MIXING SESSION PREP

How to effectively prepare your files towards a professional audio mixing session.

By Alex J

MusicMastermind.tv @musicmastermind.tv

Table of Contents

Stems vs. Multi-tracks

Multi-tracks:

- **What are they?:** These are the individual tracks (mono or stereo) of a song—each instrument and vocal recorded separately.
- **When to use:** Perfect for detailed editing and mixing. You get full control over every single sound in the song.

Stems:

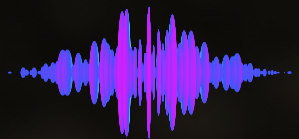
- **What are they?:** think of stems as groups of similar tracks bundled together. For example, all the drum tracks mixed into one file, all the vocals into another, etc.
- **When to use:** They're great for remixing or live performances because you can adjust big parts of a song without getting into the nitty-gritty details.

Let's look at a simple example with a drumset. Let's say we recorded a 5-piece drumset: kick, snare, tom 1, tom 2, floor tom and an overhead stereo pair....

You will have a total of 7 multi-tracks.

You'll have 7 files total.

If you mixed all of these multi-tracks into one (1) stereo pair (L+R), that would be considered a drumset stem.



You will have a total of 1 stem.

You'll have 1 file total.

If you send the mixing engineer your multi-tracks, he/she will have:

- ✓ **More flexibility to EQ.**
- ✓ **More flexibility to compress.**
- ✓ **The ability to sidechain easily.**

We don't recommend sending stems only as there's less flexibility when it comes time for the mixdown process. The only case where you should send stems is when you have a loop that can't be separated into multitracks (ex. loop from splice, sample, etc.)

Session Organization & Printing

You might be tempted to do a quick offline bounce of your entire session but be careful as the more **disorganized** the session is, the **harder** it will be for your mixing engineer to **crush your mix** and provide results in a **timely manner**.

Usually mixing sessions deal with **audio files only**. **Don't send your mixing engineer any virtual instruments.** Make sure to bounce these instruments into audio files.

We recommend creating a duplicate of the session that is ready to mix, that way you can "print out" every single virtual instrument or processing you may want in every multi-track.

if you're wondering what "printing" means, it is just a term referring to the creation of an audio file from a virtual instrument or any audio file that has specific process you want to "bake in" or make part of the new file. Let's dive in a bit more on how this works:

Let's say your have a virtual instrument like SERUM.

You would have to "print" the instrument because it will not only give you an **audio file** instead of a MIDI file, but it will also render the audio file with all of the **sonic elements** (effects, panning, etc) that you tweaked during the production process.

You have two choices when it comes to printing:

- Offline bounce.
- Bus printing.

Let's see how they both work.

Offline Bonce

This will be a quick but tricky method. It basically consists on bouncing the instrument using only the computer's processing power. Here's the pro's and cons:

PROS:

- It's offline so the rendering time is faster than real-time.
- You can bounce all of the elements of a session quickly.

CONS:

- You have to double check for any mistakes after it's bounced. This can be labor intensive if you're offline bouncing an entire session.

If you're certain all your labeling is in place and you have a computer with good processing power, then you can rely on this method. Just make sure to double check each file for any printing errors before you send them away.

It is very common for some processing not to show up or print in a weird way sometimes. **Double check your files thoroughly and you'll have an amazing result.**

Bus Printing

This approach consists of the routing of instrument or audio channels to a bus to then be printed into an audio track. It's a little but more work than offline bouncing but can help you save time and ensure proper labeling. Here's some pros and cons:

PROS:

- If you were not very organized during the production process, this provides a great moment to perfectly label all of your files before printing them to the final audio file.
- You'll physically hear any mistakes that are happening. If you hear things fine, you know you're all good! If you don't you can solo each channel until you find the culprit and re-print only that channel.

CONS:

- It's on-line, so bouncing of the files happens in real-time as you're playing back. You're essentially recording files live.
- It does require a bit of a setup.

Bus Printing Setup

In order to illustrate how print your multi-tracks using the Bus Printing setup, let's go back to the SERUM example. Once your SERUM virtual instrument is just how you like it you'll create 2 items:

- One (1) Stereo Bus.
- One (1) Stereo audio channel.

If you're printing multiple virtual instruments, you'll have to do the same with each one. If you have to print 10 virtual instruments, you'll create 10 stereo buses and 10 Stereo Audio tracks.

Once you create these items, route the output or a send of the virtual instrument channel to the bus and then have the instrument channel's input be that stereo bus.

We recommend setup up buses ahead of time in your I/O setup and label them MIX BUS (#) and a number, so that way you can quickly route them and use them. Let's look at a quick diagram on how to route it:

Virtual Instrument

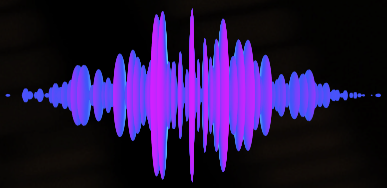
L R Output

L R Input

Stereo Bus

L R Output

L R Input



New Audio Track

TIP

This method mostly applies to channel based DAWS like Protools and Logic. For DAWs like FL studio, we can achieve similar results in a different way. For in-depth tutorials on the subject, please visit MusicMastermind.TV

Level Warning

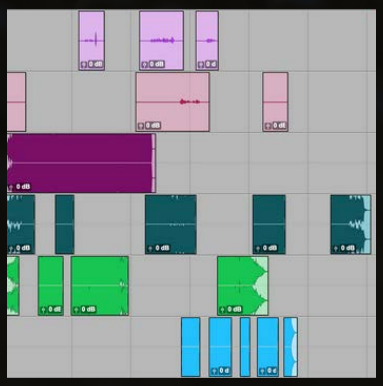
All DAWS and digital music software usually use **DBFS (dB Full Scale)** as the measurement for all meters. usually a good starting point is that all levels should have at least 3-6 db of headroom. If all of the files are too loud, you'll limit the dynamic range on the track and it will be hard for any mixing/mastering engineer to achieve a BIG sound.

This is imperative at the mix level, but can definitely help in the pre-mix stage. If you send all your prints blazing hot close to **zero dBFS**, as soon as you apply a compressor or limiter, things will start to smear and sound extremely loud and quashed.

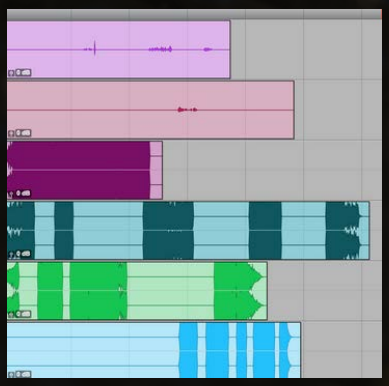
File Consolidation

Its extremely important that you consolidate your files before you send them over to your mixing engineer.

Ideally all files should be the same length. But if not, they 100% have to start at the same position. Please see the images below fore reference.



Not Acceptable.



Acceptable.

Ideal.

TIP

For in-depth tutorials on the subject, please visit MusicMastermind.TV

Files & Folders prep

The key to a fast and successful mix session relies heavily on how organized the files are, especially if you're working with a professional mixing & mastering service such as the I**n The Box Service by Noisematch Studios.**

In this section, we'll provide some tips on how to organize your files & folders for easy access by a mixing engineer.

Labeling

Properly labeling your tracks is crucial for maintaining clarity and efficiency during the mixing process. When each track in your session is clearly labeled, it significantly reduces the time spent searching for specific elements, allowing you to focus on the creative aspects of mixing rather than administrative tasks.

Clear labels help you and anyone else working on the session quickly identify the contents of each track without having to listen to them individually, which is especially beneficial in complex projects with numerous tracks.

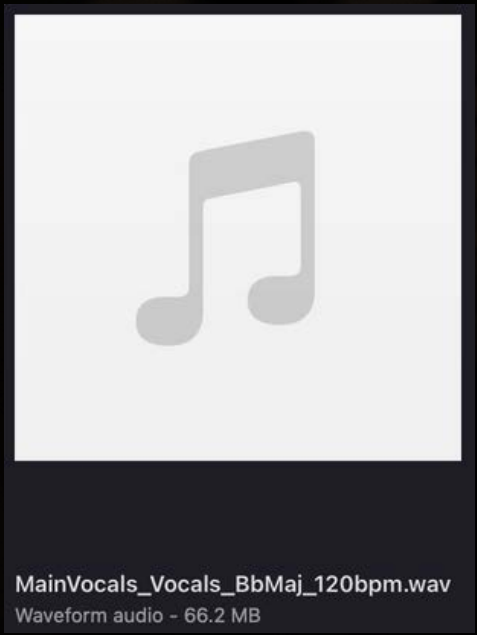
We recommend you do this inside of your DAW as it will be easier to identify the elements before exporting them. If you don't label your files properly, they will be exported with random names like "Audio 1" or "Insert 45".

Depending on the DAW you use, you will have to name the channel name or the mixer channel name before printing the files.

Here's a format we find gives the mixing engineer all of the right information quickly.

Instrument or Vocal Name _ **Type** _ **Key** _ **Tempo**

Here's some example:



Stereo Rhodes _ **Instrument** _ **Fmin** _ **98bpm**

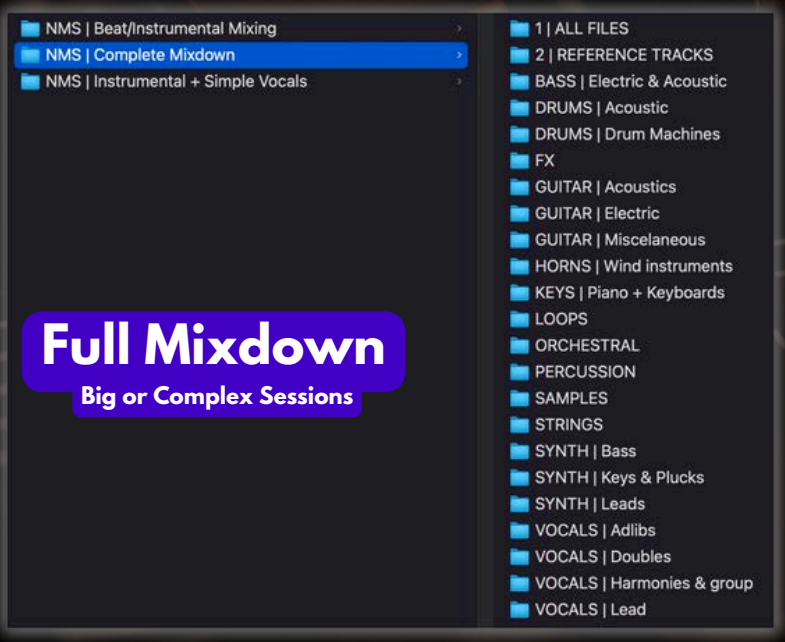
Main Vocal _ **Vocals** _ **BbMaj** _ **120bpm**

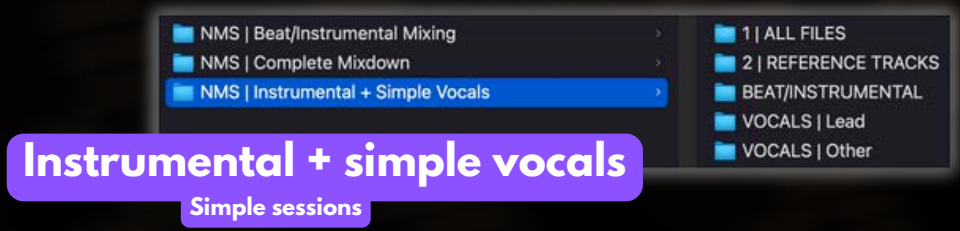
TIP

For in-depth tutorials on the subject, please visit MusicMastermind.TV

Folder Organization

If your labels are clear, it is not as imperative that you place things into different folders but it can definitely help speed up the process for your engineer, especially in big & complex sessions. Here's a file hierarchy we like to use for different types of projects:





You can download a zip file with all of these empty folders FOR FREE inside MusicMastermind.TV for quick organization on your next project!

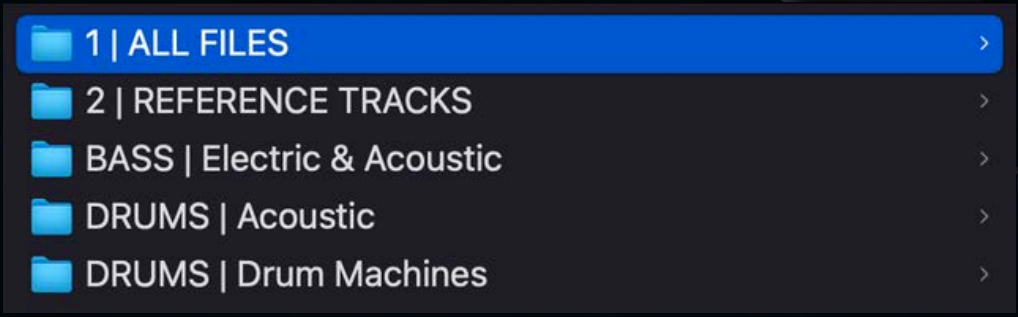
Automator Hack (Mac OS only)

If you're an apple user, there's an incredible & FREE tool called automator that we can use to save time and add information to our files or re-label them as well as many other cool functions. Here's our recommendation to save you some time using automator:

1) Label your files like this inside your DAW

Instrument or Vocal Name **_** **Type**

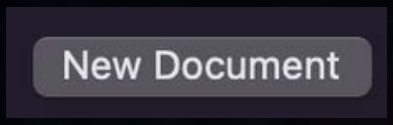
2) place all of the multi-tracks in the ALL FILES folder in your finder window.



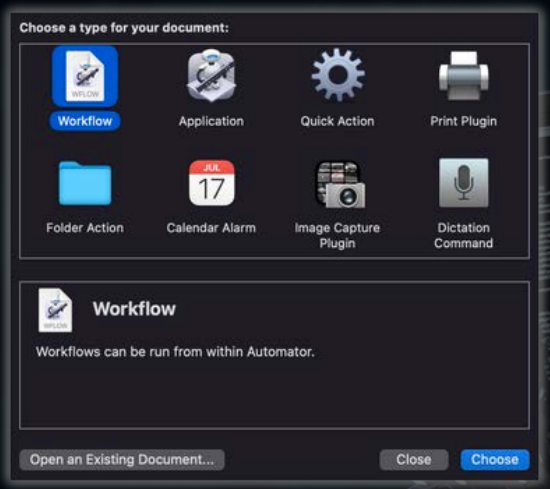
3) Open Automator.

Continue reading on next page or watch a video tutorial inside of MusicMastermind.TV

4) Create a new Document.

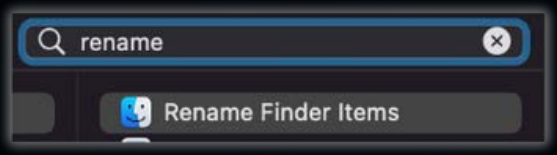


5) Create a new workflow.



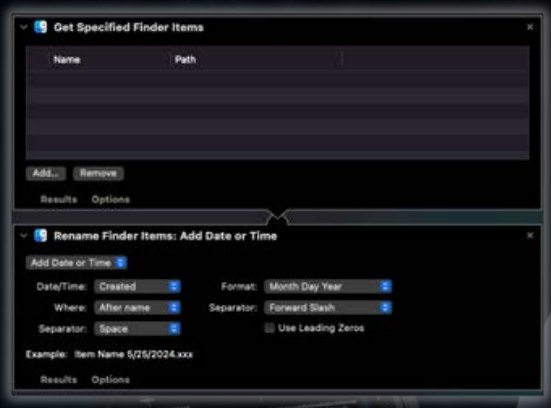
6) Look for the words “get finder” and add the action: **“Get Selected Finder Items”**.

7) Look for the word “rename” and add the **“Rename Finder Items” action.**



Watch a video tutorial for this inside of MusicMastermind.TV

8) Once the prompt pops up, click **Don't add** but make sure you're careful as there's no undo option. It will look like this:

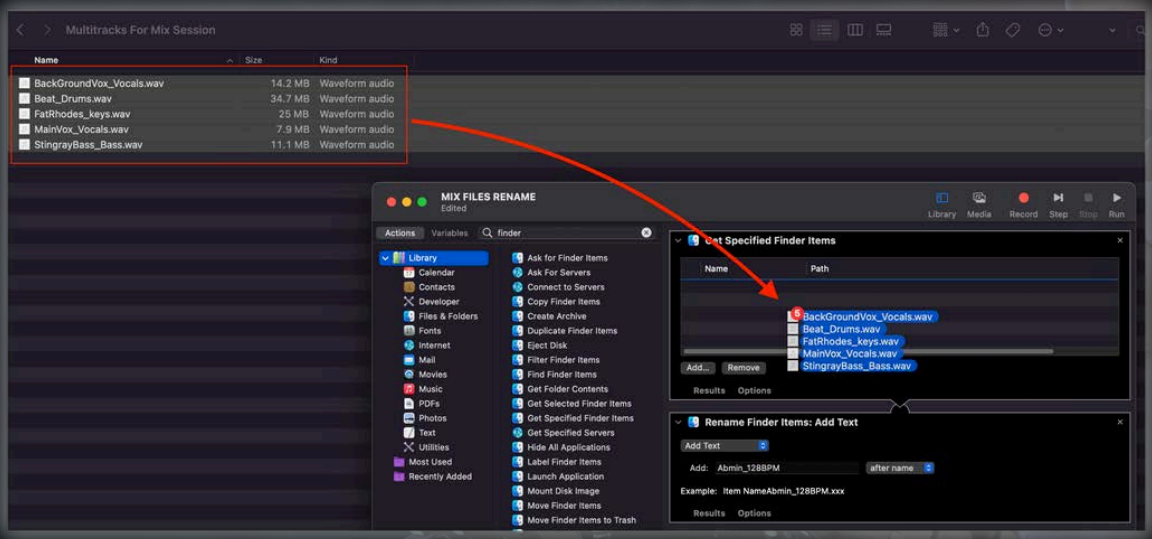


9) Go to the Rename Finder Items action and of the **Add Date or Time** text, click on the dropdown and find the **"Add text"** option.

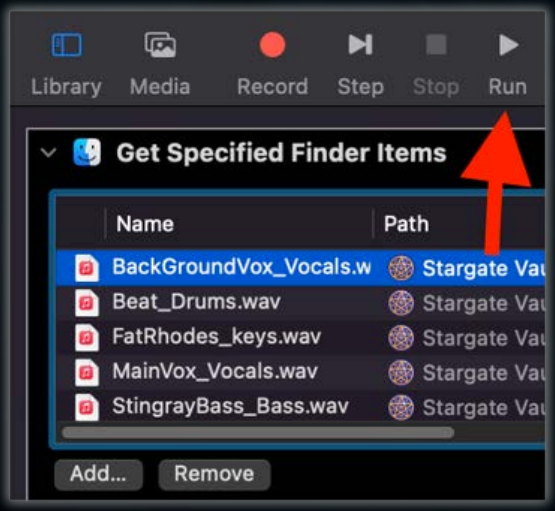
10) Add your key & tempo for the song and select the "after name" if it's not pre-selected.

Watch a video tutorial For this inside of MusicMastermind.TV

10) Go to your ALL FILES folder and drag all of your selected files to the Get Specified Finder items box.



11) Hit **Run** to batch add the information to all files.



Watch a video tutorial For this inside of MusicMastermind.TV

Mixing Checklist

- [ ] All my files have 3-6 dB of headroom.
- [ ] All my files are consolidated.
- [ ] All my files are clearly labeled.
- [ ] All my files include key & tempo information.
- [ ] I've duplicated fall of the files and placed them in their respective folders for easy access.

ENJOY!

Hopefully this guide helped you get a better understanding on how to prepare your sessions towards an incredible mixing session.

If you liked this guide, please give us a shoutout over IG! Feel free to screenshot anything you found interesting within the guide and tag us @musicmastermind.tv!

Thank you for choosing our **IN THE BOX Mixing & Mastering Services.** If you refer a friend, you'll receive a 10% discount off your next order.

I'll finish by reminding you that you're the ONLY responsible person for your own success. Believe in the mission, work hard, have a little faith and the rest will figure itself out!

We believe in you!!!!

Let's keep up the good work!!!!

ALEXJ

MIXING SESSION PREP

How to effectively prepare your files towards a professional audio mixing session.

By Alex J

MusicMastermind.tv @musicmastermind.tv