

Lesson 4: Basic Recording Techniques



Basic Recording Techniques

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Capturing creativity and not getting bogged down with technical issues

- The goal of recording is to capture true artistic expression and sometimes negotiating the recording “process” can lead to a diminishment of the original objective; making music and obtaining the ideal performance.
- Knowing your setup – whether it is an analog studio, computer based DAW or standalone harddisk system, one must understand the signal flow of their studio and have reliable gear. When it comes to recording an artist, the last thing you want to do is to stop and fix a cable, re-route an intermittent patch, or change the interface. Having the right equipment that works reliably will only enhance your confidence, and positive results will be achieved without hindering any useful creative energy.
- Providing an environment free from distraction – the goal is to record and obtain a product that has captured the “vibe” of the artist. Understanding how to enhance this by having a comfortable setting is of monumental importance. The recording equipment should blend in, not dominate the

environment. Extra cables, speaker enclosures, unused rack components, equipment cases, tools and power strips should be out of sight. Comfortable furniture, soft lighting, and flexible temperature control can only add to a successful recording session.

Choosing the right gear and setting up your work flow

- Understanding the overall objective of the recording environment - musical style, genre and marketing goals might influence what gear is needed, but the ideal equipment choices for recording will always follow similar principles. Microphones, pre-amps and interface (vocal chain) considerations that serve as the “front end” of your signal path will likely be the most significant aspect to consider. Of course, the medium in which the recording is captured is very important and a basic knowledge of audio theory will only help to solidify these decisions.
- Whether its Logic, Pro Tools, Cubase, Nuendo, Ableton Live or any other DAW, the primary focus in recording is to capture the highest quality signal possible. This requires an understanding of the equipment’s capabilities and setup options. All DAW’s provide similar specifications for recording and playback, and getting to know what is “under the hood” in these software platforms should become common knowledge. Recording with a higher sample rate and bit depth than that of the standard CD (44.1kHz @ 16 bit) is now available in all competitive DAW systems. One needs to be familiar with this computer-based language and have a basic understanding of digital audio theory.
- Setting the levels correctly. As with any analog console, making sure the gain structure of your studio equipment is paramount. When recording, it is preferred to capture the highest level (without clipping) as possible. This doesn’t mean your tracks need to be played back (monitored) at that volume. Instruments can be easily adjusted to provide for a reasonable monitoring level, but the input signal should not be compromised. In DAW systems, it is our goal to capture the audio level with as many bits as possible - therefore the analog signal can be represented as closely to its original waveform.
- Become a master of your session. Very often successful engineers have templates they use for various recording scenarios. When learning how to record on your DAW, remember to save those settings that work for you. Get to know your way around the software interface and take some time to look at tutorials to see how others utilize this technology. It is common to work in more than one platform (track in Logic and mix in Pro Tools) so accepting and learning how to record on other DAW systems is essential. No one system is best and that’s that. The best recordings are captured as unique art forms, and seasoned engineers usually can achieve this regardless of software options – it is their knowledge of “process” that holds true on any system.