



# From Inspiration to Recording

A Step-by-Step Preproduction Guide  
for Musicians

**LAB** HOME STUDIO

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# Unlocking Your Song's Potential: A Preproduction Guide

- Do you feel like your idea is not living up to your expectations?
- Do you believe your song lacks the necessary resources to reach a professional level?
- Are you stuck with the harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic structure?

This guide is a step-by-step aimed at providing you with the necessary knowledge to address these issues and approach your music producer with a solid idea.

- Song Style
- Musical Production References
- Song Structure
- Costs
- The Producer and Involved Musicians
- Demo

Preproduction in music is crucial but often underestimated by the artist. Its significance lies in detailed preparation before recording, laying the groundwork for a solid and successful production. It serves as a clear guide, enhancing collaboration between the artist and the producer.

# What is Preproduction?

**Preproduction marks the beginning of a musical production, serving as the initial phase where all aspects are detailed before entering the studio. The goal is to maximize time efficiency and minimize uncertainties to ensure excellent results.**

**In the past, the only option for obtaining professional recordings was through expensive recording studios. Therefore, preproduction, which remains relevant, was designed to reduce costs by using less studio time.**

**Currently, large studios have lost relevance not because their quality has diminished, but because smaller or home studios have matched or surpassed the sonic quality previously achieved only with expensive analog equipment.**

# How to Achieve Effective Preproduction?

## 1. Song Style

- Do I have an intention to sell?
- What emotions do I want my song to convey?
- What's the goal and purpose?

If you're an emerging artist looking to find an audience, you might need to create something a bit more **commercial** or pop. If you're an artist not necessarily intending to sell and already have an audience, you have more freedom to explore something more alternative or **unique**, mixing musical genres or using diverse **resources**.

Imagine that your song is intended to be part of a movie or short film soundtrack. The steps to follow would be to **analyze the emotional and narrative context**, identify key moments that need musical **emphasis**, and adapt the song accordingly.

For more emotional sections, an option is to use **dramatic elements** or **varied dynamics**, such as quieter and louder sections, always combining chords that create **tension** and **release**.

Choose the **instrumentation**, in this case, aligned with a dramatic tone. The piano and string instruments combined with synthesizers will create a captivating **atmosphere**.

**Vocal interpretation** is crucial in all genres, but having an emotional understanding for each style is fundamental. Experiment with different **melodies** and **melodic twists** to suggest to your producer and generate emotional intensities in the key sections of the song. The construction of the **climax** should be defined gradually, and in the case of a soundtrack, it aligns with the visual narrative.

**Musical style** is always accompanied by emotions, defining the rhythm, melody, certain melodic twists, and particular harmonic progressions.

#### TIPS:

- Always stay true to yourself and your personality as an artist.
- Stepping out of your comfort zone, trying new chords, or exploring different ways of playing them can unlock creativity.
- Sometimes, seeking the opinion or collaboration of another artist in the composition process can help define the style.

## 2. Musical Production References

**A piece of advice that always comes in handy is to find musical production references. This can be very helpful so that from the beginning, you know how to materialize your ideas, where you want to go, and how you are going to achieve it. Listening to different musical genres and various artists can give you clear ideas about instrumentation, arrangements, and specific sound.**

**For example, if it's decided that the song will take a folk/pop direction, an excellent reference would be The Lumineers. They have a wealth of recordings with elements that add depth and nostalgia to the song.**

**Another example would be if the decision is to take the song in a more minimalist and intimate direction. An excellent reference would be "All of Me" by John Legend or "Falling" by Harry Styles.**

**Having a reference from the start can help us understand what elements to record, what arrangements to make, the vocal interpretation, and how certain instruments were recorded. It also gives us an idea of the direction post-production will take from the beginning.**

#### **TIPS:**

- **Conduct active listening to different artists across various musical styles.**
- **Analyze their compositions. What type of harmonic progression did they implement? Play their arrangements and melodies on your instrument. What are their lyrics like? What instruments do they use, and what is their sound? Do they sound warm or bright? Are they prominent or subtly perceptible? What do I hear in my right and left ear? What effects do I hear?**

### 3. Song Structure

**Musical preproduction is not just a technical process; it is a creative phase where artists and producers must overcome blocks in various aspects. From conception to interpretation, each component can present challenges. Here, we will explore strategies with concrete examples to address these challenges in concept, melody, rhythm, harmony, lyrics, instrumentation, structure, and interpretation.**

**The structure of a song is the plot that guides the sonic experience. From concept to interpretation, each facet contributes to the creative richness of the composition.**

#### 3.1 Concept

**The concept is the thematic core of the song. It can be an emotion, an event, or a central idea. Encourage free word association, automatic writing, and the creation of visual boards. Dare to explore multiple angles of the concept.**

- **Example 1: For a "resilience" concept, you could explore personal experiences of overcoming or draw inspiration from nearby examples.**
- **Example 2: If the concept is "nature," you could create a list of natural elements and explore metaphors to convey emotions.**

## 3.2 Melody (Vocals)

The melody is the **succession of notes** that shapes the musical identity. Experiment with intervals, modulations, and variations in dynamics. Innovate in exploring unconventional scales.

- **Example 1:** In a melancholic song, use a **descending** melody to evoke sadness.
- **Example 2:** To convey emotion, play with unexpected changes in the **dynamics** and **speed** of the melody.

## 3.3 Harmony

Harmony provides **tonal support** through the combination of chords. Experiment with extended chords, subtle **modulations**, and suspended chords. Implement **tension** and **resolution**.

- **Example 1:** In a dramatic section, use **dissonant chords** to create tension before resolving to more **consonant** chords.
- **Example 2:** For an experimental song, try chords outside the main key to achieve a unique sound.

## 3.4 Rhythm

Rhythm establishes the **pulse** and **temporal structure**. Experiment with **polyrhythmic** patterns, metric changes, and use strategic **silences** to create suspense.

- **Example 1:** In an energetic section, incorporate **syncopated rhythms** to accentuate the drive.
- **Example 2:** For a more ethereal atmosphere, use slower rhythms and subtle changes in temporal subdivision.

## 3.5 Lyrics

Lyrics are the **lyrical expression** that communicates the **narrative**. Experiment with **metaphors**, **alliterations**, and changes in narrative perspective. Encourage authenticity and emotional **connection**.

- **Ej. 1:** En una canción sobre amor, utiliza metáforas inspiradas en la naturaleza para describir **sentimientos**.
- **Ej. 2:** Para expresar la complejidad emocional, juega con la ambigüedad en las letras y utiliza **imágenes evocadoras**.

## 3.6 Structure (Sections of a Song)

The structure **organizes** the parts of the song to tell a coherent **story**. Experiment with both traditional and unconventional structures. Play with **repetition** and **variation** to maintain **interest**.

- **Example 1:** Use an **ABABCAB** structure to build a narrative that culminates in a climax.
- **Example 2:** Explore asymmetrical structures to challenge listener expectations.

## 3.7 Interpretation

Interpretation is the **emotional** and **stylistic delivery** of the song by the artist. Experiment with changes in **vocal dynamics**, **variations** in **timbre**, and **use pauses** to emphasize key moments.

- **Example 1:** In an emotional section, the interpretation could include a **gradual increase** in **vocal intensity**.
- **Example 2:** To highlight **vulnerability**, the artist might choose to perform certain sections in a **softer** and more **reflective tone**.

Remember that each technique and example is a tool in the creative kit, and the true magic happens when they are combined in unique and personal ways.

## **4. Costs**

**For this section, it's essential to consider that the music production process for a song, especially an album, takes a considerable amount of time and may involve multiple individuals. If any cost is overlooked, the song may not be completed.**

**In this step, I recommend trying to optimize costs to a greater extent, as long as the quality of the production is not sacrificed.**

### **TIPS:**

**Better results are not necessarily achieved by paying more, nor can we force the desired outcome by paying less.**

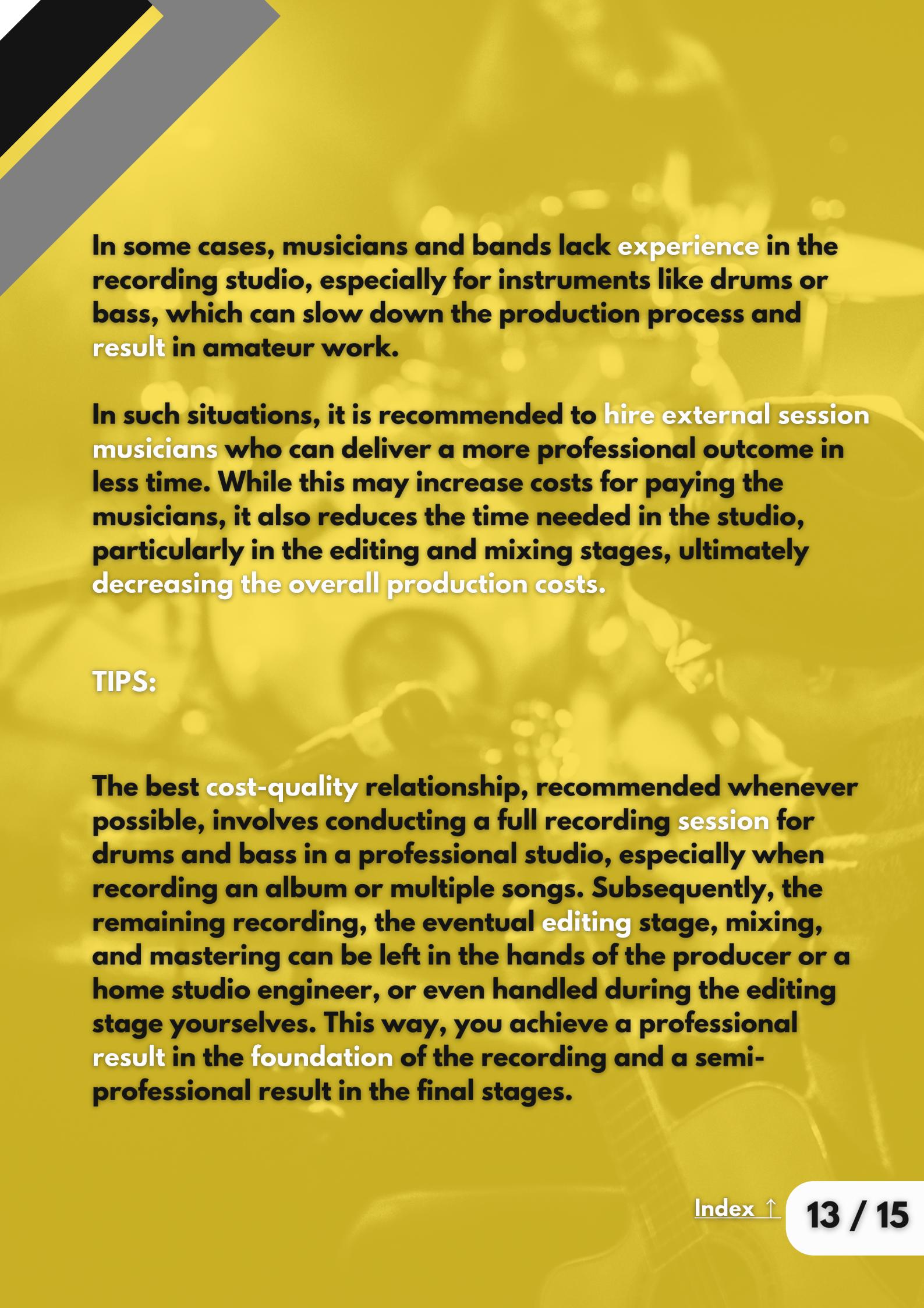
## 5. The Producer and Involved Musicians

We need to **define** and **identify** who will participate in the recording. In this section, you'll have to **choose** the musicians involved, as well as the individuals who will assist throughout the production (recording assistants, music producer, mixing and mastering engineers).

Primarily, we must **understand** the **role** of our music producer and be aware that they work with different positions:

- **Artist:** conceives the work from a sensitive and aesthetic spectrum.
- **Author:** beyond the artistic, conceives themselves as a creator.
- **Facilitator:** manages technical aspects for the proper execution of the production.
- **Collaborative:** can engage discreetly in the artistic process.
- **Permissive:** allows artists and technicians creative freedom.
- **Advisory:** remains in the shadows and can offer guidance.

As artists and musicians, we must maintain constant dialogue with the producer to make them understand our requests and set **boundaries** in our songs and creative processes.



**In some cases, musicians and bands lack experience in the recording studio, especially for instruments like drums or bass, which can slow down the production process and result in amateur work.**

**In such situations, it is recommended to hire external session musicians who can deliver a more professional outcome in less time. While this may increase costs for paying the musicians, it also reduces the time needed in the studio, particularly in the editing and mixing stages, ultimately decreasing the overall production costs.**

#### **TIPS:**

**The best cost-quality relationship, recommended whenever possible, involves conducting a full recording session for drums and bass in a professional studio, especially when recording an album or multiple songs. Subsequently, the remaining recording, the eventual editing stage, mixing, and mastering can be left in the hands of the producer or a home studio engineer, or even handled during the editing stage yourselves. This way, you achieve a professional result in the foundation of the recording and a semi-professional result in the final stages.**

## 6. Demo Recording

**Creating a demo, even if it lacks the best quality, is one of the best things you can do before professional recording. It plays a crucial role as an accelerator and creator in the musical preproduction process.**

**This way, we can effectively integrate this essential component:**

- **Structure of the Demo:**

**The demo is an initial representation of the song, a raw version that captures the essence of the composition. It serves as a musical sketch, acting as a starting point for future development.**

- **Streamlining Creative Exploration:**

**By building a solid demo, the artist and production team can swiftly explore various creative ideas. From the song structure to instrumentation, the demo provides an initial canvas that facilitates experimentation.**

- **Clarity in Artistic Vision:**

**The demo also plays a key role in communicating the artistic vision. It allows the artist to express ideas more clearly, facilitating alignment between the artist and the producer before entering the studio.**

- **Optimization of Resources in Preproduction:**

**By using the demo as a guide, resources are optimized during the preproduction phase. Essential elements that need to be recorded can be easily identified, saving valuable time and resources in the recording studio.**

- **Early Feedback and Adjustments:**

**Presenting the demo also provides the opportunity to receive early feedback. This allows adjustments before moving on to more advanced stages, ensuring a smoother evolution of the project.**

**In summary, the demo not only accelerates the creative process but also becomes a strategic resource for preproduction, paving the way for more effective collaboration between the artist and the music producer.**

## TIPS:

**If you're guitarists and don't play other instruments or don't have access to virtual instruments, imagine the sound of the instrument you desire, think about arrangements with your guitar or voice, and make recordings. This way, you can guide your producer. Nowadays, there are also plugins that transform our signal to MIDI and allow recordings with virtual instruments of all kinds, yes, just with a guitar, even with a microphone and your voice. One free resource is the MTuner plugin from Melda Production.**



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