

10 Step Guide - To Preparing for Your Recording Session

The following guide isn't intended to be a patronising list of dos and don'ts. Hopefully, you'll think of it as a helpful checklist to make your session at Bexley Audio Services more enjoyable.

1. **Be Prepared - Know Your Parts**

Your time in the studio is costing you money, so it's definitely not the place to be working out your parts or be unsure about the structure of a song. This is crucial to getting the best sound and the smoothest session. Make sure your parts are second nature to you. In a perfect world, you want to be able to play/sing your parts without even thinking about them; that way you'll get an effortless performance. Plus, it means less takes!

Of course, during the session, we may have a burst of inspiration, which means your parts may change. In this case, if you know your parts inside out, you can be prepared to adjust them as you go. If you're really prepared, you could potentially even have some alternate parts ready to be tried out!

If you're working with other musicians, it will be important to make sure everyone knows every aspect of the song(s) inside out and back-to-front. In the studio everything needs to be nailed down, otherwise you will end up wasting a lot of valuable time with endless takes.

Your final rehearsal should be at least a couple of days before the session, so that everything is still fresh in everyone's mind and you'll all be good to go.

2. **Establish Song Tempos & Practice to A Click Track**

Work out the tempos of all the songs you intend to record. This will be invaluable to me as your producer as I'll want to set up the songs in the DAW (Digital Audio Workstation) at the correct BPM (beats per minute).

Once you have established the correct BPM for a song, practice playing/singing along to a click track wearing a set of headphones. It can be daunting at first, especially if you haven't done this before, but like everything, you'll soon get used to it. You can download a metronome app for your smart phone and plug headphones into it if you don't have access to a laptop with DAW software.

The result of this is that your songs will be much tighter, and it will make it much easier if you have other musicians involved. If you intend to use a drummer make sure they are confident playing with a click track.

3. **Demo Your Songs**

Create demo versions of your songs on your own recording software. Make recordings during rehearsals as they can often highlight weak areas that still require some work. The quality doesn't need to be fantastic, simply good enough to hear and evaluate what everyone's playing and singing, so an iPhone recording will do. The more in-time it is, the easier it will be to make a scratch track.

After you have made some rough versions of your songs, send them to me. Chances are that I can make a scratch track straight from that file. For instance, I can even take a phone recording and apply it to my Cubase session. Most importantly, you can listen back to your song and make sure that it sounds good!

4. **Make lyric/chord sheets**

Print out lyric and chord sheets (with a note of tempo) so that (literally) everyone is on the same page. This can be a big help to those in the band during your rehearsals and especially when you get into the studio. The sheets will also be invaluable to me as a reference during the recording and production process. If you have your lyrics or chords sheets on an iPad, bring it along but email a copy in advance.

5. **Sing and Play Within Your Limits**

Less is more. The studio isn't really the place to overstretch yourself. Attempting to record the most astounding guitar solo you've ever done, playing mega fast drum rolls, or vocally stretching for extremely high notes, isn't a good idea if it's right on the edge of your capabilities.

The recording process in the studio should be enjoyable and fun! Pushing yourself too much or too far and it can equally turn into a pressure cooker, especially as you go for take 10! Better to strip things back a little so that everything you do is within your capabilities. The result will be tighter, better, take less time to record, and be much more enjoyable.

6. **Be Well Rested.**

Going into the studio is an exciting process. It'll probably be the culmination of many months of work if not longer, so it's easy to get nervous beforehand. Try your best to get a good night's sleep before the session and cut back on the coffee (and the cigarettes) if you can! If you're a party animal, missing one night on the town isn't going to change your life, but the recording you do the next day may do, especially if you're suffering from a hangover and are performing below par!

For singers, gigging the night before a session in the studio is not advised. Try to organise your session for a day when you're not out the night before. Give your voice a rest for at least a day beforehand, that way you can be at the top of your game.

7. **Equipment**

Sort out your equipment in advance. If you intend to bring some of your own equipment to the studio, please speak to me first to ensure that what you are intending to bring is suitable. What works well on stage may not work well in the studio. For instance, small low wattage combos work well in a studio environment, high wattage amps don't. Microphones don't like high volume levels.

For the equipment you do bring along, make sure that it's in 100% working condition. Recording in a studio can be unforgiving and will quickly highlight any equipment issues that may not have been apparent on stage or in a rehearsal room.

Guitar, Bass and Keys: Get your amp serviced, especially if it's a valve amp. Get jack sockets and pots on all equipment fixed if they are causing intermittent buzzing or crackling. Ensure guitars and basses are well set up, especially the intonation. Ensure any leads specific to your set-up are in 100% condition. Replace strings a few days before the session and ensure you always have an extra set in your case. Just like you want to make sure that your song is sounding great, you have to make sure that your instruments are sounding great too!

Drums: just bring what you need and not your full live rig – it's a small space! Make sure you've checked and replaced your heads/skins, polished cymbals and tuned, so you get the best sound you can on the day.

8. **Plan for Some Experimentation Time**

This one is of course budget permitting. But if you have some extra budget, it's a great idea to allow yourself some creative freedom in the studio to explore. After all, this is art, so let's get artistic. Sometimes you'll find some divine inspiration in the studio that will give your record the flavour it needed. So be sure to give yourself the opportunity to allow that to happen!

9. **Reference Tracks**

It's extremely helpful for your producer to know the bands/artists that have influenced your musical direction. Compile a list of 5 or 6 songs and send them through to the studio before the session starts. Any notes you want to include will also be helpful, such as what it is in each song which you particularly like. Nobody wants to be a clone; you want to be yourself and have your own unique take, but it will ensure your producer takes your sound in the right genre specific direction. Then again, you could be so inspired that you give birth to your own new genre!

10. **On the day**

If there is more than one of you recording on the same day, whether it be vocals or music, it is worth mentioning that there may be a little hanging around, whether it be setting up the equipment or while the other person is actually recording. Of course, you may find the whole recording experience something you're happy to watch but if not, I recommend you come prepared on the day with something to read, watch or listen (plus headphones!), so you can keep yourself entertained until you're needed.

Have fun and enjoy the experience!