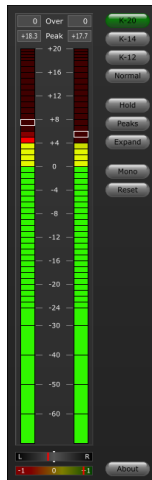


# K-Meter

Free implementation of a K-System meter  
according to Bob Katz' specifications



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*Last edited on 21st February 2011*

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# 1 The loudness race

When comparing two similar pieces of music, the louder one is perceived as sounding better (although this is only true for short periods of time). Accordingly, the loudness of music productions has continuously grown during the last decades.

As maximum levels of records, tapes and digital media are limited, however, mastering engineers have started using sophisticated dynamic compression techniques to achieve higher loudness without distorting the music (as of 2010, distortion is increasingly being used in order to achieve even higher loudness).

Unfortunately, this decrease in dynamic range does not leave the music unharmed. Current compressed music blasts away your ears and makes you turn down the volume of your amplifier. Having lowered the volume, you'll find that the "better-sounding" compressed music suddenly sounds pretty dull and boring compared to uncompressed music. In contrast, music with high dynamic range makes you turn up the volume – heck, it even sounds better when broadcast on the radio!

## 2 The K-System

The K-System has been devised by mastering engineer Bob Katz in order to counteract the ongoing loudness race and to help adjusting the levels of different songs during mastering. K-System meters are average level meters that do **not** have 0 dB on top. Instead, 0 dB on K-System meters relate to a reference loudness. There are three K-System scales:

- K-20 (0 dB at -20 dBFS, recommended)
- K-14 (0 dB at -14 dBFS)
- K-12 (0 dB at -12 dBFS)

Using the K-System is easy. Just calibrate your monitor system so that pink noise (-20 dBFS RMS, 20 Hz to 20 kHz; see the K-Meter source code for a FLAC-compressed wave file) on one channel yields 83 dB SPL on a loudness meter set to *C-weighted, slow*. Then mark the monitor's gain position as "K-20".

When your mixes or masters seem to have just the right loudness, they should now yield 0 dB on a K-20 meter.

In case you want to use the K-14 meter, attenuate the monitor gain by 6 dB or repeat the above process so that pink

noise yields 77 dB SPL. For K-12, attenuate the monitor gain by another 2 dB (pink noise should yield 75 dB SPL).

For more information about the K-System, please see [Bob's website](#).

## 3 Installation

In order to use the pre-compiled binaries, simply extract the K-Meter files from the downloaded archive. For the VST plug-in, you'll then have to move the extracted files to your plug-in folder (~/.vst, C:\ProgramFiles\Steinberg\VstPlugins\ or the like).

### 3.1 Windows

If you move the pre-compiled binaries to another directory, please make sure to also move the file `libfftw3f-3.dll` to this directory. Otherwise, you will not be able to execute the binaries anymore.

# 4 Controls

## 4.1 Meter selection

You can select the different K-System meter scales (**K-20**, **K-14** and **K-12**) by clicking on these radio buttons.



In the rare case you want to use the meter in a mixer's channel strip, click the **Normal** button (0 dBFS on top). Please note, however, that the **Normal** state will be neither saved, nor recalled in your DAW and the standalone version. This is by design – the K-System meter has been explicitly designed to **not** have 0 dBFS on top!

## 4.2 Infinite peak hold

Click on this button to toggle between infinite peak hold and “falling peaks”. This setting applies to both K-System and peak meters.





## 4.3 Show peak meter

Click on this button to toggle display of the peak meters. The original K-System meter specification demands peak meters, but Bob Katz has asked me to hide them by default:



*“Too many people will try to normalize the peak to full scale if they see a peak meter, and that’s what we want to avoid. You can still make a K-System meter like the original, but if we meet again in 15 years I hope that peak metering will be outlawed.”*

## 4.4 Magnify meters

This button magnifies both K-System and peak meters to 0.1 dB steps. If switched on, the 0 dB mark is placed near the centre.



*Hint: by selecting different meter scales, you can easily magnify the whole range between -25 dBFS and 0 dBFS.*

## 4.5 Mono mode

Click this button to easily check the mono compatibility of your stereo mix or master. In **mono** mode, both K-System meters and peak meters will be linked.



In case you insert the plug-in into a mono channel strip, **mono** mode will be selected and cannot be toggled.

### 4.6 Reset button

Click on this button to reset all meters, peaks and counters. You can also get rid of graphical artifacts, because all meters will be redrawn as well.



### 4.7 About window

Clicking on this button will open the **about** window where you will be informed about version number, contributors, copyright and the GNU General Public License.



### 4.8 Display license

This button is located in the **about window** and does not only advertise that you are using free software licensed under the **GNU General Public License** – when clicked, it will also open the license’s website in your web browser ...



# 5 Meters

## 5.1 K-System meter

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## 5.2 Peak meter

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## 5.3 Overload counter

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## 5.4 Maximum peak display

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## 5.5 Phase correlation meter

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## 5.6 Stereo meter

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## 6 Final words

Although coding K-Meter has been a lot of fun, it has also been a lot of work. So if you like K-Meter, why not send me a short email and tell me so? Write a few words about yourself, send suggestions for future updates or volunteer to create a nice theme – do whatever you like!

Here is my email address (please remove “-nospam”):

Martin Zuther <code-nospam@mzuther.de>

Thanks for using free software. I hope you'll enjoy it!



# A How to build K-Meter

## A.1 Preparing GNU/Linux

To build K-Meter yourself, I recommend setting up a chroot environment. This is fast and easy to do on Debian-based systems and might save you a **lot** of trouble. At the time of writing, I'm using Kubuntu 10.10 (maverick), but the procedure should be similar on your distribution of choice. If you aim at generic 64-bit compilation, simply change i386 to amd64.

To install the necessary packages and install the chroot base system, execute the following statements (please change <http://archive.ubuntu.com/ubuntu/> to a [mirror](#) close to you):

```
sudo apt-get install debootstrap schroot
```

```
sudo mkdir -p /srv/chroot/maverick_i386
sudo debootstrap --variant=buildd \
  --arch i386 maverick \
  /srv/chroot/maverick_i386 \
  http://archive.ubuntu.com/ubuntu/
```

Running `debootstrap` will take some time. Meanwhile, add the following lines to `/etc/schroot/schroot.conf` (make sure you remove all preceding white space so that each line begins in the first column):

```
[maverick-i386]
description=Ubuntu 10.10 Maverick Meerkat (i386)
directory=/srv/chroot/maverick_i386
personality=linux
root-users=username
type=directory
users=username,another_user
```

Please make the necessary changes to `username`. You may also add additional users, like `another_user`. In case you are setting up a 32-bit chroot environment on a 64-bit system, you'll also have to change `linux` to `linux32`.

When `debootstrap` is done, log in as `superuser`:

```
schroot -c maverick-i386 -u root
```

to install a few packages:

```
apt-get update
apt-get install libasound2-dev mesa-common-dev \
    xorg-dev language-pack-de ubuntu-minimal
apt-get clean
```

Finally, log out and log in with your user name:

```
schroot -c maverick-i386 -u username
```

Congratulations – after you have installed the dependencies (see below), you are ready to build K-Meter!

## A.2 Dependencies

### A.2.1 premake4

Importance: required

Version: 4.3

License: BSD

Homepage: [industriousone.com/premake](http://industriousone.com/premake)

### Installation

Place the binary somewhere in your PATH.

### A.2.2 Fastest Fourier Transform in the West

Importance: required

Version: 3.2.2

License: GPL v2

Homepage: [www.fftw.org](http://www.fftw.org)

## **Installation on GNU/Linux**

Extract the archive into the directory `libraries/fftw3`, change into this directory and run:

```
./configure --enable-float
make
mkdir -p bin/i386/
mv .libs/* bin/i386/
```

## **Installation on Microsoft Windows**

Extract the source code archive into the directory `libraries/fftw3` and the archive containing the pre-compiled binaries into the directory `libraries/fftw3/bin`.

### **A.2.3 JUCE library**

Importance: required

Version: 1.51

License: GPL v2

Homepage: [www.rawmaterialsoftware.com/juce.php](http://www.rawmaterialsoftware.com/juce.php)

## **Installation**

Extract the archive into the directory `libraries/juce`.

## **A.2.4 Virtual Studio Technology SDK (VST)**

Importance: optional  
Version: 2.4  
License: proprietary  
Homepage: [ygrabit.steinberg.de](http://ygrabit.steinberg.de)

### **Installation**

Just extract the archive into the directory `libraries/vstsdk2.4`.

## **A.2.5 Artistic Style**

Importance: optional  
Version: 1.24  
License: LGPL v3  
Homepage: [astyle.sourceforge.net](http://astyle.sourceforge.net)

This application formats the code so it looks more beautiful and consistent. Thus, you only have to install it if you plan to help me with coding K-Meter.

### **Installation**

Place the binary somewhere in your PATH. Depending on your platform, you should run *astyle* using the scripts `src/format_code.sh` or `src/format_code.bat`.

## **A.3 Building on GNU/Linux**

After preparing the dependencies, start your chroot environment, change into the directory `build` and execute

```
./run_premake.sh  
make config=CFG TARGET
```

where `CFG` is one of `debug32`, `release32`, `debug64` and `release64`, and `TARGET` is one of `linux_standalone_stereo`, `linux_standalone_surround`, `linux_vst_stereo` and `linux_vst_surround`.

The compiled binaries will end up in the directory `bin`.

## **A.4 Building on Microsoft Windows**

After preparing the dependencies, change into the directory `build` and execute

```
./run_premake.bat
```

Then change into the directory `build/windows/vs20xx`, open the project file with the corresponding version of Visual C++ and build the project.

The compiled binaries will end up in the directory `bin`.

# B GNU General Public License

Version 3, 29 June 2007

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