
 - Approximate length of each track
 - Sample Rate (44.1 or 48)
 - Bit Depth (16 or 24)

CD-R / DVD-R / DVD+R media:

Follow these guidelines when submitting removable disc media for mastering:

- ISO 9660, Hybrid, or Joliet formats are required. If you are on a PC one of these will come by default (most likely Joliet). If you are on a MAC, you will need to find the option in your CD Burning software to specify ISO 9660 or Hybrid (Mac & PC compatible). In software such as Toast, this setting is in the Options dialog.
- Put your media in a case, avoid paper sleeves or no case/sleeve at all.
- Include the following information on each J-Card label:
 - Artist
 - Release
 - Contact information (Name, Phone number)
 - Song titles included on the media
 - Sample Rate (16 - 192)
 - Bit Depth (16 - 32)
 - File Format used (.WAV, .AIF, .BWF, .SD2, etc...)
 - Stereo or Dual-Mono

CD Audio:

CD Audio is the least-attractive option for submitting your mixes to mastering. For example, if you have been working in a 24-bit format (ProTools, etc..), then creating an Audio CD to submit to mastering is incurring a bit reduction that can be avoided. If you can avoid submitting CD-Audio media please do. Additionally, testing has shown that write and read speeds can have a separate impact to the audio quality which in some cases can be negative. However if CD-Audio is your only option, Mike Wells Mastering is equipped with a WordClock'd CD-Player that will ensure the highest quality load-in possible.

Alesis Masterlink:

If you are mixing to an Alesis Masterlink, again it is recommend to use (or rent) a high-quality A/D converter to use in front of the Masterlink, rather than its internal converters. Once you have your mixes in the masterlink, please name the tracks as specific as you can using 8 characters and create a CD24 disc of your mixes. Why 8 characters? The CD 24 format is basically the ISO 9660 format, and this format will only create a filename with 8 characters. Therefore, if you're track is called "A New Day" and it is the Vocal +1dB version, an example would be "NEWVOX_1", etc...

Other Digital/Optical Formats:

If you would like to send in a hard-disc, or media from another external digital recorder, please follow these guidelines:

- Create a backup of your original media, and send me the BACKUP
- Contact the studio in advance as to what format/media you are sending in. If a rental is necessary, you will be contacted so there are no surprises and your session can go smoothly.
- If the device supports export to a 2-track digital format like .WAV, etc... that may be a preferable route for you, and just provide the .WAV files/etc... on a CD-R or DVD+/-R.

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