

HYPERREAL AUDIO

BAND PREP

Both the songs and the band need to be ready for the session. Songs should be worked out and rehearsed enough that you're confident in the parts and in your ability to play them well – that confidence comes from demos, individual practice, and rehearsals.

Demos

Demos can look very different depending on the goal: vocals over a bare-bones backing track and click, or a full multitrack recording with live drums. To gauge how tight the band is before a session or tour, record a rehearsal multitrack, with guitar DI's. To just capture a song's structure for the rest of the band, one instrument and a vocal is enough.

One especially useful kind is a demo with live vocals, guitars, and bass, but MIDI drums. Guitars and bass recorded direct show performance flaws right away, they also allow you to experiment with guitar plugins, helping you figure out what tone and gear to look for at the studio. Well-programmed MIDI drums let you hear at home whether a kick pattern or a fill clashes with the other parts, instead of finding that out on paid studio time. Trying out different drum libraries also makes it easy to get a sense of what kind of drum sound actually suits your songs.

The same demos, with the drums muted and the click pushed up in the mix, make great backing tracks for the drummer's individual practice and for the session itself.

Vocal demos are a hugely useful and important stage. Professional singers work their parts out in real detail – trying variations in melody, lyrics, dynamics, enunciation and emotion down to the individual syllable, recording rough takes, editing them, listening back, then trying to reproduce all the adjustments in the next take.

Demos clear up most uncertainties and take a lot of the edge off studio nerves. Bands that consistently work on demos – recording themselves at home, capturing ideas, filming rehearsals – walk into the studio with a clear sense of what they're doing, and their raw tracks often already sound close to the finished thing. Bands that skip demos usually find out about problems – parts that don't line up, poorly intonated guitars, the singer having no idea what notes to aim for – at the studio, on their dime and with the clock ticking.

Below is a list of steps that cover the most common gaps in preparation process.

CHECKLIST

- Rehearse your parts until they're fully integrated into your muscle memory so they don't require improvisation. If you come up with a cool idea during tracking – great, but don't count on sudden inspiration.
- If a song holds a steady tempo, nail down the exact BPM. If different sections genuinely need different tempos, work out those values too.
- Make a demo and a Guitar Pro file at that tempo with those parts. In the session, the demo can serve as the drummer's backing track – playing in the context of the song usually feels and sounds better than playing to a bare click. Guitar Pro lets you work out bass and guitar parts quickly and precisely, right down to specific fingerings, so you don't forget them later.
- If your material genuinely works better without a click, if the style and genre call for free tempo – definitely film your rehearsals and record demos. Make sure your natural tempo drift sounds good, happens where it should, and doesn't shift too much take to take. Recording drums without a click track assumes that the drummer is playing simultaneously with at least one other musician and that the recorded performances do not align with any predefined tempo grid. So it matters that everyone really feels the groove, or it'll be hard to lock in with the drums – especially if final guitars and bass end up getting recorded separately. There's also a workaround called tempo mapping: building a tempo grid after the fact from already-recorded live drums.
- Set up a shared folder for the band (Google Drive works fine) for demos, Guitar Pro files, lyrics, and rehearsal videos.
- Write lyrics in advance so you have the final versions ready when you start recording the instrumental parts. Sometimes a word or line is so perfect that you want to highlight it musically, and this can't be done after the fact if the music has already been recorded. Sometimes, freshly written words turn out to be awkward to sing. Furthermore, if a singer focuses on unfamiliar lyrics during recording, this negatively impacts the quality of the takes.
- For melodic vocals work out the part note for note on an instrument, record a rough vocal over the demo, check pitch and timing, find and fix recurring mistakes.
- For extreme vocals without a clear melody, do the same thing: record a rough vocal to lock in the phrasing, find the right tone and note lengths, and check that it lands on the beat.
- If a song needs keyboards, violin, horns or any other additional part – work it out in advance; don't count on calling someone to "save" the track in the studio. Write and demo the part beforehand, and figure out how the track is going to work live while you're at it.
- If you really don't want to make full demos or Guitar Pro files, but you're completely confident in yourselves and the material – budget in some extra studio time for making click tracks, recording a scratch guitar for the drummer, and problem-solving on the spot.

- Get your guitars and bass set up by the same good tech, and tell them the instruments will be recorded together on one album/track – guitars don't intonate perfectly by nature, and a tech can tune them to sit better together.
- Sort out drums and cymbals ahead of time. If you don't own a pro-level set of cymbals, ask the studio about renting, check with friends and rentals, and compare options by watching demos on YouTube. A well-tuned budget kit can sound perfectly decent, but no processing will save bad cymbals – don't cut corners there.

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