



HOLLYWOOD HILLS, CALIFORNIA - 310.598.6038 - MARSHMASTERING.COM

Marsh Mastering FAQ and Mixing Tips*

Master Bus Plug-ins

If you are using plug-ins on the master bus, please export one version of the mix with the processing and one without to give your engineer a choice in case you over processed the mix. Neither version should be limited or clipped (hitting red overs). If this is the case, pull back on the master fader until the volume bounces in between -12 and -3 DBFS. Keep in mind that loudness does not come from mixing, it comes from mastering. Focus on making your mix sound right and balanced to you without comparing it to released music. Released music has been mastered and will sound different in regards to loudness than your unmastered mix.

Phase and Polarity

Instruments that lend themselves to phase and polarity issues are drums, pianos, and synthesizer sounds. Using stereo spreader plug-ins and other 'space' related processing will also create phase issues. If these issues exist your mix will not be mono compatible and the out-of-phase elements will disappear on some playback systems. A simple check is to listen to your mix in mono. The second is use a phase correlation meter. +1 on such a meter means your mix is in phase. If the meter moves towards -1, you have phase issues. Exactly -1 means sounds are disappearing. This is something you cannot check or will notice in headphones.

The Low End

Having too loud or unnecessary sub frequencies creates poor sound quality and hinders our ability to make your tracks louder. On individual tracks that don't have meaningful subharmonics, apply a low cut filter to help prevent this, such as on vocal tracks below 80 Hz.

The High End

In mastering, sibilance or any sharp/bright sounds are difficult to control. Sibilance, plosives, clicks, or other highly bright and abrasive sounds should be taken care of in the mix before mastering. You can use volume automation, a broadband de-esser, or EQ to control these sounds at the individual level.



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Vocal Levels

There is little that can be done, if anything, in regards to smoothing out or bringing up or down vocal level throughout a track in mastering. Volume automation and compression can be used to create a smooth and audible vocal track during the mix stage. Listen to you mix at a low volume with some background noise to see if you can hear all the words clearly and evenly. If you are unsure about your vocal volumes, send us alternate vocal up or vocal down mixes where only the vocal level has been minorly adjusted.

Starts and Ends

When you export your mix for delivery, please make sure not to cut off the starts and ends of the mix. Highlight at least 1 bar before the start and after the end of the mix when you export. In regards to fades, you may or may not have them, but fades are generally better when done during the mastering process. If you would like us to create the fades, please provide timing notes when you upload your files.

File Delivery

Before you upload your files, please listen through the exported mix file to ensure your export was done correctly and that you have the correct version. Export errors happen and they can delay your session. After you have confirmed the mix, name your files with a sequence placement number (if applicable), correct spelling of the full song title and what version it is in regards to mix type and/or mix version. If you send in a corrected file after one has already been delivered, please make sure to revise the name to avoid confusion.

Examples:

05_TheEndHasYetToCome_Main

05_TheEndHasYetToCome_Main_Ver5

Optimum file formats include stereo interleaved WAV or AIFF files at 44.1 kHz / 24 bit or higher.

Do not sample rate convert or add dither to your files if you don't meet these specs or have a project with multiple file types. We'll take care of it.



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Uploading Files

When you are ready to send your files to us, please visit our Online Services page to upload your files. We do not accept links or login information to download from your services. Do not upload your audio files one at a time. Instead, place all of your files into one folder and create a compressed ZIP file to upload. If you have any notes to relay to your mastering engineer, you may include a .txt document in this folder with all pertinent information or type them into the comment field of our dropbox.

Master Delivery

File delivery

Unless otherwise stated or if you did not pay for hard masters, you will automatically receive stereo interleaved 44.1 kHz/16 bit WAV files ready to upload to your digital distributor or your own website via a download link from our dropbox. ISRCs cannot be embedded into WAV files, only on CD and DDP Masters.

Red Book CD Master or DDP Master

The Red Book is a standard for commercial audio CDs as defined by Sony and Philips. You cannot create this type of audio CD with a standard disc burner and software, nor can you produce a DDP without professional mastering software. These types of masters are meant for producing large quantities of audio CDs and are error checked to ensure no faults during production, though it is your responsibility to check everything before submitting your master for manufacturing. ISRCs and CD-Text may be included, if requested. ISRCs must be provided when the files are uploaded. If CD-Text is required, please provide a tracklisting with the titles spelled correctly and punctuated as you require. If your replication plant allows you the option to send either master, DDP is the best option as CD masters are converted to DDP's at the plant. DDP's also do not incur shipping charges as hard masters would as we can deliver them via a download link.

ISRC - International Standard Recording Code

If your music is to be sold on iTunes, you need ISRCs. If your music is being played on the radio, ISRC is an advantage for identification purposes. ISRCs are acquired either from the RIAA direct (www.usisrc.org), through your distributor or record label. The full code consists of the items below, and each song will be assigned a unique ISRC. ISRCs must be provided when you upload your files for mastering if needed. ISRCs cannot be embedded into WAV files, so if your project requires them you must order a CD Master or DDP.

Example:

US-ABC-10-001-01 (country-record label-year of registration-release-track)



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CD-Text

Don't be alarmed when you put your CD into your computer at home and the track listing does not automatically show up as it does with your store bought discs, or gets mislabeled. While your CD could have CD-Text encoded, software media players do not pull this information from the disc. Programs such as iTunes or Windows Media Player automatically matches the disc parameters with comparable information listed in online databases (such as Gracenote and AMG Lasso) that the software queries. Since we have just created a new CD you must submit your CD's information to these online databases to eliminate these issues. It is generally best to do this after you have received your replicated discs back from the manufacturer. For information on how to accomplish this please visit the links below.

Gracenote submittal information:

<http://www.gracenote.com/about/faqs/>

How to use iTunes to submit your information to Gracenote:

http://www.ehow.com/how_2064817_missing-cd-information-via-itunes.html

AMG Lasso

<http://allmusic.com>

One of the best resources for music fans on the Internet is the All Music Guide. To be sure your commercially available project is listed alongside everyone else, and disc information available for Windows Media Player – be sure to send a manufactured, bar-coded copy to All Music, along with a bio, credit listing and headshot.

Evaluating Your Master

Whether you receive audio files or a CD master, you should listen to you mastered music in the same environments and listening levels you do when you listen to other music. If changes are needed, please contact your engineer within 10 days. When listening with a computer software player, make sure you do not have any presets such as sound enhancer in iTunes turned on. Do not check your music through installed speakers on Apple laptops or computers as they have a built in limiter that will change the sound. If you are listening with a CD player, make sure you listen through as well as skip between the tracks to make sure track IDs are properly placed. Do not upload or send your masters to manufacturing without checking absolutely everything. It is your responsibility to report back to us if you find any errors so we can fix it.



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Credits

We take pride in our work and we appreciate whenever a client feels we warrant a mention in the credit listing of their project. The preferred wording for this credit is 'Mastered by Engineer Name @ Marsh Mastering'. This can of course be edited or changed as you see fit. The correct spellings of our engineer's name are:

Stephen Marsh
Stephanie Villa
Fernando Lee

Manufacturing and Duplication

Marsh Mastering proudly recommends Disc Makers for all of your manufacturing and duplication needs. We've had many clients continually get great service and product from Disc Makers over the years, and they can meet any of your requests at a reasonable cost. If you decide to do your manufacturing or duplication with Disc Makers, please let them know we referred you by providing our customer number CT02379422. Please visit their website for easy online ordering: <http://www.discmakers.com/>

*Mixing tips are just suggestions and should only be seen as basic information to help you navigate the mixing process. Marsh Mastering cannot be made liable for any interactions with 3rd party vendors you may hire that we have mentioned in the document.

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