

HYPERREAL AUDIO

VOCALIST'S GUIDE

PREPARATION

Regardless of genre and how exactly you write your material, you need a genuinely solid, worked-out part by the time you record. That means not just the rhythm, notes, and lyrics, but the note lengths, dynamics, tonal and emotional coloring too. Every singer eventually settles on the combination of those variables that feels most right to them, but some are clearly aware of it and lock it in, and others aren't. Experienced and skilled singers tend to spend a significant amount of time recording and editing rough vocal takes. That usually comes from understanding how much work is required to achieve a truly great performance, and the process itself continues to sharpen their skills even further.

Try to eliminate as much uncertainty as possible, so there's almost no searching or improvising left to do at the studio. Don't count on a sudden flash of inspiration, especially if a session still feels to you more like taking an exam than playing in a sandbox.

Here's a short checklist:

- People very often can't lock into the rhythm and pitch on a recording simply because they don't know exactly what they're supposed to be landing on. So once you feel like you've found the melody and rhythmic phrasing, always work out the actual notes on an instrument.
- If you don't have perfect pitch and aren't fluent in solfeggio, program your parts as a MIDI track over the demos and/or as a separate track in Guitar Pro, so you end up with karaoke versions of your songs. This helps learn the notes faster and better, get a feel for the intervals, catch and fix dissonances, harmonic weaknesses, and rhythmic mismatches.
- When you're writing lyrics, think not just about meaning and phonetics, but also about where you're going to breathe in.
- Find a way to record rough vocals that works for you. All you need is a regular dynamic mic, a laptop with any DAW, an audio interface, an XLR cable, and headphones – you probably already have all of this, and you don't need an expensive interface. If singing at home isn't possible, use your rehearsal space instead. Inside the DAW, you need to learn three basic operations: recording, cutting/moving/comping clips, and tuning – you can pick up all three easily from YouTube videos.
- Once you've got those operations down and you know exactly what notes and lengths make up your vocal line, you'll easily be able to diagnose most performance issues yourself (pitch, timing, enunciation, dynamics), find the

right positioning and emotion, hear where backing vocals and doubles are needed, get a feel for how much your voice can endure, and learn what instrument balance you need to sing comfortably.

- Gradually train yourself to hear your own voice in the mix as a note in a chord, not as a separate thing floating on top – over time, this will help you land pitch more accurately, even when you can't hear yourself all that well.
- At rehearsals and shows, try not to compensate for underpowered gear by pushing harder. Look into the monitoring situation at venues ahead of time, work on balancing volume levels better, and if you can, get an in-ear monitoring system or your own powerful floor wedge. Try singing with just barely inserted earplugs .
- Record and/or film your rehearsals and shows. What tendencies show up under the influence of adrenaline, volume, and imperfect monitoring?
- Just like Michael Jordan had a coach, even very skilled singers often still have a vocal coach. If you feel like certain things just aren't clicking no matter how hard you work at them, don't put off finding one – feeling stuck is demoralizing, while an experienced coach can quickly diagnose the problem and offer a fix. But even a great teacher can't practice for the student – without work on the your part, their effort is wasted. Also, don't expect a miracle: a real result takes time.
- Through all of this, try not to lose the intuitive feel of the process, and don't over-filter the things that make your voice recognizable. Stay playful and relaxed. If you're not enjoying yourself and you're overthinking it in the moment of singing, you'll hear it – and so will your bandmates and your listeners. Don't shut yourself off. Support and a positive reaction from your bandmates, other musicians, an audience at a show, or an engineer during a session is a genuinely real signal that you're doing something right. Trust those signals.

RECORDING

Prepare Backing Tracks or Stems

- Why this matters: there's nothing worse than tracking vocals straight into a full hundred-track project where someone forgot to mute a solo – it will absolutely blast your ears out at the worst possible moment.
- Don't make your backing tracks too compressed or aggressive-sounding.
- If your demo has rough vocals and backing vocals you're happy with, and the tempo's the same, export them as a separate stem just in case.

Physical Readiness

- Don't show up to record sick or exhausted.
- The day before, try not to talk too much, and avoid anything that could cause inflammation (particularly alcohol).
- Get a good night's sleep.
- Don't start recording sooner than 4 hours after waking up, unless you specifically want a slightly rougher, huskier voice.
- Warm up a little before you leave, but not at full force – 15-20 minutes of light warm-up is usually enough.
- Don't eat spicy food or anything that could give you heartburn, and don't eat a heavy meal right before recording.
- Before and during the session, don't drink anything hot or cold. Stock up on still water at room temperature.

Microphone

- Mic choice is a subtle, individual thing: there are platinum-selling albums with vocals recorded on a simple Shure SM58, and there are singers who can't imagine recording without a vintage Neumann U67. If the studio has several different vocal mics, budget an extra hour at the start of your first session and try them all.

Mental State

- If you're the type who chronically dislikes their own voice, make sure to bring along whichever bandmate's ear you trust the most.
- Don't be embarrassed by anything at all. Vocals are the most noticeable element of a song to the average listener, so do whatever is needed to get the right takes. Don't put up with bad monitoring, heat, cold or lack of air. Take breaks and drink water whenever you need to. And beyond that – make faces, dance, laugh, cry, scream, whisper, sing standing, seated, lying down, or hanging upside down – go as wild as you want, if it helps the takes and the vision behind them. Drop every inhibition; a good engineer will back you up on that.

Recording Process

- If you're happy with a take overall, move on to the next section or track. Going into each new take, know exactly what you're trying to improve – don't burn through your voice for nothing.
- When judging takes, put emotion and energy above technical precision.
- If you're punching into a dense section, record with overlap – come in a bit early and keep singing a couple of seconds past the end of the section. If you're recording odd and even lines separately in a very dense verse with no pauses, make a conscious call on whether it should sound like an intentional effect or like one continuous live take, and if it's the latter, record with overlap there too.
- Ask the engineer to comp the best takes onto a dedicated track as you go.
- Comp the pieces right away and listen to the quality of the edits.
- Don't delete lower-quality takes – they can come in handy at mix time for doubles, and they might have good syllables or words worth keeping as spare parts.
- Split vocal recording across as many sessions as you actually need. Few singers can go longer than 3-4 hours, and a lot of vocal-cord screamers in hardcore only have about an hour of quality takes in them. A great way to check your voice: quietly squeak out a high note in falsetto – if the sound cuts out, comes out hoarse, or won't come out at all, it's time to stop.

After the Session

- Ask the engineer to export the tracks with the recorded vocal.