



# Pro Tools Session Guidelines

## Quick Reference Guide – v2.2

### Master Sessions

*These are the main and central 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 session.
- Work done in other sessions should be imported into the Master session.
- Always label audio tracks *before* recording, Rename *all* audio files recorded before the track was labeled.
- Use comments section liberally.
- Always label internal Busses in I/O Set-Up...
- Label Inputs, Outputs and Inserts in I/O Set-Up...
- Set computer Date & Time correctly to insure correct time stamps on all files.

#### When Creating A New Session

- The Master session should be labeled "Song Title-MST".
- .WAV is the recommended audio file type for compatibility with all DAW systems.
- Enforcing Mac/PC Compatibility for improved session interchange between systems.
- Save the session to a level on your audio hard drive where it can be easily located.
- VSO setting un-checked in the Session Set-Up when using SYNC I/O or USD.
- Create some form of tempo map in the conductor track for appropriate music styles.
- Include the Click plug-in on an Aux Input, or create an audio click track.
- Create Memory Location markers of song's arrangement.
- Include key and modulation information in File > Get Info...
- Notate any Delay Compensation in File > Get Info for users of pre 6.4 software.
- Include a well labeled tuning note on its own track at the beginning of the session.

#### Cleaning Up

- Clean all edits and punches, make sure there are no clicks and pops with the Auto Region Fade In/Out Length (TDM only) set to "0 ms", use crossfades if necessary.
- Consolidate tracks into solid audio starting from the beginning of the 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 session.
- Periodically delete redundant or unnecessary playlists.
- Remove unused audio files before closing session.

## Organization

- Try to leave tracks organized in an order that makes sense to you when closing session.
- Keep Aux Input returns of submixed tracks (e.g. BG Vocals) adjacent to the source tracks.
- Generally keep FX Returns (Aux Inputs) and the Mix Bus (Master Fader) preferably to the right and bottom, or optionally to the left and top of the session.
- Create a blank track labeled "---UNUSED---" to place between the used and unused tracks.
- Keep all tracks still being used in the session showing and essentially above/to the left of the "---UNUSED---" marker.
- Deactivate, mute, hide and generally move below/to the right of the "---UNUSED---" marker all tracks no longer being used in the session.

## Additional Items

- Keep a recent rough mix labeled with song title and date on a pair of tracks at the top of the session.
- Use Mute Regions instead of muting with automation to mute audio tracks.
- Label Aux Inputs with direction (to/from) and name of outboard gear used. Also document settings in comments.
- Additional comments about the session can also be placed in DigiBase (Windows > Show Project Browser) in the File Comment column.
- Using send and return routing (Aux Inputs) 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 regions that will be easily visible on the timeline of the Edit window.



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### Slave Sessions – Outgoing

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

#### **The Basics**

- There may be many Slave sessions.
- Slave sessions should allow receiving users to playback the elements of the Master session on substantially fewer tracks.
- Master 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 Session**

- The 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 system so the Slave will open properly.

#### **Make Sure You Have These Elements From The Master Session**

- The start time and frame rate must be the same as the Master's.
- Include the tempo map.
- Include the Click plug-in track, or the audio click track. Keep at top of session if possible (shown or hidden)
- Include the Memory Location markers.
- Include key and modulation information in File > Get Info...
- Include separate reference tracks of the instruments the session is being sent out to have overdubbed if applicable.

## Slave Sessions – Returning

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

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

## Source Sessions

*These are usually retired 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 session and kept in Source sessions for future reference.*

- There may be many Source sessions.
- The 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 session should be saved to the Source Sessions folder.



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### Mix Master and Mix Slave Sessions

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

#### **The Basics**

- There should be only one Mix Master and optionally one or more unique Mix Slaves for each mix.
- Label session "Title-MIX" with no Mix Slaves, & "Title-MIX MSTR" with Mix Slaves.
- The Mix Slave(s) should be labeled with the song title, the abbreviation "MIX SLV", and if applicable the Slave number (e.g. "Song Title-MIX SLV 1").
- Use comments section for notes to mixer.
- Label any unlabeled Busses, Inputs, Outputs and Inserts in the I/O setup...
- Label Aux Inputs with name of outboard gear & document settings in comments.
- Make sure some form of tempo map is in the conductor track if appropriate.
- Make sure there are Memory Location markers of the song's arrangement.
- Make sure the key and modulation are in File > Get Info...
- Note in comments if a track (or a copy for effect) is slipped.
- Print "Final Rough Mix" with song title & date on tracks at the top of the session.
- At the end of the mix, always label final mixes with the song title and type of mix (e.g. "Song Title-Voc +1", "Song Title-Inst") when printing or bouncing to disk.

#### **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, mute, hide and generally move them to the bottom/far right.
- 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 Regions instead of muting with automation to mute audio tracks.
- Leave any automation the producer wants the mixer to use (e.g. BG vocal blends, panning) and label it clearly in the comments.
- Mark nonessential automation in the session as "Automation may be deleted".

## **Make Sure You Have These Elements**

- Every track is in session that is supposed to be.
- All parts are on each track that are supposed to be.
- All flies (copied and pasted parts/sections) have been completed.
- All comps (composite tracks) are completed and clearly labeled.
- The correct lead vocal is there and VERY clearly labeled.
- All tuned tracks have been printed to another track and are clearly labeled as tuned.
- If a track is tuned, leave a clearly labeled un-tuned version on another track.

## **Cleaning Up**

- Delete loud noises and other extraneous elements you don't want in the mix.
- Repair clicks and pops at edit and punch points with the Auto Region Fade In/Out Length (TDM only) set to "0 ms", and put in crossfades if necessary.
- Consolidate tracks into solid audio starting from the beginning of the session when you are completely finished editing them.
- Delete all tracks not needed for mix.
- Delete all playlists not needed for mix.
- Remove all unused audio files before closing session.

## **Organization**

- Arrange tracks in logical order (drums, bass, guitars, keys, vocals).
- Keep Aux Input returns of submixed tracks ( BG Vocals) adjacent to source tracks.
- Place FX Returns (Aux Inputs) and Master Fader at top or bottom of session.
- Leave optional tracks showing, but de-activated & clearly labeled in the comments.
- Place a blank track labeled "---UNUSED---" between mix tracks and unused tracks.
- Leave comments showing for mixer to see when opening the session.

## **Routing Outputs**

- When session will be mixed through a console route outputs as you'd like them to come up on the desk if possible.
- When session will be mixed inside Pro Tools route tracks and submixes to Outputs 1-2, or route internally through a stereo bus (Aux Input) and then to Outputs 1-2.



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### File Management, Storage and Documentation

#### Management and Storage

- When sending a session out, the current Master, Slave, or Mix session should be the only session file showing on the top level of the session folder.
- All other session files should be stored in folders (see below) to prevent confusion about which is the current session.
- We recommend using these folder names to keep your session folder organized:
  - *Session History* – for all non-current sessions.
  - *Source Sessions* – for all retired source tracks sessions.
  - *MIDI Files* – tempo maps, MIDI sequence files, etc.
  - *Rough Mixes*
  - *Final Mixes*
- When using a single drive, the current Master, Slave, or Mix session's audio files should all reside in a single Audio Files folder at the top level of the session's folder.
- When a session's audio files are divided between drives, there should be only one session folder containing a single Audio Files and Fade Files folder per drive.
- After following the Pro Tools Session Guidelines to prepare a session to send out (especially to mix) we recommend using the *Save Session Copy In...* method to save the session:
  1. Save a copy of your current session by choosing the *Save As...* command in the File menu.
  2. Give the session a different name than your original.
  3. Choose *Select Unused Regions* from the Audio Regions list pop-up menu.
  4. Choose *Clear Selected* from the Audio Regions list pop-up menu.
  5. Click *Remove*. Do NOT click *Delete*. (See "[Remove all unused...](#)" on page 21.)
  6. Choose *Save Session Copy In...* in the File menu.
  7. Select *Enforce Mac/PC Compatibility*. (See "[Enforcing Mac/PC...](#)" on page 8.)
  8. Select *Save All Audio Files*.
  9. Save the session to a different hard drive than the drive the original session resides on. The CPU hard drive can be used if no other drive is available. If possible, save it directly to the drive it will be sent out on.
  10. Remove the original session's drive from desktop.
  11. Confirm that the newly created session Opens.
  12. Test playback of the new session from beginning to end to confirm all files play.
  13. If you didn't save the session to your new media in step 9, copy the new session folder to the media you're sending it out on now.

- If using DigiDelivery to send a session out, it is best to do so directly after saving the session before any files or drives are moved. DigiDelivery will inform you if any dependent media files are missing.
- When transferring sessions between studios during production we recommend saving session data to CD-R's, FireWire drives, SCSI drives or (in the near future) DVD-R's for their universality.
- Always keep a safety copy of a session and all its files in your possession when sending a session out.
- For final archiving of sessions at the end of a project see the *Master Delivery Recommendations* at [www.grammy.com/pe\\_wing/guidelines](http://www.grammy.com/pe_wing/guidelines).

### **Pro Tools Session Info Document**

- Use the *Pro Tools Session Info Document* to keep all information about your session for future users.
- Always keep the *Pro Tools Session Info Document* in the same session folder as the session file it is referring to.
- Only have a single *Session Info Document* for each set of sessions that share the same audio files and session folder (i.e. one per song). A single *Info Document* can keep information about multiple sessions of the same song.
- Always include your name and contact information in the *Operators* section of the *Session Info Document*.
- Always update the *Session History* section with the dates worked, the work done and your name.
- When sending a session out for film or video post production work the session recipient should determine the correct pull-up/pull-down settings for the session. The supplier must provide complete documentation concerning synchronization during recording of the session.
- And remember, you can never have too much documentation.