

## RECORD AT HOME, MIX IN A PRO STUDIO

By Bruce Bartlett

This can be a great way to make an album. You track all the instruments and vocals in your home studio. Later, when all the tracks are recorded, you take them to a commercial studio for mixing and mastering.

What are the benefits of working this way? You can take all the time you need to create music and record it without spending money. You're more relaxed because you're not watching the clock. When your tracks are ready, a competent mixing engineer can make your tracks sound really good, and probably will take much less time to create a good mix than you could.

What are the drawbacks of recording at home? Compared to a commercial studio, your home studio might not have the best mics, studio acoustics, or recording techniques. You are likely to get a better sound with a pro recording.

Some musicians thrive on the discipline of recording efficiently in a commercial studio. Others need the lack of time pressure when recording at home.

### How to record and prepare your tracks

Let's say you want to record in your own studio and have a pro do the mixes. You might follow the miking advice in my next blog. An easy way to record is to plug mics into a recorder-mixer such as the Zoom R16. Or use an audio interface connected to a computer with recording software.

Of course, you want your tracks to sound as clean as possible before handing them over to an outside recording engineer. Here are some tips:

During recording:

- \* Avoid clipping your recorded tracks -- distortion usually can't be fixed during mixdown. Record each track at -6 dBFS maximum in peak meter mode.

- \* Avoid recording room reverb -- it can't be removed during mixdown. Mount acoustic material on the walls to reduce reverb. Use acoustic foam or dense fiberglass insulation from [atsacoustics.com](http://atsacoustics.com). Place dense fiberglass panels across room corners to reduce boomy-sounding standing waves. Put a 3-foot square piece of acoustic foam on the ceiling over singers and their mics. Mike close and record direct when possible. Monitor the bass with headphones rather than with an amp.

- \* Prevent noise -- it's difficult or impossible to remove during mixdown. Close doors and windows; turn off air conditioning or the furnace while tracking.

When exporting your tracks:

\* Turn off pitch correction; don't use time correction. Let the mixing engineer do it with better tools.

\* Turn off compression, EQ, reverb, and other effects. Again, the mixing engineer is likely to have better-sounding effects, and probably knows how to use them more effectively.

\* Save (export) each track as a soloed wave file, 24-bit, 44.1 kHz or higher. Each exported file should be the mix with one track soloed, played from time zero to the end of the song. Name each track's file according to the song and instrument. For example, "On the Edge-bass.wav."

\* Do NOT burn an audio CD of your tracks. Instead copy the tracks' wave files to a USB thumb drive, USB hard drive, or data DVD-R.

Take the track files to the mixing studio. There, the engineer will import your files, put each file on its own track, and start mixing.

At the mixing session, you might bring some commercial CDs whose sound you admire so that the mixing engineer can get an idea for the sound you want. Make sure the genre of the commercial CDs is the same as your music. Also bring some rough mixes that you made at home.

You might be delighted to hear how good your mixes can sound when handled by a pro. And your album can have a relaxed vibe because you tracked it at home, on your own time.