



1. First & foremost, don't be too concerned about getting your levels up to try and match your favourite commercial song or album. This can be achieved in the mastering stage, so you don't need to over compress your songs. A little compression on the individual tracks is ok if you know what you're doing but don't over do it, as it can't be undone when mastering & leaves little room for the mastering engineer to work. **PREFERABLY NO COMPRESSION AT ALL ON THE MIX BUSS.** (If you're unsure, don't compress).
2. Definitely **NO LIMITING !** (This should only be done as one of the last steps in the mastering stage). If you're mixing for a client that requires a version of the songs before mastering, make two mixes, one with limiting etc. and the other without for mastering.
3. Leave 3-6 db of headroom. In other words don't slam the meters into the red or 0 dbfs on the peak digital meters, as this leaves no headroom to play with and can lead to ugly distortion in the final stages of post production.
4. **DON'T NORMALISE** tracks, as this only degrades the quality of audio.
5. Try and record at the highest level bit rate (24 bit if possible) as this gives more headroom. So 48k 24 bit or 96k 24 bit etc. Don't worry if you haven't done this and don't change sample rates, this also should be left for the mastering stage.
6. **NO DITHERING !** This too is left to one of the last steps at the mastering stage.
7. Getting rid of any clicks or pops, or de essing (toning down excessive sibilance - harsh "S" sounds) is more easily done & probably more cost effective at the mixing stage on the individual tracks but can still be achieved at the mastering stage if you don't have this luxury. Vocal tracks are more often the culprit here
8. If you have recorded or mixed onto tape, make a high resolution digital file from this tape mix. Playing your mix back on another tape machine can often bring up problems such as azimuth, unusual tones or tape speed headaches. These are a few of the problems with tape machines calibrated differently, or even different head wear.
9. If you have the luxury or time to create a couple of extra mixes of your songs with different vocal levels, then this is a great way to ensure any compression or EQing at the mastering stage doesn't affect where your vocal sits in the song. So have the "Normal vocal mix" then also "Vocal + .5db" and also "Vocal +1db" and "Vocal - .5db"
10. Upload songs via internet, or bring songs as Audio Data files (.WAV or .AIFF) on CD, DVD or Flash drives. (Bring a back up too!) No mp3 files as these have been stripped of all their goodness!
11. Remember to keep mixes below 0 dbfs on the meters (peak level at -3 to -6 dbfs is good).
12. Vinyl Mastering & Stem Mastering requires some different criteria - please contact James for Vinyl or Stem Mastering Tips.

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