BEFORE THE MASTERING SESSION

There are two ways to get a project started. The easiest way is using the Cost Calculator on the Mystery Room Mastering website to enter the variables and details of the project, as well as upload the audio files. If other arrangements have been made, send an email with a link to the audio files, and include a typed note with the following info:

-artist/band name exactly as it should appear in the CD-Text and/or metadata (info embedded into the CD master and/or mp3 and WAV files)

-album title or release/project name (please don't use ALL CAPS unless it's truly part of the name/title)

-song order/track listing (Please note where side A and B are split for vinyl releases). Make sure the spelling and capitalizations are exactly as they should appear. Also, make a note if there are any mix files that may have an old or different name rather than the official name to avoid confusion.

-format(s) in which the project is being released (CD, vinyl, cassette, online/digital distribution, Mastered For iTunes)

-ISRC codes are optional and can be provided for a small fee if you do not have your own. You will likely need them for online distribution. Most online distribution services will provide them for you, but having them generated ahead of time ensures the codes are properly applied to all master formats rendered by Mystery Room Mastering.

-If you'd like the album cover art embedded into an mp3 version of your project, please email a .jpg or .png file along with the audio files, or as soon as it's available. WAV files can also support artwork, but very few apps can display it. CD masters cannot contain artwork.

Since the songs are being submitted as data files from you or the mix engineer, they are not sequenced in any order other than alphabetical (or numerical if they are named with an 01, 02 etc. at the start). Be sure to provide the song order in the web form or a separate note to be sure.

If you have a stylistic mastering preference, make it known before mastering begins. Some want a master that is loud and competitive with other material, while some prefer a more natural sound while preserving the dynamics, and sacrificing some overall loudness. Please let it be known if you have a preference either way.

-As for any noises, count-ins, or talking before and after any songs, make note if any of those sounds should stay in or be cut out. Feel free to include

any notes about song-to-song transitions and general spacing between the songs. It may be helpful to create and send one continuous file of the album to demonstrate the transitions if precise transitions are desired between certain songs. The reference file for transitions can be an mp3 for ease of sending as it will only be used as a template or map if you will, when sequencing your master. The audio itself will not be used.

-If you'd like any equipment noise or hiss to be removed or reduced during intros, outros, or other quiet parts where any hiss/noise is usually more noticeable, please be sure to include a sample (at least 1 second) of ONLY the hiss/noise (with no music or other sounds) before or after the song.

Generally speaking, any hiss within a song can appear louder after it's mastered unless some noise reduction is done, so if you think any hiss or noise may be a problem after mastering, be sure to include a hiss sample for each song in question so an attempt can be made to reduce the noise. Without a clear noise/hiss fingerprint, it's much harder to do any useful noise reduction if at all.

It is strongly recommend to very carefully triple check the final mixes for any stray noises, pops, and clicks that may become more noticeable after mastering. Cleaning up individual tracks when they're not in use within your mixing sessions can help prevent the buildup or exaggeration of unwanted noises after mastering.

PREFERRED AUDIO FILE TYPES

- Your final mix files can be stereo (interleaved) .wav or .aif files

- 32-bit float audio files are strongly preferred, 16-bit files are OK only when 32-bit float (or 24-bit) files are absolutely unavailable.

 * * ***A note to mix engineers and those mixing their own material:** Even though your recording may be a 24-bit recording, if you're using a modern DAW, it likely processes audio at 32-bit float bit-depth. So, it's important to either save your mixes as 32-bit float, or to dither to 24-bit. I personally think saving as 32-bit float with no dithering is the best option. Feel free to email me with questions about this. If you're unsure what bit-depth your DAW is processing audio at, you can **use this free plugin** to analyze it in your mixing session. Put it in the very last insert slot of your master fader and use the bit-depth meter within the plugin to see if your audio is higher than 24-bit. With most modern DAWs, it probably will be unless you're specifically dithering to 24-bit.

Saving a mix file as 24-bit from a DAW that operates at 32-bit float means some of the bits are being truncated (or lost) which is not ideal.

Preferred sample rate is whatever the original recording and/or mix session is at. Basically, there is no need to up-sample files to a higher sample rate once they're printed. Don't change the sample rate of your files before sending.

- Don't convert mp3s to WAV for mastering. Use true WAV files.

- Please be sure that the mix files have reasonable headroom to work with and are not already at loud level. It's hard and sometimes impossible to do anything useful (sonically) to mixes that already have a high RMS (average volume) level and consistently clip or hit 0dBFS.

- **Please don't send mix files that have already been "pre-mastered", normalized, or made extremely loud using digital processing. It's understood that in some cases, certain plug-ins on the master fader/ buss can be very important to the sound, but if you are adding an L2 Limiter (or something similar) simply for the sake of loudness, it's preferred that type of processing is removed before making the final mix files for mastering.**

- The final master can be as loud as you'd like, **but it's hard to do a quality mastering job when the unmastered mix files are already loud or have limiting applied.**

- This only refers to processing on the master fader, mix file, or overall mix. Compression on individual tracks or instruments within the mix is certainly ok. As long as the overall mix level/DAW output is not going over 0dBFS, and there is no limiting on the master fader or anything else preventing the levels from exceeding 0dBFS when they otherwise would, the levels should be acceptable for mastering.

It's becoming more common for mix engineers to show clients working mixes with some "faux-mastering" added for loudness, but ideally the mix engineer will remove that "faux-mastering" and create a 32-bit float mix file without any limiting and loudness processing for the actual mastering session. Feel free to send the "faux-mastered" versions as a reference point but I normally prefer to work with versions that have more natural headroom.

Although it might seem simple, one can't simply turn down a mix file that is already too loud because in most cases, severe sonic compression (and damage) has already been done to achieve that loudness, and can only be undone from the mixing source by removing limiting and other techniques used to achieve loudness.

If you feel that your mixes won't be the same without a particular plug-in on the master fader, feel free to send one song as a sample to see if it's something that can be worked with, or send both your processed version and a version with no processing on the master fader to show what you're shooting for.

DELIVERING YOUR MIXES FOR MASTERING

When using the cost calculator on the website, you will eventually be taken to a page that allows you to upload unmastered files directly to a secure place. Please upload just one .zip file containing all the files and name it clearly with the artist/project name so it can be identified easily.

If you'd rather share a direct link or folder, Dropbox is the preferred way to receive your mix files via the Internet. If you don't have a Dropbox account you can go to www.dropbox.com and sign up for a free 2.5 GB account which should be enough space to upload your high resolution mix files for a full album. Share your folder with the following Dropbox account ID:

mysteryroommastering@gmail.com

Direct links from other file sharing sites are ok but **please avoid using file sharing services that require signing in or creating an account to retrieve the files. Also, avoid sites that require downloading each file one at a time. Making a single zip file of all your mixes to avoid any errors or issues and saves everybody time.**

Please do not send in audio CDs or mp3 files to master from unless the audio CD or mp3 files are the only known source of the files. mp3 files are very poor quality and not suggested for use as a mastering source. This is especially true because your project will likely end up being converted to mp3 (again) for the end user resulting in "transcoding". m3ps don't always sound bad, but an mp3 of and mp3 will definitely sound terrible.

Audio CDs are not ideal to master from for many reasons. If uploading the files isn't an option, you can send your mixes on a DATA CD (or DVD), hard disk, or flash drive. If your master files have ever been mp3s or on an audio CD, please get the raw data files directly from your mix engineer.

Once audio files have been burned to an audio CD or converted to mp3, there is no way to get the quality back that is desired for mastering.

DATA CD/DVD or flash drives can be mailed to:

Mystery Room Mastering
PO BOX 70302

Milwaukee WI 53207

AFTER THE MASTERING SESSION

When the initial mastering is finished, an email with a download link will be sent to approve the master. Once everything is approved and finalized, a master will be supplied for the format(s) you requested. Most CD manufacturers will accept a DDP file as the audio master, which can easily be delivered via Internet.

Check with your CD manufacturer because it's an easier and better method to use a DDP file rather than a CD-R master. CDs are much more prone to errors, and will always contain some level of micro-errors. All audio master CD-Rs from Mystery Room Mastering are tested for C1/C2 errors to be sure the error rate is within spec to be used as a master CD, but by submitting a DDP file for a CD production master, there is no place for those errors to occur which is one reason why DDP is superior to CD-R for masters.

Add $20 for preparation, testing, materials, and shipping of physical master CD-Rs for production per disc and/or format.

If you're releasing your project via online distribution, be aware of what file type you need. Most online distribution services require 16-bit/44.1k WAV files as the master source. Bandcamp and SoundCloud can accept 24-bit WAV files with sample rates higher than 44.1k which will usually result in a better sounding experience for the end user.

The Mastered For iTunes program is also available from certain aggregators and this means you can upload higher resolution files as the master source that will be converted to AAC format, which is what the end user purchases. Mastered For iTunes is a special program and different than standard iTunes Store releases. Mastered For iTunes typically requires that a separate release be setup with your online distributor.

For more info on what formats of your master you may need, visit this page: www.mysteryroommastering.com/what-format

VINYL PRE-MASTERS: For vinyl pre-masters, one 24-bit WAV file for each side of the record will be prepared. Unlike audio CDs, vinyl has no limitations when it comes to bit-depth or sample rate, so rather than reduce the audio to CD quality and then transfer to vinyl, it's best to keep the audio at 24-bit and the native rate if higher than 44.1k. Other adjustments are made as well to optimize for the lacquer cutter/pressing plant. The reason for one file per side is to assure that the spacing between

songs, and song order can't be altered accidentally. A PDF file with song info and times will be provided so the cutter knows where each song starts and ends.

***If using United Record Pressing, Rainbo Records (or other pressing plant that requires a CD-R master rather than 24-bit data file that can be sent via Internet), add $20 for burning, testing, misc materials, and shipping a physical master CD-R.

Submitting new mixes, or remixes is subject to further billing, but the basic mastering rate includes unlimited revisions on the files you initially submit for mastering until you are satisfied with the results.

Please send payments via check or money order to:

Mystery Room Mastering
PO BOX 70302
Milwaukee, WI 53207-0302

PayPal and most major credit cards accepted as well.

*PayPal or Credit/Debit card payments may be subject to a 3% transaction fee. This allows mastering rates for everybody to be as low as possible. No payment is due until you are satisfied with the results.

If you have any questions, feel free to email me.

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