



Wavy Seals Elite Mix Session Preparation Guide

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The purpose of this document is to provide a clear step by step pathway to preparing a session for mixdown. In some instances, it is best to start the mix from scratch, removing any processing that has been done in the rough mix. In other cases, it may be better to continue and finish the work of the recording engineer. If the session is done well, there may not be a need to tear down and rebuild from scratch. You will have to use your best judgement on this. I prefer to work on a mix in a certain order, so more often than not, I start from scratch.

Before starting ANYTHING always do a SAVE AS and work from the new copy so you wont change the original session.

This is extremely important and invaluable if you need to recover the original session for any reason.

Organize the tracks:

Having a standardized way of organizing our sessions will save time when mixing and free your brain up to do the important stuff instead of looking for that third hi-hat track. During this process tracks will also be color-coded, sub-mixed, grouped and the names should be simplified as needed.

-There will be times where the multitrack files will need to be synced with the stereo beat used in the session. This is a very important step to ensure the timing is correct. Use this video as a guide to merge and synchronize the files. <https://youtu.be/1dgXreYhu-8>

You may find that all of the files are stereo, even if they are truly only mono sources. A good example of this is having an 808 or kick drum track in stereo. Most drum files will not be true stereo, but they may come in this way due to the export options of other DAWs. Although some files may be actually stereo. You need to investigate to determine any files in question. One method of determining if a track is genuinely stereo or mono, is the **phase inversion technique**.

You will need to split the files into mono then, delete the stereo file and one of the mono files, you will be left with one mono file.

If we are working with a full multitrack session, the layout should be as follows:

Drums- Purple

- Kick
- 808
- Snare
- Hi-Hat
- Tom 1
- Tom 2
- Tom 3
- Overhead Left (OHL)
- Overhead Right (OHR)
- Room Mics

Percussion (shakers, tambourine, claps, etc)- Pink

Bass- Blue

Guitars- Green

Keys- Yellow

Strings- Brown

Synths- Orange

Vocals- Use an unused color, one color for each separate artist on the song

Arrange vocal tracks in the order they appear in the song.

- Lead vocals
- Dubs
- Background Vocals
- Harmonies
- Ad-Libs

When working with a stereo instrumental track, start there and follow with the vocals as outlined.

Mark it up!

After the session is organized, if you are working with music recorded to a strict rhythm you should find and assign the session's tempo. This is done best in Pro Tools using the Identify Beat method.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpSF3bDNPDk>

Once the tempo is set, be sure the edit mode is set to Grid and set the Grid value to 1 bar. I like to use 1 bar because it minimizes the chances of small mistakes, you can always change this as needed.

Divide the timeline by using color coded markers to identify each section of the song (Intro, verse, chorus, bridge, outro, etc.).

To color code the markers go to Pro Tools Menu> Preferences> Display> In the color coding tab, be sure "Always Display Marker Colors" is selected.

Clean up and Learn the Session

After you can easily navigate the session, the next step is to listen to each track individually and edit out any noise or silent patches of audio clips. You should be removing any headphone bleed, clicks and pops. **Do not remove all the breaths in a track.** By listening critically, you should identify where a breath may be too loud or needs to be removed. Use clip gain in Pro Tools to lower the level of any breaths you think are too prominent. By lowering them instead of deleting them, we create a more natural feeling vocal.

Add fades and/or crossfades to the start and end of every clip to ensure the clips transition smoothly. During this process you will learn the nuances of every track and more easily spot problem areas that need to be addressed as well as unique moments that need to be highlighted.

Use a marker followed by a comment on the track's comment section to explain any areas of concern or areas that should be highlighted in the final mix. Once the session is cleaned, **LOCK the clips in place on the timeline.**

Gain Staging

As you are investigating and cleaning the session, you may find that some or all of the audio files are too quiet or too loud. The average peak level for all audio signals should be about -6dB. This is not a hard and fast rule. Use your judgment to determine what tracks need to be adjusted. The clip gain tool can be used to achieve these levels when necessary.

Multing

Multing is the process of separating a single audio file onto multiple tracks based on what the audio files contain. For example, If a vocal starts off whispering then later changing to a full excited voice, the whisper and the full voice can be separated into separate tracks for greater independent control.

Fix It!

Before attempting this step be sure that you understand the intentions of the artist and producer. Music creation is subjective and every song is different.

Now is the time to fix any obvious timing or tuning mistakes in the audio. If a word, phrase, drum beat or other element is out of time or does not work well with the groove, separate the clip at that point and adjust it. You can use any track that holds the groove as your timing reference. I also will use the visible grid lines and the metronome to help with this step. Trust your ears more than the visual references but they do help to speed things up in this step. Be careful to clean your edits with fades and be sure not to change the intent of the artist or producer.

If pitch correction is needed, you may want to use Melodyne or apply Auto-Tune where it is appropriate.

Import the reference tracks-

If the client included any ruff mixes or reference tracks, import them into the session. Mute these tracks.

Import Mix Template...

Having frequently used effects tracks like reverb, delays, parallel chains and other processors ready to go can allow you to be more creative, faster.

Import your mixing template into the session.

Setup the mix Bus

1. Create a Stereo Aux Input track name it- **Mix Bus**
2. Route the output of every track **except any reference tracks** to this Mix Bus Aux input.
3. Name the Bus path Mix Bus as well.
4. Solo safe the Mix Bus track.

Establish your Metering

At the start of your mix, the most important meters will be your vu meter. Unless you are using an external metering system, Insert a VU meter on your mix bus calibrated to -15VU. When you start to balance the mix, aim for an average of about 0VU on the meters. [Learn more about VU meters.](#)

Build the Balance

With your knowledge of the session's contents, the timing and tuning problems fixed, it's time to start the mix by building a balance. To keep this simple, it's best to start with the most important part of the song or the part that has the most energy and instruments going at once. This is usually the last chorus of a modern "pop" song arrangement.