



**The Recording Academy
Producers and Engineers Wing**

Digital Audio Workstation Guidelines for Music Production

Version 1.0



A few years ago audio engineers could open a reel of tape they'd never seen before, glance at the track sheet, and begin working almost immediately. Today, with Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs), replacing tape machines on recording projects, the amount of time between opening a project or session from another engineer and going to work has definitely increased. And the same can be true when engineers re-open their own projects or sessions that they haven't worked on for a few months.

Why is this? And why was it so easy in the past? The answer is that over the years engineers developed a number of conventions with linear tape and track sheets. When they opened up the tape box they pretty much knew what to expect and, after looking at the track sheet to confirm a few basics, they could start pulling up the faders.

Until now, however, no real conventions of this kind have been established with DAWs. This is what the **Digital Audio Workstation Guidelines for Music Production** set out to do. When followed, they can greatly improve the process of transferring projects/sessions between operators, as well as help those operators better organize their own projects/sessions.

Our committee of very experienced users and manufacturers' representatives of Cubase, Digital Performer, Logic, Nuendo, Pro Tools and Sonar worked for over a year to create these new guidelines. We based our work on the *Pro Tools Session Guidelines for Music Production* created by the Technical Subcommittee of The Recording Academy Florida Chapter's Producers & Engineers Wing committee and released in 2003. Essentially, these are many of the same Pro Tools guidelines re-written to apply to all DAWs, along with many updates and new guidelines.

To all who invested their time and effort, we'd like to say thank you very much. Your contributions are greatly appreciated. It is our hope that these guidelines will help everyone as much as they have helped us in improving our productivity when working with DAWs.

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Introduction

These guidelines are the Producers and Engineers Wing DAW Guidelines Committee's recommended best practices when using a digital audio workstation for music production. Their primary goal is to make the exchange of DAW (digital audio workstation) projects and sessions as transparent as possible.

It is important to note these guidelines *do not* set out to reinvent the wheel. Many of them are simply adapted versions of the best practices for recording with tape, but made to apply to DAWs. The guidelines are based upon our years of experience using DAWs at every stage of a project. Along the way, many new practices were devised to replace organization and record keeping methods that no longer applied to this new medium. Over the years, we have refined these new practices, distilling them down to this set of basic guidelines. In addition, we incorporated many suggestions by national members of the Producers and Engineers Wing.

The guidelines focus mainly on how the engineer/operator can organize, clean up, and save their project/session data at the end of the day to make the next person's job a lot easier. They are meant to help recording projects where the projects/sessions are being passed from one operator to the next, as well as those where there is only one operator on the entire project. When followed, they can eliminate much confusion for all operators, provide answers to anticipated questions, solve certain problems before they arise, and shorten the time between when an operator opens a project/session and when they are able to go to work.

The guidelines are organized into two parts. The first are the Universal guidelines and these guidelines apply to all DAWs. Second are the Platform Specific guidelines that are specifically written for each platform. They focus on issues relevant to each, as well as how to convert each DAW's project/session files into files that will be readable by any other DAW platform.

Most of the guidelines are followed by a brief explanation of the reasoning behind them. Additionally, we've provided a *Quick Reference Guide* in the Appendix, which is simply a list of the guidelines without the explanations. This can be printed out and used as a reminder when cleaning up a project/session, or given to an operator/assistant engineer as instructions on how to leave the project/session.

At first it could appear that adding these practices might add considerable time to a recording project/session, but in fact the opposite is true. These guidelines can actually be incorporated into your current workflow with little to no effect on the length of the project/session while being completely transparent to the client. Many of the guidelines can be performed while other things are already happening; for example, most cleaning guidelines regarding edits and crossfades are actually most efficiently done right after the edit or recording while the client is listening back to the track. Nonetheless, any investment in time made by following these guidelines is well worth it in light of the hours to be saved on future sessions.

Our Committee will review this document each year to insure it is up to date with changes in software, hardware, and new industry practices. We welcome all of your suggestions and feedback. Please send them to dawguidelines@grammy.com.

Lastly, please keep in mind the guidelines are not a “cure all” for all problems that can arise with a DAW project/session, and in no way replace the documentation provided by your DAW’s manufacturer. We highly recommend that all users read the manual that is included with their DAW for the best understanding of how to use their system. Additionally, though these guidelines were written with Cubase, Digital Performer, Logic, Nuendo, Pro Tools, and Sonar in mind, many of them can be applied when using other DAWs. If you’re the manufacturer of a DAW not currently listed here, but would like to have your DAW represented in these guidelines, please email us dawguidelines@grammy.com.

Terminology

There are many similarities between each of the digital audio workstations represented here, and this is what makes these universal guidelines possible. But there are some aspects of each platform where they have their own terminology to describe similar functions or operations. To address this and make these guidelines applicable to as many platforms as possible we've chosen to use the following terms in these instances.

DAW

This is the abbreviation for Digital Audio Workstation.

Project/Session

We use this term to refer to the document or file that is essentially the map of all elements associated with the current song. Depending on your platform you may refer to this document as the “project file”, “project document”, “song file” or “session file.”

Audio File

Depending on your platform you may refer to this file as an “audio file” or a “sound bite.”

Segment

A block of data that is either a portion of an audio or MIDI file, or the entire audio or MIDI file. Depending on your platform you may refer to this as a “region”, “event”, “clip”, or “sound bite.”

Render

To take multiple segments on a single track (e.g. vocal comp or edited guitar part) and convert them into a single contiguous file. No processing is added to the file when it is rendered. Depending on your platform you may refer to this operation as “bounce”, “merge soundbite”, “glue”, or “consolidate.”

Deactivate or Disable

The function of turning a track or plug-in (if applicable to your DAW) “off”, so it does not use any CPU or DSP resources. Depending on your platform you may refer to this process as “deactivate”, “disable”, “track mute with CPU-saving preference selected”, or “archive.”

Activate or Enable

The opposite of deactivate or disable. The function of turning a track or plug-in (if applicable to your DAW) “on”, so it does use CPU or DSP resources. Depending on your platform you may refer to this process as “activate”, “enable”, “unmute track with CPU-saving preference selected”, or “unarchive.”

Edit List

A sequence of segments (see above) arranged on an audio or MIDI track that you are able to create alternate versions of with different edits or takes of a performance. Depending on your platform you may refer to this as a “play order list”, “take” or “playlist.”

Timeline Marker

A marker that denotes a point in the project/session’s timeline; most often used in music production to illustrate the different sections of a song (e.g. Verse 1, Chorus 2, Bridge, etc.). Depending on your platform you may refer to this as a “marker” or “memory location marker.”

Delay Compensation

An adjustment by the DAW software for the delay or latency caused by processing a track through a plug-in or routing (if applicable to your DAW). Depending on your platform you may refer to this as “delay compensation” or “latency compensation.”

Overview of Projects/Sessions

The guidelines are divided into essentially four different types of projects/sessions depending on their purpose:

Master (MST)

This is the main and central project/session throughout the pre-production, recording and overdubbing phase. All the work may be done in this project/session, but any tracks recorded, edited or processed in other projects/sessions should be transferred back to this project/session. This is where all the tracks intended for the final mix eventually end up. There should be only one Master project/session.

Slave – Outgoing and Returning (SLV)

These are usually reduced track versions of the Master project/session made from submixes of its tracks. These are satellite projects/sessions used for overdubbing (e.g. strings, backgrounds) or editing tracks (e.g. vocal comping) often at other studios or on other systems. The completed work is then imported back into the Master project/session. There may be many Slave projects/sessions.

Source (SRC)

These are usually retired projects/sessions that contain all the original source tracks (e.g. drum takes, vocal takes, strings) that have been comped or submixed down to tracks in the Master. These tracks are no longer needed so they are taken out of the Master project/session and kept in Source projects/sessions for future reference. There may be many Source projects/sessions.

Mix (MIX)

These are projects/sessions being prepared for mixing or in the mixing phase, either through a console or inside of a DAW. For each mix there should only be one Mix project/session.

Master Project/Session

These guidelines are for the main and central project/session throughout the pre-production, recording, and overdubbing phase. This is where all the tracks intended for the final mix eventually end up.

The Basics

There should be only one Master project/session.

In a perfect world this would always be the case. A single clearly labeled Master project/session resolves any question about where the final tracks are.

The final results of work done in other projects/sessions should be imported into the Master project/session.

This is the key to keeping track of the final elements of the production. The same convention is used with tape reels.

Always name audio tracks *before* recording, and rename *all* audio files that were recorded before a track was labeled.

Some DAWs derive the audio file's name from the track name. This will prevent audio files from being given generic names like "Audio 1", which makes it difficult to differentiate and locate them later.

Use comments section liberally (if applicable to your DAW).

This is very important. Include any information you feel may assist future engineers in understanding your or the producer's intentions, similar to notes on a track sheet.

Always label internal Busses (if applicable to your DAW).

This is a tremendous time saver for the next engineer when tracking the routing of the audio.

Label Inputs, Outputs and Inserts (if applicable to your DAW).

This is very useful when recreating patching from a previous project/session.

Confirm that computer's Date and Time are set correctly.

This insures all file's Date Created and Date Modified information will be correct. If two files have the same name the *newest* can be chosen.

When Creating A New Project/Session

The Master project/session should be labeled "Song Title-MST".

Keeping the main project/session always labeled as the Master communicates to everyone that this is *the project/session* to work on. Renaming the project/session with the initials of each operator, or new instrument, creates a long list of projects/sessions *without* communicating to the next operator which project/session is the current one. To keep a safety of the project/session before working, make a copy and place it in the Project/Session History folder. (See "We suggest using these folder names..." on page 30.)

WAV (or Broadcast WAV) is the recommended audio file format for compatibility with most DAW systems (if applicable to your DAW).

WAV is the most widely accepted audio file format. Broadcast WAV is simply WAV with additional metadata (e.g. timestamps).

24 bit resolution is preferred for recording of audio files.

24 bit audio files sound much better than 16 bit. 24 bit audio files will also be compatible with most DAWs. Some platforms can record at a higher bit resolution, but most A/D converters maximum bit depth is actually 24 bits, so there's a good chance there will be no benefit to recording audio files at a higher bit depth.

Make sure you save the project/session to a level on your audio hard drive where you and future operators can locate it.

A few things to watch for on some DAWs are unintentionally saving the project/session to the project/session folder of *another project/session*, to an audio or fade file folder (if applicable), or to the CPU's hard drive instead of the project/session drive—any of which might make it difficult to find later.

Create some form of tempo map in the conductor track (if appropriate for music style).

Applicable to most modern music production, this should be one of the first things done during the basic tracking project/session, or at least at the earliest possible stage. You can simply place a single tempo marker at the beginning of the song, or on some DAWs you can import it from the

original MIDI sequence. Utilizing the tempo map while editing audio is one of the biggest time saving aspects of a DAW. If there is no tempo information, this benefit is lost.

Always include a click track plug-in (if available) or create an audio click track (if appropriate for music style). Keep at top of project/session if possible.

A click track plug-in that is able to receive tempo data from a tempo map may be available for your DAW, if so please include one in the project/session. If not, you should create or record an audio click track.

Before sending project/session out to user on another platform, print click track plug-in (if applicable) to an audio track.

Create timeline markers of song's arrangement.

This may be imported with the tempo map from a MIDI sequence. This allows all operators after you to quickly understand the structure of the song and easily move about.

Include key and modulation information in comments (if applicable to your DAW) and the *Project Info* document.

It's nearly essential when tuning tracks, just as tempo information is useful when setting delay times. Give key with additional accidentals. Example: "Key: G min w/ A, C#".

When using automatic delay compensation or similar with your DAW make a note of it in the *Project Info* document, so users of software without automatic delay compensation will know to compensate.

To maintain the phase coherency of the original project/session.

It is highly recommended to include a tuning note on its own track at the beginning of the project/session. Keep at top of project/session if possible (shown or hidden).

Besides being a good idea for tuning instruments when recording, a tuning note can help resolve the question of whether the initial project/session was clocked to an external source that was not the same as the sample rate setting of the project/session. For example, even if the initial project/session was set to 44.1kHz, if it was slaved to house sync at 29.97 the actual sample rate of the project/session would be 44.056kHz. When played on another system without house sync the project/session would play back slightly faster. Clearly not a good thing.

Cleaning Up

Clean all edits and punches, put in fades if necessary, and insure there are no clicks and pops.

This is simply considered good DAW etiquette, and greatly appreciated by all who follow you.

Render tracks into contiguous audio files starting from the beginning of the project/session when you are completely finished editing them.

Rendering tracks into contiguous audio files improves project/session playback, and lessens the number of audio files and fades, simplifying archiving and restoration. Starting from the beginning of the project/session will allow the audio files of the rendered tracks to be used easily with other DAW's, and is a second way to confirm sync. Always make sure there are no clicks and pops before rendering. Also save a copy of the project/session with the unrendered tracks to the Source Projects/Sessions folder. See the Platform Specific guidelines for a more detailed explanation on the best way to do this with your DAW.

Always print tuned tracks to another track when you are finished tuning them.

This is very important. Tuning plug-ins *do not* tune identically on each pass. The only way to get consistent results is to print them. As well, the next system may not have the plug-in or enough DSP power. You may also wish to correct any delay caused by the tuning process. Note in comments (if applicable to your DAW) if it's corrected or if you wish to leave the delay. Additionally, you may leave a clearly labeled copy of the un-tuned track.

Delete all tracks that are no longer needed in the project/session.

This will also make the project/session more manageable.

Periodically delete redundant or unnecessary edit lists (if applicable to your DAW).

Depending on your working style, it is possible for the edit lists to become very cluttered and unmanageable. To make it easier to find alternate takes in the future, delete those you don't need.

Remove unused audio files before closing the project/session (if applicable to your DAW).

Doing this after doing the above two items should really clean out all the files in the project/session you were no longer using. This makes the project/session even more manageable, lessening the number of files for archiving and restoration. (Caution: Do NOT delete unused audio files from your hard drive. This is something you should do ONLY when you fully understand the command after reading your DAW's manual. This command could permanently ERASE files from your hard drive and cannot be undone.)

Organization

Leave tracks organized in an order that makes sense to you when closing the project/session.

Possibly in the order you would organize them on a track sheet or console (e.g. drums, percussion, bass, guitars, keys, vocals, etc.). When tracks are grouped in this manner it makes the next operator's job much easier when they're trying to get a feeling for what's in the project/session so they can go to work.

Keep the returns of internally bussed submixes (e.g. BG Vocals) adjacent to the source tracks (if applicable to your DAW).

Along with labeling the busses, this makes it much easier to track the routing of the audio.

Generally keep effects returns and the mix buss channel preferably to the right and bottom, or optionally to the left and top of the project/session (if applicable to your DAW).

This makes it much easier than if they are scattered about the project/session.

Create a blank track labeled "---UNUSED---" to place between the used and unused tracks.

This will make it very clear which tracks to use. Use the lowest resource track type available. For example, an empty MIDI track will use no additional DSP on most DAWs. The comment or label on each of the unused tracks may also start with ALT, UNUSED, or REF.

Keep all tracks still being used in the project/session showing and above/to the left of the "---UNUSED---" marker (if applicable to your DAW).

When the next operator opens the project/session this easily communicates which tracks are currently active. If tracks are hidden that are playing, especially in larger projects/sessions, it can really slow things down when the operator is trying to locate something.

Deactivate or disable, mute, hide and generally move below/to the right of the “---UNUSED---” marker (if applicable to your DAW) all tracks that are no longer being used in the project/session.

As tracks accumulate and multiple versions of the same instruments begin to appear, this is the clearest way to communicate these tracks are no longer being used. Usually they are just being kept for reference purposes. Clearly label in the comments (if applicable to your DAW) why they are not being used.

Additional Items

Keep a recent rough mix labeled with song title and date on a pair of tracks or stereo track at the top of the project/session.

Very useful when anyone wants to see how something sounded previously. Labeling with song title prevents confusion with other mixes on system.

Use the mute audio segment functionality of your DAW, instead of muting with automation, to mute audio elements (if applicable to your DAW).

This is preferred for a number of reasons. First, it visually tells you what is being used and what's not, as well as letting you see parts you may want to unmute later. Secondly, it is more reliable because the automation can be turned off later and your mutes will not be maintained.

When using outboard gear, label I/O channels with direction (to/from) and name of gear used, and document settings in comments (if applicable to your DAW) or Project Info document.

Very useful when recreating a setup from an earlier project/session. Patching gear into the same numbered inputs and outputs (e.g. In 8/Out 8) on the audio interface can also be helpful.

Using send and return routing for reverb, chorus, and delay effects is generally preferred instead of inserting them on the audio tracks.

This is much more DSP efficient, and how these effects are usually handled on consoles.

Comment tracks can be created using blank MIDI tracks and renaming blank MIDI segments that will be easily visible on the timeline.

Different tracks for comments, lyrics, key or tempo info may be created and placed anywhere in the project/session.

Slave Projects/Sessions – Outgoing

These guidelines are for projects/sessions being prepared to be sent out as Slaves. They are usually reduced track versions of the Master that are satellite projects/sessions used for overdubbing (e.g. strings, backgrounds) or editing tracks (e.g. vocal comping). The completed work is then imported back into the Master project/session. The following are in addition to applicable Master project/session guidelines.

The Basics

There may be many Slave projects/sessions.

You may create a Slave project/session for every overdub or editing project/session being done outside of the Master project/session.

Slave projects/sessions should allow receiving users to playback the elements of the Master project/session on substantially fewer tracks.

Consolidating a larger project/session to fewer tracks allows work to be done on smaller systems and frees up voices to record additional tracks.

Master project/session elements should be submixed into similar groups (Drums, Keys, etc.) or individual tracks (Bass, Lead Vocal), and are often printed with effects.

The submixed tracks, also known as stems, should give the receiving engineer a good sounding mix with the ability to re-balance major elements depending on the work being done.

The receiving users should easily be able to hear the mix of the Slave tracks exactly the way you hear them.

The stems (submixes) should be printed so when their faders are all set to the same level (e.g. all set to -5 dB) they can hear your mix. Otherwise, use volume automation to show the intended balance. The level can also be noted in the comments (if applicable).

The submixes should allow the receiving users to hear the parts blended so they can make proper musical decisions for overdubs.

If they can't hear the chord changes, rhythm, bass, etc. properly you may get back parts that will not work in the final mix.

When Creating A New Slave Project/Session

The project/session should be labeled with the song title, a description of its purpose, and the abbreviation "SLV" (e.g. "Song Title-String SLV").

This communicates that this is not the Master and does not contain all the original tracks, as well as what job is intended for the project/session. The same convention is used with tape.

Consider the receiving DAW configuration to insure the Slave project/session will open properly.

By enforcing Mac/PC compatibility or similar (if applicable to your DAW), insuring you send WAV format audio files, and keeping the number of tracks or files to 24 or less your project/session or audio files should be able to be used on nearly all DAWs.

Make Sure You Have these Elements

Building a Slave project/session from a cleaned out Master streamlines the process of keeping many of these very important items:

The start time and frame rate must be the same as the Master's.

Include the tempo map.

This is very important.

Include a Click plug-in track or an audio click track. Keep at top of project/session if possible (shown or hidden).

A click should be with every project/session, especially Slaves.

Include timeline markers of the songs arrangement.

Include key signature and modulation information in *Project Info* document.

Include separate reference tracks of the instruments the project/session is being sent out to have overdubbed if applicable.

This is so the part being replaced (e.g. synth strings with real strings) can be referenced and muted during the overdub project/session.

Slave Projects/Sessions – Returning

These guidelines are for projects/sessions being returned to the Master project/session containing the completed work to be imported into the Master. These are in addition to applicable Master project/session guidelines.

The final results of all work done in the Slave projects/sessions should be transferred back to the Master project/session.

This is the key to keeping track of all the final elements of the production and the same convention used with tape reels.

Return all the tracks that were in the Slave project/session when you received it.

This is very important to confirm the sync of the new tracks, and so the new tracks can be heard together with the Slave's original tracks exactly as they were when the work was done.

Make sure the project/session start time and frame rate are the same as when you received the project/session, or note in the *Project Info* document if not.

Very important when returning the new tracks from the Slave project/session back to the Master project/session. See the *Project Info document* (page 26) section for more information.

Clearly label in the comments (if applicable to your DAW) and list in the *Project Info* document all tracks to import back into the Master project/session.

To eliminate any questions.

Make note of changes or edits done to the original tracks of the Slave in the comments (if applicable to your DAW), as well as the *Project Info* document, so they can be imported or reproduced in the Master.

While working, changes are sometimes done to individual tracks, submixes, or the entire song structure of the original Slave tracks that must be imported or reproduced in the Master when the new tracks are imported.

Include your name and contact information in the *Project Info document* incase the receiving studio has any questions.

Source Projects/Sessions

These guidelines refer to usually retired projects/sessions that contain the original source tracks (e.g. drum takes, vocal takes, strings) that have been comped or submixed down to tracks in the Master. These tracks are no longer needed so they are taken out of the Master project/session and kept in Source projects/sessions for future reference.

There may be many Source projects/sessions.

You may create a Source project/session for any tracks you would like to remove from the Master project/session, but wish to keep copies of.

The project/session should be labeled with the song title, a description of the tracks removed from the Master, and the abbreviation "SRC" (e.g. "Song Title-Ld Vox SRC").

So the source tracks can be found later if changes need to be made.

The project/session should be saved to the Source Projects/Sessions folder.

Once a project/session is retired it should be removed from the top level of the project/session folder to eliminate clutter and confusion regarding which project/session is the current Master. (See "We suggest using these folder names..." on page 30.)

Mix Projects/Sessions

These guidelines are for Master projects/sessions being prepared for mixing or those in the mixing phase, either through a console or inside of a DAW. Certain guidelines are repeated because their application — or the reasoning behind them — may be different with Mix projects/sessions.

The Basics

There should be only one Mix project/session for each mix.

This resolves any question about where the final mix project/session is.

The Mix project/session should be labeled "Song Title-MIX".

"MIX" is to distinguish it from the Master ("MSTR") project/session, which may have tracks and/or plug-ins you wish to keep, but not want to send to the mixer.

Use comments section (if applicable to your DAW).

If you didn't before, you should now include any notes that will assist the mixing engineer, including the producer's suggestions for effects and processing on specific tracks.

Label any unlabeled busses, inputs, outputs and inserts (if applicable to your DAW).

Make sure all busses being used are labeled for the mixer, as well as any I/O info that would be useful.

Label inputs with name of outboard gear used and document settings in comments (if applicable to your DAW).

If you wish the mixer to try to recreate any part of your set-up.

Make sure some form of tempo map is in the conductor track (if appropriate for musical style).

If this has not been done yet, simply place a single tempo marker at the beginning of the song and confirm it stays in time until the end. If it doesn't, you can manually create a tempo map by identifying the downbeats of each measure based on the click track, kick drum, or main drum loop. Alternatively, on some DAWs you can import a tempo map from the original MIDI sequence.

Make sure there are timeline markers of the song's arrangement.

This may be imported with the tempo map from the original MIDI sequence. If not, please take the time to do it now. This allows the mixer to quickly understand the structure of the song and easily move about.

Make sure the key signature and modulations are in the Key Signature ruler (if applicable), and in the *Project Info* document.

This does not imply the mixer should be left to tune any tracks. This should *a/ways* be done before they receive the project/session. (See “Always print tuned tracks...” on page 13.) Nonetheless, it can be very useful if the mixer hears something that needs to be tweaked. Note the key signature with additional accidentals. Example: "Key: G min w/ A, C#."

Note in comments (if applicable to your DAW) or track label, if a track (or a copied track for effect) is intentionally moved or offset in the timeline.

So the mixer won't "correct" a timing change that you intended.

Print a "Final Rough Mix" labeled with song title and date on a pair of tracks at the top of the project/session.

It is standard to always send a rough mix of a song when sending multitrack masters out to be mixed. With a DAW, you can make it even easier for the mixer by placing the rough mix on a pair of tracks in the project/session.

Always label audio files of the final mixes with the song title and type of mix (e.g. "Song Title-Voc +1", "Song Title-TV Mix", "Song Title-Inst", etc.).

Even if you put mixes for each song into separate folders, mastering engineers will often look at all mixes in a single list. Song titles will allow them to tell the mixes apart.

Plug-Ins

All essential (i.e. special effect) plug-ins should be printed to another track.

If your plug-ins have radically processed the sound from the un-effected track (e.g. you used an amp simulator or tuning plug-in) during the production phase, and that sound has become integral to what that track now is—you should definitely print them to another track. If, for any reason, the receiving system can't play back these plug-ins, an important element will be lost from the production. Do not assume another system

will have even the most common plug-in when it is essential to your sound.

You may leave clearly labeled unprocessed versions of the above printed tracks. Keep plug-ins and settings. Deactivate or disable, mute, hide and generally move these tracks to the bottom/far right (if applicable to your DAW).

So the producer and mixer will have the option to process them differently. If the project/session gets too large unprocessed tracks can reside in an Auxiliary project/session where they may be imported to the mix project/session if needed.

Leave in only nonessential plug-ins the producer would like the mixer to reference and remove the rest.

These you should not print (i.e. basic compressors and EQ's). If the mixer has these plug-ins in their system, they can reference them and afterwards deactivate or disable them. The rest of the plug-ins should be removed, because, after all, this is what the mixer has been hired to do.

Automation

If volume automation is used to fade-in or fade-out of regions, it is best to replace it with created audio fade-ins and fade-outs.

One of the first things some mixers do is turn off a DAW's automation when mixing to a console, or delete it if mixing in the system. Following this guideline is the best way to insure your intended fades are maintained. More complex automation fades can be left as templates for the mixer and should be labeled clearly in the comments (if applicable to your DAW).

Use the mute audio segment functionality of your DAW (if applicable), instead of muting with automation, to mute audio elements.

For essentially all the same reasons as above. Additionally, it allows you to mute parts the producer isn't sure whether they'll want in or out, and the mixer will easily be able find them.

Leave any automation the producer wants the mixer to use (e.g. BG vocal blends, panning automation) and label it clearly in the comments (if applicable to your DAW) or track label.

Make sure the mixer knows why it's there and how they are supposed to use it.

If possible, contact mixer to confirm if you should leave the remaining nonessential automation in the project/session or delete it.

Some mixers prefer to reference all the automation before deleting it, while others prefer it be deleted. If the mixer can't be reached the safest option is to leave it.

Make Sure You Have These Elements

Before sending the project/session out to mix, look it over a few more times to double-check that you have these very important items:

Every track is there that is supposed to be.

All parts are on each track that are supposed to be.

All flies (copied and pasted parts or sections) have been completed.

All comps (composite tracks) are completed and clearly labeled.

The correct lead vocal or lead melody instrument is there and VERY clearly labeled.

All tuned tracks have been printed to another track and are clearly labeled as tuned.

Never send a project/session out to be mixed without printing the tuned tracks. (See "[Always print tuned tracks...](#)" on page 13.) You may wish to correct any delay caused by tuning process. Note in comments (if applicable to your DAW) if it's corrected or if you wish to leave delay.

If the lead vocal or melody instrument is tuned, we recommend leaving a clearly labeled un-tuned version of it on another track.

This gives the producer and mixer the last minute option to switch to the un-tuned track for any sections they prefer that way. Note in track's comments (if applicable to your DAW).

Optionally, you may leave clearly label un-tuned versions of other important tracks that were tuned.

Cleaning Up

Once you know you have everything, go through and clean out everything you don't need.

Clean up tracks by going through them and deleting loud noises and other extraneous elements you don't want in the mix.

This does not mean to clean the tracks to the point of sterility. Leave in elements that give the performance character and life, such as breaths on the vocal tracks. Just delete those elements you are certain you don't want to be in the mix (e.g. false starts, talking on BG tracks), similar to when a multitrack tape master is cleaned up before it's sent out to mix.

Check that all edits and punches are clean and make sure there are no clicks and pops. If your DAW has an automatic audio segment fade in/out function, set the fade time to "0 ms" (or turn it off) before checking edits. Put in fades if necessary.

At this point in the process this is no longer DAW etiquette—*it is essential*. Not checking fades with automatic segment fade in/out function set to "0 ms" (or similar) is the most common cause of clicks and pops in tracks.

Render tracks into contiguous audio files starting from the beginning of the project/session when you are completely finished editing them.

This will present the mixer with the cleanest possible project/session. A sixty-four track project/session will have only sixty-four files and no fades, and all with the same starting point, down to the sample, should there be any question about sync.

Delete all tracks that are not needed for the mix.

This will also make the project/session more manageable.

Delete all edit lists that are not needed for the mix (if applicable to your DAW).

At this point, you should really trim down your project/session to just the edit lists that are needed for the mix.

Remove all unused audio files before the final save of the project/session (if applicable to your DAW).

Doing this after completing the above two guidelines should bring your project/session down to just the files that will be needed for the mix. This will make the project/session extremely manageable, really consolidating the number of files for archiving and restoration. (Caution: Do NOT Delete unused audio files. This command will permanently ERASE files from your hard drive, and cannot be undone. Please consult your manual.)

Organization

Put tracks in an order that makes sense to you.

Possibly in the same order as you might organize them on a console. (For example: drums, percussion, bass, guitars, keys, vocals, etc.). This will be greatly appreciated by the mixer.

Keep the returns of internally bussed submixes (e.g. BG Vocals) adjacent to the source tracks (if applicable to your DAW).

Along with labeling the busses, this makes it much easier to track the internal routing of the audio in the project/session.

Place effects returns and the mix buss channel preferably to the right and bottom, or optionally to the left and top of the project/session (if applicable to your DAW).

Doing this makes it much easier than if they are scattered about the project/session.

Leave any optional tracks showing, but deactivated or disabled and clearly labeled in the comments (if applicable to your DAW) or track names as to their status.

This applies to any parts the producer has not decided whether to include or not in the mix at the time of sending out the project/session. Explain this clearly to the mixer in the comments (if applicable to your DAW) or track names.

Place a blank track labeled "---UNUSED---" between the tracks to mix on the top/left and those not being used on the bottom/right (if applicable to your DAW).

This makes it very clear which tracks are for the mix. Use the lowest resource track type available. For example, a blank MIDI track will use no additional DSP on most DAWs. The comment or name of each unused track may also start with ALT, UNUSED, or REF.

Keep all tracks to be mixed showing and above/to left of “---UNUSED---” marker (if applicable to your DAW).

Nothing is more confusing and a waste of time to a mixer than not knowing what to mix. Please make sure all the tracks for the mix are showing.

Deactivate or disable, mute, hide and move below/to the right of the “---UNUSED---” marker the unused tracks being left for reference (if applicable to your DAW).

After having cleaned out all unneeded tracks, there may be a few left over that aren't intended for the mix, but the producer wants to keep for reference. Clearly label in the comments (if applicable to your DAW) or the track names why they are not being used and then deactivate or disable and hide them.

Leave comments (if applicable to your DAW) showing for the mixer to see when opening the project/session.

At this point, you may have left a number of important comments (if applicable to your DAW) to the mixer. The best way to make sure they see them is to save the project/session with the comments showing (if applicable to your DAW) . When the mixer opens it they will see the comments immediately.

Routing Outputs

When the project/session will be mixed through a console route outputs as you'd like them to come up on the desk if possible.

If you have more tracks than you have outputs , route all the remaining tracks to the last two outputs. Make sure all tracks that are intended to be used are routed out an active output.

When the project/session will be mixed inside of a DAW route the tracks and submixes to Outputs 1-2, or route internally through a stereo buss and then route to Outputs 1-2.

MIDI and Virtual Instruments

These guidelines are for MIDI tracks and virtual instruments. They follow many of the same general principles of the rest of the DAW guidelines.

Label all MIDI tracks and segments to accurately reflect the part, instrument and/or patch they're triggering.

Organize MIDI tracks in an order that makes sense to you.

For example: drums, percussion, bass, guitars, keys, etc. This will be greatly appreciated by the next operator.

Merge multiple MIDI tracks into a single track when they trigger the same instrument (or channel of a multi-timbral instrument).

Delete all MIDI tracks that are no longer needed in the project/session.

This will also make the project/session more manageable.

Record an audio track version of each MIDI track or virtual instrument and label it with the same name as the MIDI track followed by “_Audio”.

This will allow the person receiving your project to make accurate patch choices when collaborating on a composition, and/or have the correct audio if you intend for them to mix your MIDI-based project.

When printing a new audio version of a previously printed MIDI track ensure that the new audio lines up with the original audio.

For example, if there is a MIDI piano track that was printed by the sender, choose that piano MIDI track and print your piano audio track. Compare your piano track timing with the sender's printed piano track. Zoom in and observe any delay between the sender's track and your track. You may wish to compensate for this discrepancy in all MIDI data that you print to audio in this session.

When creating a Standard MIDI file for another platform always use Type 1.

When the production is in the recording stage keep MIDI tracks hidden (if applicable) and adjacent to their corresponding printed audio tracks.

This makes it much easier to refer to the source MIDI tracks if necessary.

When the production is in the mixing stage hide and move to the bottom/far right all MIDI tracks.

File Management, Storage, Transfer & Documentation

These guidelines are recommendations on how to keep your project/session folder organized, how to transfer your project/session from system to system, and how to document your project/session.

Management, Storage and Transfer

When sending a project/session out, the current Master, Slave, or Mix project/session should be the *only* project/session file showing on the top level of the project/session folder.

This clearly communicates that this project/session is *the project/session* to work on.

All other project/session files should be stored in folders (see below) to prevent confusion about which is the current project/session.

Keeping the top level of the project/session folder organized eliminates clutter and makes it easy to find various projects/sessions.

We suggest using these folder names to keep your project/session folder organized:

- ***Project History or Session History*** – for all non-current projects or sessions. Use applicable name.
- ***Source Projects or Source Sessions*** – for all retired source tracks projects or sessions. Use applicable name.
- ***MIDI Files*** – MIDI sequence files, tempo maps, Sys Ex data, etc.
- ***Auxiliary Audio Files*** – impulse responses, samples, REX files, Reason files, etc.
- ***Notes***
- ***Rough Mixes***
- ***Final Mixes***

When using a single drive, the current Master, Slave, or Mix project/session's audio files should all reside in a single Audio files folder at the top level of the project/session's folder (if applicable to your DAW).

This is essential to simplify backups and copying of project/session data.

When a project/session's audio files are divided between drives, there should be only one project/session folder containing a single Audio files and Fade files (if applicable) folder per drive.

This also greatly simplifies backups and copying of data.

When transferring projects/sessions between studios during production we recommend saving project/session data to CD-R's, DVD-R's, or FireWire drives for their universality.

These formats do not usually require third party software or hardware other than the receiving system's computer. Essentially insuring that any studio you send them to can easily access them.

Always keep a safety copy of a project/session and all its files in your possession when sending a project/session out.

This is in case the data is lost or damaged.

When sending a project/session out for film or video post production work the project/session recipient should determine the correct pull-up/pull-down settings for the project/session. The supplier must provide complete documentation concerning synchronization during recording of the project/session.

This includes Project/Session Setup Sync Source, Time Code Rate and actual Drop Frame status, connection to House Sync, and House Sync Rate.

For final archiving of projects/sessions at the end of a project see the *Delivery Recommendations for Master Recording* here:

http://www.grammy.com/Recording_Academy/Producers_And_Engineers/Guidelines/

This excellent document, created by the Nashville Producers and Engineers Wing, covers this topic completely.

Project Info Document

The Project Info document is text document we suggest you include with your projects/sessions to keep all relevant documentation for the next operator. It is designed to include information usually found on tape box labels and tracksheets, along with some recall documentation.

Use the *Project Info* document to keep all information about your project/session for future users.

This document replaces both tape box labels and some recall documentation.

The *Project Info* document should be a plain text document with the “.txt” extension.

Files with the .txt extension can easily be opened by any program that reads text and are considered to be platform independent.

The *Project Info* document should be labeled with the same name as the project/session it is referencing, followed by the suffix “-INFO” (e.g. “Project/Session Name-INFO.txt”).

Always keep the *Project Info* document in the same project/session folder as the project/session file it is referencing.

So all users can find it.

Only have a single *Project Info* document for each set of projects/sessions that share the same audio files and project/session folder (i.e. one per song). A single *Info Document* can keep information about multiple projects/sessions of the same song.

This will prevent confusion about where the most current information is.

Include the name and contact information for each operator in the *Project Info* document.

So they can be contacted if there are any questions.

Keep a running history of all work done on the project/session file with the dates worked, the work done and the operators name.

So everyone can see who did what when, and who to contact with questions.

And remember, you can never have too much documentation.

If there is anything you believe may be helpful to yourself or any future operator who may open this project/session, please make a note of it in the *Project Info* document.



DAW Guidelines for Music Production

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Master Project/Session

These are the main and central projects/sessions throughout the pre-production, recording, and overdubbing phase. This is where all the tracks intended for the final mix eventually end up.

The Basics

- There should be only one Master project/session.
- Work done in other projects/sessions should be imported into the Master project/session.
- Always name audio tracks *before* recording, and rename *all* audio files recorded before a track was labeled.
- Use comments section liberally (if applicable).
- Always label internal busses (if applicable).
- Label inputs, outputs and inserts (if applicable).
- Set computer Date & Time correctly to insure correct time stamps on all files

When Creating A New Project/Session

- The Master project/session should be labeled "Song Title-MST".
- WAV is the recommended audio file type for compatibility with most DAW systems (if applicable).
- 24 bit resolution is preferred for recording of audio files.
- Save the project/session to a level on your audio hard drive where it can be easily located.
- Create some form of tempo map in the conductor track for appropriate music styles.
- Include a click track plug-in or audio track at top of project/session (if applicable).
- Print click track to audio track before sending project/session out to another platform.
- Create timeline markers of song's arrangement.
- Include key and modulation in comments (if applicable) and *Project Info* document
- Notate automatic delay compensation in *Project Info* document for users without automatic delay compensation.
- Include a well labeled tuning note on its own track at the beginning of the project/session.

Cleaning Up

- Clean all edits and punches, put in fades if necessary, and insure there are no clicks and pops.
- Render tracks into contiguous audio files starting from the beginning of the project/session when you are *completely* finished editing them.
- Always print tuned tracks to another track when finished tuning them.
- Delete all tracks no longer needed in the project/session.

- Periodically delete redundant or unnecessary edit lists (if applicable).
- Remove unused audio files before closing project/session (if applicable).

Organization

- Leave tracks organized in an order that makes sense to you when closing project/session.
- Keep returns of internally bussed submixed tracks (e.g. BG Vocals) adjacent to the source tracks (if applicable).
- Generally keep effects returns and mix buss at top or bottom of project/session (if applicable).
- Place blank track labeled "---UNUSED---" between used and unused tracks.
- Keep all tracks still being used showing and above/to left of "---UNUSED---" marker (if applicable).
- Deactivate or disable, mute, hide and generally move below/to right of "---UNUSED--" marker (if applicable) all tracks no longer being used.

Additional Items

- Keep a recent rough mix labeled with song title and date on a stereo track at the top of the project/session.
- Use mute audio segment functionality of DAW, instead of muting with automation, to mute audio elements (if applicable).
- Label I/O channels with direction (to/from) and name of outboard gear used. Also document settings in comments (if applicable) or *Project Info* document.
- Using send and return routing for reverb, chorus, and delay effects is generally preferred instead of inserting them on the audio tracks.
- Comment tracks can be created using blank MIDI tracks and renaming blank MIDI segments that will be easily visible on the timeline.



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Slave Projects/Sessions – Outgoing

These projects/sessions are being prepared to be sent out as Slaves. They're usually reduced track versions of the Master that are satellite projects/sessions used for overdubbing or editing tracks.

The Basics

- There may be many Slave projects/sessions.
- Slave projects/sessions should allow receiving users to playback the elements of the Master project/session on substantially fewer tracks.
- Master project/session elements should be submixed into similar groups (Drums, Keys, etc.) or individual tracks (Bass, Lead Vocal), and are often printed with effects.
- The receiving users should easily be able to hear the mix of the Slave tracks exactly the way you hear them.
- The submixes should allow the receiving users to hear the parts blended so they can make proper musical decisions for overdubs.

When Creating A New Slave Project/Session

- The project/session should be labeled with the song title, a description of its purpose, and the abbreviation "SLV" (e.g. "Song Title-String SLV").
- Consider the receiving DAW system so the Slave will open properly.

Make Sure You Have These Elements

- The start time and frame rate must be the same as the Master's.
- Include the tempo map.
- Include a Click plug-in track or an audio click track. Keep at top of project/session if possible (shown or hidden).
- Include timeline markers of the songs arrangement.
- Include key signature and modulation information in *Project Info* document.
- Include separate reference tracks of the instruments the project/session is being sent out to have overdubbed if applicable.

Slave Projects/Sessions – Returning

These are projects/sessions being returned to the Master project/session containing the completed work to be imported into the Master. These are in addition to applicable Master project/session guidelines.

- The final results of all work done in the Slave projects/sessions should be transferred back to the Master project/session.
- Return all the tracks that were in the Slave project/session when you received it.
- Make sure the project/session start time and frame rate are the same as when you received the project/session, or note in the *Project Info* document if not.
- Clearly label in the comments (if applicable) and list in the *Project Info* document all tracks to import back into the Master project/session.
- Make note of changes or edits done to the original tracks of the Slave in the comments (if applicable), as well as the *Project Info* document, so they can be imported or reproduced in the Master.
- Include your name and contact information in the *Project Info* document in case the receiving studio has any questions.

Source Projects/Sessions

These are usually retired projects/sessions that contain the original source tracks that have been comped or submixed down to tracks in the Master. These tracks are no longer needed so they are taken out of the Master project/session and kept in Source projects/sessions for future reference.

- There may be many Source projects/sessions.
- The project/session should be labeled with the song title, a description of the tracks removed from the Master, and the abbreviation "SRC" (e.g. "Song Title-Ld Vox SRC").
- The project/session should be saved to the Source Projects/Sessions folder.



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Mix Projects/Sessions

These are projects/sessions being prepared for mixing or in the mixing phase.

The Basics

- There should be only one Mix project/session for each mix.
- The Mix project/session should be labeled "Song Title-MIX".
- Use comments section (if applicable) for notes to mixer.
- Label any unlabeled busses, inputs, outputs and inserts (if applicable).
- Label inputs with name of outboard gear and document settings in comments (if applicable).
- Make sure tempo map is in conductor track (if appropriate for musical style).
- Make sure there are timeline markers of the song's arrangement.
- Make sure key and modulations are in the Key Signature ruler (if applicable), and in the *Project Info* document.
- Note in track label or comments (if applicable) if a track (or a copy for effect) is intentionally offset in the timeline.
- Print a "Final Rough Mix" with song title and date on a pair of tracks at the top of the project/session.
- Always label audio files of the final mixes with the song title and type of mix (e.g. "Song Title-Voc +1", "Song Title-TV Mix", "Song Title-Inst", etc.).

Plug-Ins

- All essential (i.e. special effect) plug-ins should be printed to another track.
- You may leave clearly labeled unprocessed versions of the above printed tracks. Keep plug-ins and settings. Deactivate or disable, mute, hide and generally move these tracks to the bottom/far right (if applicable).
- Leave in only nonessential plug-ins the producer would like the mixer to reference and remove the rest.

Automation

- If volume automation is used to fade-in or fade-out of regions, it is best to replace it with created audio fade-ins and fade-outs.
- Use mute audio segment functionality of DAW (if applicable), instead of muting with automation, to mute audio elements.
- Leave any automation the producer wants the mixer to use (e.g. BG vocal blends, panning automation) and label clearly in comments (if applicable) or track label.
- If possible, contact mixer to confirm if you should leave remaining nonessential automation or delete it.

Make Sure You Have These Elements

- Every track is in project/session that is supposed to be.
- All parts are on each track that are supposed to be.
- All flies (copied and pasted parts or sections) have been completed.
- All comps (composite tracks) are completed and clearly labeled.
- The correct lead vocal or lead melody instrument is there and VERY clearly labeled.
- All tuned tracks have been printed to another track and are clearly labeled as tuned.
- If the lead vocal or instrument is tuned, we recommend leaving a clearly labeled un-tuned version on another track.
- Optionally, you may leave clearly label un-tuned versions of other tuned tracks.

Cleaning Up

- Delete loud noises and other extraneous elements you don't want in the mix.
- Repair all clicks and pops at edit and punch points with automatic audio segment fade in/out function turned off (if applicable), and put in fades if necessary.
- Render tracks into contiguous audio files starting from the beginning of the project/session when you're *completely* finished editing them.
- Delete all tracks not needed for the mix.
- Delete all edit lists not needed for mix (if applicable).
- Remove all unused audio files before final save of project/session (if applicable).

Organization

- Arrange tracks in logical order (drums, bass, guitars, keys, vocals).
- Keep internally bussed submix returns (e.g. BG Vocals) adjacent to source tracks (if applicable).
- Place effects returns and mix buss at top or bottom of project/session (if applicable).
- Leave optional tracks showing, but deactivated or disabled and clearly labeled in comments (if applicable) or track names.
- Place blank track labeled "---UNUSED---" between mix tracks and unused tracks.
- Keep all tracks to be mixed showing and above/to left of "---UNUSED---" marker (if applicable).
- Deactivate or disable, mute, hide and move below/to right of "---UNUSED---" marker remaining unused tracks being left for reference (if applicable).
- Leave comments showing for mixer to see when opening project/session (if applicable).

Routing Outputs

- When project/session will be mixed through console route outputs as you'd like them to come up on desk if possible.
- When project/session will be mixed inside of DAW route tracks and submixes to Outputs 1-2, or route internally through stereo buss and then route to Outputs 1-2.



DAW Guidelines for Music Production

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MIDI and Virtual Instruments

These are for MIDI tracks and virtual instruments, and follow many of the same principles as the DAW guidelines.

- Label all MIDI tracks and segments to accurately reflect the part, instrument and/or patch they're triggering.
- Organize MIDI tracks in an order that makes sense to you.
- Merge multiple MIDI tracks into a single track when they trigger the same instrument (or channel of a multi-timbral instrument).
- Delete all MIDI tracks that are no longer needed in the project/session.
- Record an audio track version of each MIDI track or virtual instrument and label it with the same name as the MIDI track followed by “_Audio”.
- When printing a new audio version of a previously printed MIDI track ensure that the new audio lines up with the original audio.
- When creating a Standard MIDI file for another platform always use Type 1.
- When the production is in the recording stage keep MIDI tracks hidden (if applicable) and adjacent to their corresponding printed audio tracks.
- When the production is in the mixing stage hide and move to the bottom/far right all MIDI tracks.



DAW Guidelines for Music Production

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File Management, Storage, Transfer & Docs

These are recommendations on how to keep your project/session folder organized, how to transfer from system to system, and how to document your project/session.

Management, Storage and Transfer

- When sending a project/session out, the current Master, Slave, or Mix project/session should be the *only* project/session file showing on the top level of the project/session folder.
- All other project/session files should be stored in folders (see below) to prevent confusion about which is the current project/session.
- We suggest using these folder names to keep your project/session folder organized:
 - *Project History* or *Session History* – for all non-current projects or sessions. Use applicable name.
 - *Source Projects* or *Source Sessions* – for all retired source tracks projects or sessions. Use applicable name.
 - *MIDI Files* – MIDI sequence files, tempo maps, Sys Ex data, etc.
 - *Auxiliary Audio Files* – impulse responses, samples, REX files, Reason files, etc.
 - *Notes*
 - *Rough Mixes*
 - *Final Mixes*
- When using a single drive, the current Master, Slave, or Mix project/session's audio files should all reside in a single Audio files folder at the top level of the project/session's folder (if applicable).
- When a project/session's audio files are divided between drives, there should be only one project/session folder containing a single Audio files and Fade files (if applicable) folder per drive.
- When transferring projects/sessions between studios during production we recommend saving project/session data to CD-R's, DVD-R's, or FireWire drives for their universality.
- Always keep a safety copy of a project/session and all its files in your possession when sending a project/session out.
- When sending a project/session out for film or video post production work the project/session recipient should determine the correct pull-up/pull-down settings for the project/session. The supplier must provide complete documentation concerning synchronization during recording of the project/session.
- For final archiving of projects/sessions at the end of a project see the *Delivery Recommendations for Master Recording* here:
http://www.grammy.com/Recording_Academy/Producers_And_Engineers/Guidelines/

Project Info Document

We suggest you include this text document with your projects/sessions. It's designed to include information previously found on tape box labels, tracksheets, and recall notes.

- Use the *Project Info* document to keep all information about your project/session for future users.
- The *Project Info* document should be a plain text document with the ".txt" extension.
- The *Project Info* document should be labeled with the same name as the project/session it is referencing, followed by the suffix "-INFO" (e.g. "Project/Session Name-INFO.txt").
- Always keep the *Project Info* document in the same project/session folder as the project/session file it is referencing.
- Only have a single *Project Info* document for each set of projects/sessions that share the same audio files and project/session folder (i.e. one per song). A single *Project Info* document can keep information about multiple projects/sessions of the same song.
- Include the name and contact information for each operator in the *Project Info* document.
- Keep a running history of all work done on the project/session file with the dates worked, the work done and the operators name.
- And remember, you can never have too much documentation.