

SHOW UP READY

Twenty years at the board taught me one thing above all: preparation is the single biggest factor in how good your record sounds and how far your budget goes. This is the short version — print it, check it off, and walk in ready.

BEFORE THE SESSION

- **Know your songs cold.** Every change, lyric, and harmony should be muscle memory. The studio is not the place to decide how the bridge goes.
- **Lock tempos and keys.** Decide the actual BPM and key of each song in advance and commit. Deciding on the clock is the most expensive way to decide.
- **Do your own pre-production.** Make rough phone demos, listen back honestly, and fix arrangement problems at home for free.
- **Settle the arrangement.** Intro length, section order, where parts enter and drop, background vocals, and the actual ending.

WHAT TO BRING

- **Serviced instruments.** Fresh strings (changed a day or two ahead so they settle), a proper setup, new heads where it counts.
- **Spares.** Strings, picks, sticks, cables, and a 9V or two.
- **Two or three reference tracks.** Released songs that sound like where you want to land — tone, energy, space.
- **Yourself, ready.** Eat beforehand, bring water, and plan a ride if you're tracking into the evening.

TRACKING TO A CLICK

- **Practice with one for weeks, not the night before.** Start slower than the song, lock in, then bring the tempo up.
- **Subdivide** when you drift — count or play the eighths/sixteenths for more reference points.
- **Feel lives inside the grid.** Laying back creates a heavy pocket; pushing adds urgency. The click is the canvas, not the enemy.
- **Ask about a tempo map** if the song wants to lift or breathe between sections.

PERFORMING UNDER THE RED LIGHT

- **Warm up** — never make your first take cold the hardest thing you'll play all day.
- **Treat the scratch take like it's real.** The unguarded pass is often the keeper.
- **Energy beats perfection.** A take with a tiny flaw and real fire beats a flawless, lifeless one.
- **Don't over-track.** Take 14 is often worse than take 3. We'll move on and come back fresh.

VOCAL PREP

- **Hydrate over days, not minutes.** Vocal folds are watered by consistent intake, not the bottle you drink in the lobby.
- **Sleep.** A rested voice has range and stamina a tired one doesn't.
- **Warm up gently** — range work, lip trills, sirens — before anything demanding.
- **Sing it, don't shout it.** A good chain rewards control, not volume.

SENDING TRACKS FOR REMOTE MIXING OR MASTERING

- **Export individual stems** — each instrument as its own file, not a stereo bounce.

- **Start every file at bar 1, beat 1** — the same timestamp, even if the part comes in later. This is the one people get wrong.
- **WAV or AIFF, 24-bit**, at the project's native sample rate. Avoid MP3s for anything you want mixed.
- **Label clearly:** KICK_IN, SNARE_TOP, BASS_DI, GTR_RHYTHM_L, VOX_LEAD_01, VOX_HARM_HI. Consistent names save mix time.

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