DAW Guidelines for Music Production
Quick Reference Guide – v1.0b
Master Project/Session

These are the main and central projects/sessions throughout the pre-production, recording, and overdubbing phase. This is where all the tracks intended for the final mix eventually end up.

The Basics
- There should be only one Master project/session.
- Work done in other projects/sessions should be imported into the Master project/session.
- Always name audio tracks *before* recording, and rename *all* audio files recorded before a track was labeled.
- Use comments section liberally (if applicable).
- Always label internal busses (if applicable).
- Label inputs, outputs and inserts (if applicable).
- Set computer Date & Time correctly to insure correct time stamps on all files

When Creating A New Project/Session
- The Master project/session should be labeled "Song Title-MST".
- WAV is the recommended audio file type for compatibility with most DAW systems (if applicable).
- 24 bit resolution is preferred for recording of audio files.
- Save the project/session to a level on your audio hard drive where it can be easily located.
- Create some form of tempo map in the conductor track for appropriate music styles.
- Include a click track plug-in or audio track at top of project/session (if applicable).
- Print click track to audio track before sending project/session out to another platform.
- Create timeline markers of song's arrangement.
- Include key and modulation in comments (if applicable) and *Project Info* document
- Notate automatic delay compensation in *Project Info* document for users without automatic delay compensation.
- Include a well labeled tuning note on its own track at the beginning of the project/session.

Cleaning Up
- Clean all edits and punches, put in fades if necessary, and insure there are <u>no</u> clicks and pops.
- Render tracks into contiguous audio files starting from the beginning of the project/session when you are *completely* finished editing them.
- Always print tuned tracks to another track when finished tuning them.

- Delete all tracks no longer needed in the project/session.
- Periodically delete redundant or unnecessary edit lists (if applicable).
- Remove unused audio files before closing project/session (if applicable).

Organization
- Leave tracks organized in an order that makes sense to you when closing project/session.
- Keep returns of internally bussed submixed tracks (e.g. BG Vocals) adjacent to the source tracks (if applicable).
- Generally keep effects returns and mix buss at top or bottom of project/session (if applicable).
- Place blank track labeled "---UNUSED---" between used and unused tracks.
- Keep <u>all</u> tracks still being used showing and above/to left of "---UNUSED---" marker (if applicable).
- Deactivate or disable, mute, hide and generally move below/to right of "---UNUSED---" marker (if applicable) all tracks no longer being used.

Additional Items
- Keep a recent rough mix labeled with song title and date on a stereo track at the top of the project/session.
- Use mute audio segment functionality of DAW, instead of muting with automation, to mute audio elements (if applicable).
- Label I/O channels with direction (to/from) and name of outboard gear used. Also document settings in comments (if applicable) or *Project Info* document.
- Using send and return routing for reverb, chorus, and delay effects is generally preferred instead of inserting them on the audio tracks.
- Comment tracks can be created using blank MIDI tracks and renaming blank MIDI segments that will be easily visible on the timeline.

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Slave Projects/Sessions – Outgoing

These projects/sessions are being prepared to be sent out as Slaves. They're usually reduced track versions of the Master that are satellite projects/sessions used for overdubbing or editing tracks.

The Basics
- There may be many Slave projects/sessions.
- Slave projects/sessions should allow receiving users to playback the elements of the Master project/session on substantially fewer tracks.
- Master project/session elements should be submixed into similar groups (Drums, Keys, etc.) or individual tracks (Bass, Lead Vocal), and are often printed with effects.
- The receiving users should easily be able to hear the mix of the Slave tracks exactly the way you hear them.
- The submixes should allow the receiving users to hear the parts blended so they can make proper musical decisions for overdubs.

When Creating A New Slave Project/Session
- The project/session should be labeled with the song title, a description of its purpose, and the abbreviation "SLV" (e.g. "Song Title-String SLV").
- Consider the receiving DAW system so the Slave will open properly.

Make Sure You Have These Elements
- The start time and frame rate must be the same as the Master's.
- Include the tempo map.
- Include a Click plug-in track or an audio click track. Keep at top of project/session if possible (shown or hidden).
- Include timeline markers of the songs arrangement.
- Include key signature and modulation information in *Project Info* document.
- Include separate reference tracks of the instruments the project/session is being sent out to have overdubbed if applicable.

Slave Projects/Sessions – Returning

These are projects/sessions being returned to the Master project/session containing the completed work to be imported into the Master. These are in addition to applicable Master project/session guidelines.

- The final results of all work done in the Slave projects/sessions should be transferred back to the Master project/session.
- Return all the tracks that were in the Slave project/session when you received it.
- Make sure the project/session start time and frame rate are the same as when you received the project/session, or note in the *Project Info* document if not.
- Clearly label in the comments (if applicable) and list in the *Project Info* document all tracks to import back into the Master project/session.
- Make note of changes or edits done to the original tracks of the Slave in the comments (if applicable), as well as the *Project Info* document, so they can be imported or reproduced in the Master.
- Include your name and contact information in the *Project Info* document incase the receiving studio has any questions.

Source Projects/Sessions

These are usually retired projects/sessions that contain the original source tracks that have been comped or submixed down to tracks in the Master. These tracks are no longer needed so they are taken out of the Master project/session and kept in Source projects/sessions for future reference.

- There may be many Source projects/sessions.
- The project/session should be labeled with the song title, a description of the tracks removed from the Master, and the abbreviation "SRC" (e.g. "Song Title-Ld Vox SRC").
- The project/session should be saved to the Source Projects/Sessions folder.

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Mix Projects/Sessions

These are projects/sessions being prepared for mixing or in the mixing phase.

The Basics
- There should be only one Mix project/session for each mix.
- The Mix project/session should be labeled "Song Title-MIX".
- Use comments section (if applicable) for notes to mixer.
- Label any unlabeled busses, inputs, outputs and inserts (if applicable).
- Label inputs with name of outboard gear and document settings in comments (if applicable).
- Make sure tempo map is in conductor track (if appropriate for musical style).
- Make sure there are timeline markers of the song's arrangement.
- Make sure key and modulations are in the Key Signature ruler (if applicable), and in the *Project Info* document.
- Note in track label or comments (if applicable) if a track (or a copy for effect) is intentionally offset in the timeline.
- Print a "Final Rough Mix" with song title and date on a pair of tracks at the top of the project/session.
- Always label audio files of the final mixes with the song title and type of mix (e.g. "Song Title-Voc +1", "Song Title-TV Mix", "Song Title-Inst", etc.).

Plug-Ins
- All essential (i.e. special effect) plug-ins should be printed to another track.
- You may leave clearly labeled unprocessed versions of the above printed tracks. Keep plug-ins and settings. Deactivate or disable, mute, hide and generally move these tracks to the bottom/far right (if applicable).
- Leave in only nonessential plug-ins the producer would like the mixer to reference and remove the rest.

Automation
- If volume automation is used to fade-in or fade-out of regions, it is best to replace it with created audio fade-ins and fade-outs.
- Use mute audio segment functionality of DAW (if applicable), instead of muting with automation, to mute audio elements.
- Leave any automation the producer wants the mixer to use (e.g. BG vocal blends, panning automation) and label clearly in comments (if applicable) or track label.
- If possible, contact mixer to confirm if you should leave remaining nonessential automation or delete it.

Make Sure You Have These Elements
- Every track is in project/session that is supposed to be.
- All parts are on each track that are supposed to be.
- All flys (copied and pasted parts or sections) have been completed.
- All comps (composite tracks) are completed and clearly labeled.
- The correct lead vocal or lead melody instrument is there and VERY clearly labeled.
- All tuned tracks have been printed to another track and are clearly labeled as tuned.
- If the lead vocal or instrument is tuned, we recommend leaving a clearly labeled un-tuned version on another track.
- Optionally, you may leave clearly label un-tuned versions of other tuned tracks.

Cleaning Up
- Delete loud noises and other extraneous elements you don't want in the mix.
- Repair all clicks and pops at edit and punch points with automatic audio segment fade in/out function turned off (if applicable), and put in fades if necessary.
- Render tracks into contiguous audio files starting from the beginning of the project/session when you're *completely* finished editing them.
- Delete all tracks not needed for the mix.
- Delete all edit lists not needed for mix (if applicable).
- Remove all unused audio files before final save of project/session (if applicable).

Organization
- Arrange tracks in logical order (drums, bass, guitars, keys, vocals).
- Keep internally bussed submix returns (e.g. BG Vocals) adjacent to source tracks (if applicable).
- Place effects returns and mix buss at top or bottom of project/session (if applicable).
- Leave optional tracks showing, but deactivated or disabled and clearly labeled in comments (if applicable) or track names.
- Place blank track labeled "---UNUSED---" between mix tracks and unused tracks.
- Keep all tracks to be mixed showing and above/to left of "---UNUSED---" marker (if applicable).
- Deactivate or disable, mute, hide and move below/to right of "---UNUSED---" marker remaining unused tracks being left for reference (if applicable).
- Leave comments showing for mixer to see when opening project/session (if applicable).

Routing Outputs
- When project/session will be mixed through console route outputs as you'd like them to come up on desk if possible.
- When project/session will be mixed inside of DAW route tracks and submixes to Outputs 1-2, or route internally through stereo buss and then route to Outputs 1-2.

These are for MIDI tracks and virtual instruments, and follow many of the same principles as the DAW guidelines.

- Label all MIDI tracks and segments to accurately reflect the part, instrument and/or patch they're triggering.
- Organize MIDI tracks in an order that makes sense to you.
- Merge multiple MIDI tracks into a single track when they trigger the same instrument (or channel of a multi-timbral instrument).
- Delete all MIDI tracks that are no longer needed in the project/session.
- Record an audio track version of each MIDI track or virtual instrument and label it with the same name as the MIDI track followed by "_Audio".
- When printing a new audio version of a previously printed MIDI track ensure that the new audio lines up with the original audio.
- When creating a Standard MIDI file for another platform always use Type 1.
- When the production is in the recording stage keep MIDI tracks hidden (if applicable) and adjacent to their corresponding printed audio tracks.
- When the production is in the mixing stage hide and move to the bottom/far right all MIDI tracks.

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File Management, Storage, Transfer & Docs

These are recommendations on how to keep your project/session folder organized, how to transfer from system to system, and how to document your project/session.

Management, Storage and Transfer

- When sending a project/session out, the current Master, Slave, or Mix project/session should be the *only* project/session file showing on the top level of the project/session folder.
- All other project/session files should be stored in folders (see below) to prevent confusion about which is the current project/session.
- We suggest using these folder names to keep your project/session folder organized:
  - *Project History* or *Session History* – for all non-current projects or sessions. Use applicable name.
  - *Source Projects* or *Source Sessions* – for all retired source tracks projects or sessions. Use applicable name.
  - *MIDI Files* – MIDI sequence files, tempo maps, Sys Ex data, etc.
  - *Auxiliary Audio Files* – impulse responses, samples, REX files, Reason files, etc.
  - *Notes*
  - *Rough Mixes*
  - *Final Mixes*
- When using a single drive, the current Master, Slave, or Mix project/session's audio files should all reside in a single Audio files folder at the top level of the project/session's folder (if applicable).
- When a project/session's audio files are divided between drives, there should be only one project/session folder containing a single Audio files and Fade files (if applicable) folder per drive.
- When transferring projects/sessions between studios during production we recommend saving project/session data to CD-R's, DVD-R's, or FireWire drives for their universality.
- Always keep a safety copy of a project/session and all its files in your possession when sending a project/session out.
- When sending a project/session out for film or video post production work the project/session recipient should determine the correct pull-up/pull-down settings for the project/session. The supplier must provide complete documentation concerning synchronization during recording of the project/session.
- For final archiving of projects/sessions at the end of a project see the *Delivery Recommendations for Master Recording* here:
  http://www.grammy.com/Recording_Academy/Producers_And_Engineers/Guidelines/

Project Info Document

We suggest you include this text document with your projects/sessions. It's designed to include information previously found on tape box labels, tracksheets, and recall notes.

- Use the *Project Info* document to keep all information about your project/session for future users.
- The *Project Info* document should be a plain text document with the ".txt" extension.
- The *Project Info* document should be labeled with the same name as the project/session it is referencing, followed by the suffix "-INFO" (e.g. "Project/Session Name-INFO.txt").
- Always keep the *Project Info* document in the same project/session folder as the project/session file it is referencing.
- Only have a single *Project Info* document for each set of projects/sessions that share the same audio files and project/session folder (i.e. one per song). A single *Project Info* document can keep information about multiple projects/sessions of the same song.
- Include the name and contact information for each operator in the *Project Info* document.
- Keep a running history of all work done on the project/session file with the dates worked, the work done and the operators name.
- And remember, you can never have too much documentation.