

surmastering
AUDIO MASTERING SERVICE

Sur Mastering Submission Guidelines

Dear Sur Mastering customer,

Firstly, we'd like to thank you for your enormous efforts during your production process. We understand that a few minutes in the audio industry is the equivalent of many hours, days, weeks and sometimes months of lonely production in your home studio. So we want to make sure that this final process does not ruin all of those hours of hard work and dedication.

For this same reason we have put together a series of guidelines, rules and recommendations to make sure that the mastering process, which is the final processing of your audio before it hits the market, has the best possible source to work from to ensure the maximum quality results we can.

Thank you for your hard work and for understanding how important and decisive this last step is. Please read each item carefully and **contact us if you have absolutely any questions, doubts or concerns.**

Check, baby Check

We all get pretty excited when we think we are done with our track. We've cranked out a master demo, sent it to our friends, and they love it. So now is a perfect time to do yourself and your label a favor and cross check your mix in as many systems as you can.

IMPORTANT: Don't think the mastering process is going to fix the problems in your mix. If it doesn't sound wide enough, bassy, too punchy, dull at the top, fix it in the mix. There is only so much the mastering engineer can and will do to address issues in the mix. The less drastic moves he does to correct issues, the more resources he has to make things sound better and the more probabilities everyone has to be happy with the overall results.

The best places to reference your newly created track is in your car. Most of us spend loads of time traveling to and from work, and we bet you listen to a lot of music during that trajectory. Grab your song, go for a ride and turn it up. Listen for frequencies that you don't recognize in your car. See how it feels. Low end, mids, highs, clarity, depth, etc.

Suggestion: Before listening to your song, first check out your favorite tunes in the car. At least one or two minutes to firstly take a break from your mixing, and secondly to get a good feel of what your car sounds like again. After that, then you can pop in your song and see how you feel about it. The other way around usually is counterproductive.

Do the same using your iPods, boom boxes, living room system, friend's house, on a different PC station in a different room, etc. The idea here is to see if anything comes up that you missed while spending so much time in your studio getting used to all of the problems while producing your tracks. This will give you a new and refreshing

perspective of your mix. After listening, if you don't like the way it sounds, you need to try to figure out and remember what it is you don't like and correct it back in the lab.

Final Preparations - Nuances

Before turning in your work, make sure there are no pops, clicks and noise before and after the track content. Sometimes we get used to hearing those things and then we forget to treat those issues and next thing you know, your magnificent creation has a huge click or an incredible amount of audible noise after the mastering engineer made your track louder.

Please, take care of all of these small nuances before they become big, and most importantly, before it's too late. It is not the mastering engineer's responsibility to clean up your tracks. Sometimes these things can go unnoticed, or perhaps the person mastering your track thinks those clicks at the beginning and end of your samples is intentional and just might not address it or even notice it. Remember, the mastering process does not focus on individual elements of the mix, but rather the overall tonality, dynamics and loudness of the final master.

Pre-Master Formats, Bit Rates and Balanced Mix

Once you've followed the previous guidelines and you believe you are ready to export your final pre-master you need to make sure your track is in the following formats and bit-rates:

Minimum Bit-rate: 24bits 48000hz

File Format: WAV

Peak DB: Between -6db and -12db (not RMS). This means that your master/stereo bus should not be going over -6db on it's highest peak. Most DAWs have a meter that remembers its highest peak during play back. If you are done mixing and find you are going over, you need to lower the overall volume of your mix. This ensures the mastering engineer has plenty of headroom to work with.

EQ Spectrum Curve and balance: This depends on the content of your audio, but your final mix should have a typical "smiley face" looking eq curve. If your not sure how to check this, slap a Voxengo Curve EQ on your master bus, place it in Mastering mode and check out the curve it renders on your busy spots (usually the drops). It doesn't have to be a perfect smile. But you shouldn't have big peaks nor valleys as this usually (not always) means there are audible irregularities and imbalances. Check out any issues, but most importantly use your ears. If it sounds good, than it's probably good. Issues in this area can be easily fixed by the engineer if you are saturated from hearing your mix over and over and not sure what the problem is. That's what mastering is for as well.

NOTHING ON THE MASTER/STEREO BUSS PLEASE

Yes, we've heard this one before. But it makes sense. Part of the benefits of having the mastering done externally is for the simple fact that this person will have "fresh ears" to listen to your mix. This person usually has vast experience at listening to tracks for the first time and telling right away what the problems are.

But another important benefit of having someone else besides the producer master the track is that his "fresh ears" status allows him/her to make better decisions as to how much processing should be done to your pre-master. It is extremely difficult to make eq, compression and limiting decisions when you've already lost an important amount of objectivity to transients, dynamics, tone and balance of your mix. Any changes you do in this process will make you doubt as to how much is good or enough.

So leave this to the mastering engineer. He/She will learn what your intentions and ideas are once he/she hears your demo. That's why it's important to not skip that step.

NOTE: It is common to have global effects such as stutters, filters and such on the master bus as part of the production. This is totally fine. Although we recommend creating a "Global" or "All" buss to do this kind of stuff on, some people end up doing it on the master bus. No problem. Just make sure you don't add any compressor nor limiters to your final mix. Otherwise, you are killing transients and shaping the mix, leaving little or no room for the mastering engineer to maneuver.

Demo Masters and Reference Tracks

Aside from submitting your pre-master following the previous guidelines, it is extremely important to submit your own mastered demo along with your pre-master, so the engineer has a good idea of what you are shooting for. Use your favorite mastering plugins and try to get the sound you like at the loudness you want. Don't worry if it's not perfect. This is just for reference purposes.

It would also be extremely helpful if you include a link or title of a song you like, or one that is in the same genre or style your track is in. Preferably a song that already is in the market, from a known artist and that has been professionally mastered. The mastering engineer will use this as a reference to compare yours and to try to get that same quality of sound or even make it better.

This might seem obvious, but please do not send us a reference track that is protected by copyright laws. A URL to Spotify or even its title and artist name is more than sufficient so we can track it down.

Submission Methodology

Great! You've made it all the way here and now you need to know how to turn all of this in. Go ahead and gather your Pre-Master and Demo and compress them into a ZIP file. Feel free to add a text file with any notes you'd like to pass over to the mastering engineer for his consideration. Just make sure it's all in one ZIP file. Upload this file to your favorite file sharing server and send the download link to your A&R.

If you have any questions regarding this entire process, we are here to help you. Remember that studies show that mastering accounts for 50% of the decision making in the purchasing factor of a song. That doesn't mean that mastering makes a song of better or worse creation, it simply means that messing this final step up could mean the track is not at a standard other tracks are that do sell and that have gone through all of these processes correctly.

Congratulations on your new project and thank you again for your collaboration and understand that we also wish for the best possible outcome of all of our artists' releases. Every small step counts and adds up in the end. And the final step is mastering 😊

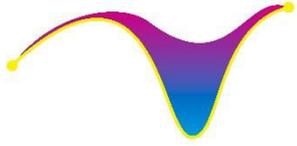
Cheers!

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