

Title:

How to Prepare for Your Recording Session

Word Count:

777

Summary:

Some simple tips on how to make your recording session productive and smooth.

Keywords:

Recording studio music gear session engineer producer songwriter microphone recorder

Article Body:

Recording is a time-intensive experience, and problems that arise often seem magnified. No one wants to wait for an hour while the guitar player runs to Guitar Center for new strings. So, to keep things going smoothly and efficiently, here are some things to do in preparation:

1. Practice! You'd be surprised how many bands come into the studio obviously unprepared. If you can't play through the song without making mistakes, then you're not ready to record yet. Take the time to practice the songs you want to track thoroughly. This isn't to say that you can't be creative in the studio, but it's a lot cheaper to be creative on your own time.
2. Make sure your songs are finished. Going into the studio hoping to finish lyrics or parts on the spot is a recipe for dissatisfaction. You may be inspired by the pressure, but you'll inevitably listen back to it later on and think that you could have sang it better, or that you don't especially like this line or that phrase.
3. Record yourselves. It's very useful to record your practice using a simple tape recorder. The finished product won't sound very good, but you'll be able to hear if you're off time, or off key. It may also make you aware that some parts of your song are dragging, or that other parts could be extended or more developed.
4. Get your gear in shape. Don't show up for a session that you're paying for with gear that doesn't work, cables that cut out, batteries that are going dead, or blown speakers. If you're afraid that your gear is less than perfect, make some calls. Your engineer can point you to some people in town that rent gear on

a day-by-day basis, or to other musicians who might be willing to loan an amp or cabinet for a day or two. It makes a difference!

5. Tune your instrument. Drummers should put on new heads about 1 week before the session. The snare head should be replaced immediately before the session, and if you're doing more than one or two songs, consider bringing extra snare heads. Nothing sounds as good on tape as a fresh snare head. Guitarists should put a new set of strings on a few days before the session. Bring extra strings, as you probably will break one or two. Bass players can replace their strings, although new bass strings can be a bit overly metallic. I recommend changing bass strings a week or two before the session.

6. Let people know you're busy! You don't want to be called in to work half-way through your session. Everyone involved needs to clear their schedules. Nothing creates more tension in a session than someone wanting to blow out early so they can hit some party. Also, if you're recording at your home, make sure your family knows about it. Take phones off the hook, recording will require some degree of quiet. If you're working at your practice space, make sure the neighbors know that you'll need some quiet, if there are other bands at your facility, ask them for their schedules, and work out a time when they won't be playing in the next room.

7. Have a plan. It's always better to have fewer songs to finish, and to know precisely which songs you're trying to get done. Often, once a session gets rolling, it's easy to just go ahead and track some of the other songs you have. While this isn't terrible, in my experience these tracks are usually discarded, as they haven't been thoroughly practiced, and may not even be complete.

9. Develop a vision. I like to come see a band before I record them, just to get a feel for their sound, and develop my vision for the session. If you envision your record sounding like the latest MTV hit, you may be frustrated and disappointed. Your band is unique, and my goal as an engineer is to find what's best about your band and accent that. Your record may not sound like anything that's come before, and trying to cram it into a pre-existing notion of a "good recording" doesn't do it justice. The Pixies didn't sound like anything that came before them, nor does Modest Mouse, or the Beatles, for that matter.

8. Relax! Recording is fun, and there's really no pressure. Just be prepared, and you'll have a smooth, enjoyable session with a great product at the end!