

## BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO HOME RECORDING ON A BUDGET

### Part 8. Overdubbing, punching in, and comping tracks.



### OVERDUBBING

After your first track or tracks are recorded with a good performance, you might want to add more musical parts. This procedure is called overdubbing. Start with the best take of the song. When you overdub, the musician listens to tracks already recorded, and records a new part on an unused track.

Ready to overdub? Here is one way:

1. If you are in the same room as the musicians, turn off the monitor speakers and listen on headphones. If you are in a control room and the musicians are in a separate studio, turn up the monitor speakers.
2. Play the song and set up a quick mix of the recorded tracks using the software's faders.
3. Plug in the mic or direct box for the instrument or vocal you want to record. Insert an audio track and label it according to the instrument or vocal. Set the track input to the interface channel you plugged the mic into. Turn up the track's fader to design center (the 0 point about three-quarters of the way up).
4. Set up the audio interface's software mixer to monitor the playback mix of recorded tracks and the input signal of the instrument or vocal you want to record.
5. Have the musician play or sing. Can you hear the signal in the phones? Set the recording level using the interface's gain control for that mic's channel.

6. Play the song. As the musician plays or sings along, use the monitor mixer to set a good balance between the recorded-tracks mix and the incoming mic signal that you're going to record. Ask the musician if they are hearing what they need to hear. Change the mix if needed, or use a personal monitor mixer.

Some musicians want to hear effects when they overdub; some want it dry. If you're overdubbing background vocals one at a time, often it helps to mute certain other vocals from the headphone mix. Some musicians prefer to monitor with one headphone on and one headphone off – that way they can hear themselves better.

7. When you're ready to record the new part, go to a point about 10 seconds before the part of the song where the musician plays. Set the recorded tracks to SAFE and set the track you're recording on to RECORD READY.

8. Before you hit that RECORD button, stop! Are you recording on the correct track(s)? Are you going to accidentally erase any tracks? Double-check your track sheet, and make sure the record-enable buttons are on only for the tracks that are safe to record over.

9. Start recording and have the musician play along with the tracks.

In a DAW, if you accidentally record over something, you can simply undo the recording (Ctrl-Z or Command-Z) and start over.

## **PUNCHING IN**

Punching in is used to fix mistakes in a recorded performance, or to record a musical part in segments. You enable record mode on a track, play the multitrack recording, then "punch" or press the RECORD button at the right spot, record a new part, then punch out of record mode.

Some musicians like to record a performance a phrase at a time, perfecting each phrase as they go. Others record a complete take, then go back and fix the weak parts.

To do a punch-in, grab your song-arrangement sheet and follow these steps:

1. Go to a point about 10 seconds before the point where you want to start recording.
2. Play the song to the musician over headphones. The musician plays along to practice the part. Write down the counter times, or note the waveforms where you want to punch in and punch out.
3. Finally you're ready to record. Before you hit that RECORD button, stop! Tell the musician what you're going to do so there's no chance of a mistake. Be very clear. For example, "I'm recording your keyboard part on a new track." Or, "I'm punching in over your old performance—is that what you wanted?"
4. Okay, ready to go. Play the recording. During a rest or pause in the music just before the part needing correction, punch in the RECORD button (or use a foot-switch). Have the musician record the new part, and punch out right away. What if you punch-out too late and overwrite part of the recorded track? Simply undo the recording and redo the punch. Or slide the ends of the punch-in section to include only the punched-in part.

5. Put the cursor about 10 seconds before the punch. Play the recording to see if the punch was okay. If necessary, you can re-record the punch or smooth it over with crossfades. Notice whether the musician wants to practice the part. Don't redo the punch until they are ready.

Some DAWs have an autopunch function. You type in the punch-in and punch-out times. As the recording plays, the DAW automatically goes into and out of record mode at those points. Some DAWs can loop repeatedly between those two points.

### **COMPOSITE TRACKS**

Rather than punching in, you can record a solo performance in several takes, each on a separate track. Then combine the best parts of each track into a single track. Use only that track in the final mix, and you'll hear the best parts of all the takes in succession. This is called "recording composite tracks" or "comping."

Create a blank comp track, then copy and paste good sections from other tracks into the comp track. Be sure to maintain the start time of each section when you paste. Or divide the tracks into short sections, delete sections you don't like, and play the mix of all the tracks. A few DAWs let you simply click on an audio clip in a take to add it to a comp track.

Some software lets you record several takes on one track, view all the take waveforms as "lanes" in that track, select the best parts of each take, and create a composite track of those parts.

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