

HYPERREAL AUDIO

ORGANIZING THE RECORDING PROCESS

So, let's say you've got demos and Guitar Pro files, or just very well-rehearsed songs. You know your tempos, you've picked a studio, and you're ready to book a session. How do you organize the process, and how much time should you book?

Gauge the Scope and Difficulty

The question is how much material you're recording, how difficult it is for you, and how much studio experience you have. If you feel completely at home in a studio, the parts are relaxed and second nature, and you only need to record one or two songs, you'll most likely get it done in a single three-hour session per instrument. If you're recording a full-length album of difficult material and it's your first-ever recording session (you don't need all three to apply – one is enough), plan ahead for everything below.

Conditions for a Consistent Sound

- If you mean for drums, bass, and rhythm guitars to keep the same sound across the entire record, try to record each of those instruments in a single session – it's practically impossible to mic up drums or a guitar cabinet exactly the same way twice.
- Book a separate setup-and-soundcheck session, especially if the drummer, bassist, or guitarists are recording a lot of material, or several people are recording the basic tracks playing together. An arrangement that works well is: you come in the evening before, set everything up, mic it, dial in the sound, import tempo tracks/backing tracks/demos, set up monitoring, record a test take, and go home to rest – then record the next day with a clear head.
- Budget at least 4 hours for getting a studio ready for three or four musicians playing simultaneously, and 2 hours for drums only.
- If it's absolutely impossible to record an instrument in one session, or over several consecutive days without breaking down the setup, try and document every variable involved: which instruments, effects, amps, cabinets, mics, preamps, and settings were used. Take a photo of every mic position individually. Note exactly which speaker in the cabinet was captured by which mic. Measure the distances from the snare to the overheads and room mics, and from the guitar/bass speakers to the mics, with a tape measure. Photograph every setting on anything with knobs or buttons. Save the session, marking in the file name that this is the reference point to pick back up from.

Recording In Sections

- If you're recording in sections, comp them right away and listen to the edit points. Pay attention to gaps between guitar chords, the sustain of bass, drums, and cymbals, the singer's tone and breathing – these small things get more noticeable at mix stage once compression is applied. To make edits sound more musical, record with overlap: come in a little early and keep playing or singing a couple of seconds past where the section actually ends.

Editing as Part of the Process

- Plan ahead for editing. There's no point recording guitars or bass without finished drums. If an instrument's track needs to be comped from several takes, or the raw tracks need to be tightened up, get that done before the next elements are recorded. If the lead vocal is a bit off pitch and backing vocals are next to record, it's worth doing a rough pitch correction pass first.

Recording Vocals

- Split vocal recording across as many sessions as your singer actually needs. Even experienced singers vary a lot depending on their physical and mental stamina, and how demanding the parts are. It's better to nail one song properly per session than to force your way through six and end up with weak vocals on tracks five and six of the album.
- After the session, always ask for a rough mix with vocals so you can listen back to what you got in a calm setting.

Keeping Sessions Productive

- Don't have the whole band sit in on the session unless there's a reason to, and don't bring friends along just for company – people who aren't involved will inevitably end up distracting you.
- If you're there but not the one recording, think about what you can actually contribute. Maybe your bandmate or the engineer needs water, coffee, or a snack – ask. If something about the sound or performance bothers you, say so, don't hold back. If a great sound was found or a great take was recorded, say that too. Help keep the session productive and the vibe relaxed.
- If you're the one recording, do everything you can to show up in the best possible shape. Don't book too early a morning session, get a good night's sleep, shower, eat breakfast, leave enough time to get to the studio, think about lunch and dinner if it's a long session. Bring spare strings, picks, sticks, and anything else you might need.
- Avoid overnight sessions. Don't record during the hours you'd normally be asleep. Good performance depends on fine motor control, and that's the first thing to go when your nervous system is exhausted. Musicians who normally play well often start drifting in timing and pitch, or losing track of their parts, during late-night sessions.