The Producers and Engineers Wing

Pro Tools Session Guidelines
For Music Production

Version 2.2b1

A few years ago an engineer could open a reel of tape they'd never seen before, glance at the track sheet and begin working almost immediately, but more recently, with Pro Tools and other DAW's replacing tape machines on many recording projects, the amount of time between opening a session from another engineer and going to work has definitely increased. In some cases, mixing engineers hire separate operators and add a half-day to the mix just to make sense out of the session.

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 with Pro Tools no real conventions of this kind have been established. This is what the **Pro Tools Session Guidelines for Music Production** set out to do. When followed they can greatly improve the process of transferring sessions between operators.

These guidelines were created by the Technical Subcommittee of the Florida P&E Wing of The Recording Academy based on our experience with Pro Tools, along with many excellent suggestions received from the national P&E Wing members. To everyone who took the time to help, we'd like to say thank you. Your contributions have been greatly appreciated. It is our hope these guidelines will help everyone as much as they have helped us in improving our productivity when working with Pro Tools.

Eric Schilling   Tom Morris   Charles Dye

Pro Tools Guidelines for Music Production Committee
Producers & Engineers Wing of the Recording Academy®
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Producers and Engineers Wing
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Eric Schilling, co-chair
Charles Dye, co-chair
Carlos Alvarez
Trevor Fletcher
Gil Gowing
Jim Morris
Tom Morris
Roger Nichols
Ron Taylor

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Introduction

The goal of these guidelines is to improve Pro Tools session interchange. The Producers and Engineers Wing of The Recording Academy endorses them with the intent of making the transferring of sessions from one engineer/operator to the next — from pre-production through mixing — as seamless 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 common practices that were established for recording with tape, but made to apply to Pro Tools. The guidelines are based upon our years of experience guiding projects while using Pro Tools at every stage. Along the way, many new practices were devised to replace the organization and record keeping methods that no longer applied to this new medium. Over the years, we have refined them, distilling them down to this set of basic guidelines. In addition, we incorporated many suggestions by the national members of the Producers and Engineers Wing.

The guidelines focus mainly on how the engineer/operator can organize, cleanup, and save their session data at the end of the day to make the next person's job a lot easier. They are meant to help projects where the 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 session and when they are able to go to work.

In the main section of this document each guideline is listed followed by a brief explanation of our reasoning behind it, but we've also provided a *Quick Reference Guide* in the Appendix, which is simply a list the guidelines. It can be printed out and used as a reminder when cleaning up a session, or given to an operator/assistant engineer as instructions on how to leave the session.

At first it could appear adding these practices could add considerable time to a recording session, but many of these guidelines can actually be incorporated into your current workflow with little to no effect on the length of the session while being completely transparent to the client . Many of the guidelines can actually be done 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, the investment in time is worth it in light of the hours to be saved on future sessions.

Together with the guidelines, we've also included the **Pro Tools Session Info Document**, a database to keep all relevant documentation about a Pro Tools session for the next operator. It is designed to include info usually found on a tape box label, along with some recall documentation. For more information see the *Session Info Document*, which can be found in the same folder as these guidelines.

Our Committee will review this document every six months to insure it is up to date with changes in software, hardware, and industry practices. We welcome all of your suggestions and feedback. Please send them to p&eptguidelines@grammy.com.

Lastly, please keep in mind the guidelines are not a "cure all" for all problems that can arise with a Pro Tools session, and in no way replace the documentation provided by Digidesign. We highly recommend that all users read the **Pro Tools Reference Guide** for the best understanding of how to use their system. Additionally, though these guidelines were specifically written with Pro Tools in mind, many of them can be applied when using other DAW's.

Sessions Types

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

Master

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

Slave – Outgoing and Returning

These are usually reduced track versions of the Master session made up from submixes of its tracks. These are satellite 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 session. There may be many Slave sessions.

Source

These are usually retired 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 session and kept in Source sessions for future reference. There may be many Source sessions.

Mix Master and Mix Slave

These are sessions being prepared for mixing or in the mixing phase, either through a console or inside of Pro Tools. The Mix Master is the main session and plays back from the Master Pro Tools system. The Mix Slaves are slaves to the Mix Master and play back from additional locked-up Pro Tools systems. For each mix there should only be one Mix Master and optionally one or more unique Mix Slaves.

Master Sessions

These guidelines are for 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.

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

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

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

Always label audio tracks *before* recording, and Rename *all* audio files recorded before the track was labeled.

> This will prevent audio files from being given generic names (i.e. "Audio 1_01"), which makes it difficult to differentiate and locate them later.

Use comments section liberally.

> 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 in I/O Set-Up...

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

Label Inputs, Outputs and Inserts in I/O Set-Up...

> This is very useful when recreating patching from a previous 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 Session

The master session should be labeled "Song Title-MST".

Keeping the main session always labeled as the Master communicates to everyone that this is *the session* to work on. Renaming the session with the initials of each operator, or new instrument, creates a long list of sessions *without* communicating to the next operator what the current session is. To keep a safety of the session before working, make a copy and place it in the Old Sessions folder. (See "We suggest using these folder names…" on page 24.)

.WAV is the recommended audio file type for compatibility with all DAW systems.

.WAV is the most universally accepted audio file format.

Enforcing Mac/PC Compatibility is recommended to improve session interchange between all Pro Tools systems.

As more PC based systems come online this will become more important. The exception is when creating sessions that will be used with software earlier than Pro Tools 5.1.

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

A few things to watch for are unintentionally saving the session to the Session folder of *another session*, to an Audio or Fade File folder, or to the CPU's hard drive, any of which might make it difficult to find later.

Confirm that VSO setting is un-checked in the Session Set-Up window when using SYNC I/O or USD.

The previous session's VSO settings can unintentionally be applied to the next new session that's created. When the new session is played back on systems without VSO capabilities, or mixes are bounced to disk or printed digitally, they will playback at the wrong speed.

Create some form of tempo map in the conductor track for appropriate music styles.

Applicable to most modern music production, this should be one of the first things done during the basic tracking session, or at least at the earliest possible stage. You can simply place a single tempo marker at the beginning of the song, use Beat Detective to create a Tempo Map, or

import it from a MIDI sequence. Editing in Bar|Beat Grid mode is one of the biggest time saving aspects of Pro Tools. If there is no tempo information, this benefit is lost.

Always include the Click plug-in on an Aux Input, or create an audio click track, for appropriate music styles. Keep at top of session if possible (shown or hidden).

The Click plug-in is included with Pro Tools 6.x and can receive broadcast tempo data from your tempo map. With earlier versions of Pro Tools you should always create or record an audio click track.

Create Memory Location 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 File > Get Info...

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#" Key and modulation info may also be placed in markers track.

When using Auto Delay Compensation make a note in File > Get Info... so users of software earlier than Pro Tools 6.4 will know to compensate.

To maintain the phase coherency of the original session.

It is highly recommended to include a tuning note on its own track at the beginning of the session. Keep at top of 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 session was clocked to an external source that was not the same sample rate as the Session Setup setting. For example, even if the initial session was set to 44.1kHz, if it was slaved to house sync at 29.97 the actual sample rate of the session would be 44.056kHz. When played on another system without house sync the session would play back slightly faster. Clearly not a good thing.

Cleaning Up

Clean all edits and punches, make sure there are <u>no</u> clicks and pops with the Auto Region Fade In/Out Length (TDM only) set to "O ms", and put in crossfades if necessary.

> This is simply considered good Pro Tools etiquette, and greatly appreciated by all who follow you. Not checking fades with the Auto Region Fade In/Out Length (Windows > Preferences > Operation) set to "O ms" is the most common cause of clicks and pops.

Consolidate tracks into solid audio starting from the beginning of the session when you are *completely* finished editing them.

> Consolidating tracks improves session playback, and lessens the number of audio files and crossfades, which simplifies archiving and restoration. Starting from the beginning of the session will allow tracks to easily be used with other DAW's, and is a second way to confirm sync. Definitely insure there are no clicks and pops before consolidation. An unconsolidated version may also be kept in the playlists.

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

> This is very important. Auto-tuning plug-ins *do not* tune identically on each pass. The <u>only</u> 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 it's corrected or if you wish to leave the delay. Additionally, you may leave a clearly labeled copy of the un-tuned track underneath the playlist of the tuned track.

Delete all tracks no longer needed in the session.

> This will also make the session more manageable.

Periodically delete redundant or unnecessary playlists.

> Depending on your working style, it is possible for the playlists 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 session.

> Doing this after doing the above two items will really clean out all the files in the session you were no longer using. This makes the session even more manageable, lessening the number of files for archiving and

restoration. (Caution: <u>Do NOT</u> **Delete** unused audio files. This is something you should do <u>ONLY</u> when you fully understand the command after reading the manual. This command will permanently <u>ERASE</u> files from your hard drive and cannot be undone.)

Organization

Leave tracks organized in an order that makes sense when closing session.

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

Keep Aux Input returns of submixed tracks (e.g. BG Vocals) adjacent to the source tracks.

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

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.

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

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

This makes it very clear which tracks to use. A Master Fader (set to no output) or a MIDI track will use no additional DSP. The comment on each of the unused tracks may also start with ALT, UNUSED, or REF.

Keep <u>all</u> tracks still being used in the session showing and essentially above/to the left of the "---UNUSED---" marker.

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

Deactivate, mute, hide and generally move below/to the right of the "---UNUSED---" marker all tracks no longer being used in the 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 why they are not being used.

Additional Items

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

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

Use Mute Regions instead of muting with automation to mute audio tracks.

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.

Label Aux Inputs with direction (to/from) and name of outboard gear used. Also document settings in comments.

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

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.

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 regions that will be easily visible on the timeline of the Edit window.

Different tracks for comments, lyrics, key or tempo info can be created and placed anywhere in the session. Set Track View to blocks and use Edit > Consolidate Selection to create blank regions. Rename by double clicking with the Grabber tool. Display Name In Regions (Display menu) must be on.

Slave Sessions – Outgoing

These guidelines are for sessions being prepared to be sent out as Slaves. They are usually reduced track versions of the Master that are satellite 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 session. The following are in addition to applicable Master session guidelines.

The Basics

There may be many Slave sessions.

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

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

> Consolidating a larger session to fewer tracks allows work to be done on smaller systems and frees up voices to record additional 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 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 a single volume automation breakpoint to show the intended balance. The level can also be noted in the comments.

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 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").

> 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 session. The same convention is used with tape.

Consider the receiving system so the Slave will open properly.

> By enforcing Mac/PC compatibility and keeping the track count at 24 or less your session will open on all Pro Tools systems.

Make Sure You Have These Elements From The Master Session

Building a Slave 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. It can also be imported from the Master session by checking the box in the lower left hand corner of the Import Track (PT 5.1x) or Import Session Data (PT 6.x) window.

Include the Click plug-in track, or the audio click track. Keep at top of session if possible (shown or hidden)

> A click should be with every session, especially Slaves.

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.

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

Slave Sessions – Returning

These guidelines are for 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.

> 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 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 session start time and frame rate are the same as when you received the session, or note in the *Session Info Document* if not.

> Very important when importing the tracks back into the Master. See the *Pro Tools Session Info Document* (page 26) section for more information*.*

Clearly label in the comments and list in the *Session Info Document* all tracks to import back into the Master session.

> To eliminate any questions.

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.

> 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 *Session Info Document* incase the receiving studio has any questions.

Source Sessions

These guidelines refer to usually retired 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 session and kept in Source sessions for future reference.

There may be many Source sessions.

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

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").

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

The session should be saved to the Source Sessions folder.

Once a session is retired it should be removed from the top level of the session folder to eliminate clutter and confusion regarding which session is the current Master. (See "We suggest using these folder names…" on page 24.)

Mix Master and Mix Slave Sessions

These guidelines are for Master sessions being prepared for mixing or those in the mixing phase, either through a console or inside of Pro Tools. Certain guidelines are repeated because their application — or the reasoning behind them — may have changed. The Mix Master is the main session and plays back from the Master Pro Tools system. The Mix Slaves are slaves to the Mix Master and playback from additional locked-up Pro Tools systems.

The Basics

There should be only one Mix Master and optionally one or more unique Mix Slaves for each mix.

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

The Mix Master should be labeled "Song Title-MIX" when there are no Mix Slaves, and conversely "Song Title-MIX MST" when there are Mix Slaves.

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

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").

> To distinguish it from the Mix Master and other Mix Slaves.

Use comments section for notes to mixer.

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

Label any unlabeled Busses, Inputs, Outputs and Inserts in the I/O setup...

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

Label Aux Inputs with name of outboard gear used and document settings in comments.

> 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, use Beat Detective in Bar resolution to quickly create a tempo map from the click track, kick drum, or main drum loop. Alternatively, you may import a tempo map from the original MIDI sequence.

Make sure there are Memory Location 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 and modulation are in File > Get Info...

> This does not imply the mixer should be left to tune any tracks. This should *always* be done before they receive the session. (See "Always print tuned tracks…" on page 10.) Nonetheless, it can be very useful if the mixer hears something that needs to be tweaked. Give the key with additional accidentals. Example: "Key: G min w/ A, C#." Key and modulation info may also be placed in markers track.

Note in comments if a track (or a copy for effect) is slipped.

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

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

> It is standard to send a rough mix out when sending multitrack masters out to be mixed. With Pro Tools, you can make it even easier for the mixer by printing the rough on a pair of tracks (or by bouncing and importing it) into 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.

> 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 Amp Farm) 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 other Pro Tools systems will have even the most common plug-in if it is essential to your sound.

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.

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

Use Mute Regions instead of muting with automation to mute audio tracks.

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) and label it clearly in the comments.

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

If possible, contact the mixer regarding whether you should leave the remaining nonessential automation in the 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 session out to mix, look it over a few more times to double-check that you have these very important items:

Every track is in session that is supposed to be.

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

All flys (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.

Never send a session out to be mixed without printing the tuned tracks. (See "Always print tuned tracks…" on page 10.) You may wish to correct any delay caused by tuning process. Note in comments if it's corrected or if you wish to leave delay.

If the lead vocal is tuned, it is recommended to leave a clearly labeled un-tuned version of the vocal on another track.

This gives the producer the last minute option to switch to the un-tuned track for any sections they prefer that way. Additionally, you may leave a clearly labeled copy of the un-tuned track underneath the playlist of the tuned track. Note in track's comments.

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

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, make sure there are <u>no</u> clicks and pops with the Auto Region Fade In/Out Length (TDM only) set to "O ms", and put in crossfades if necessary.

> At this point in the process it is no longer Pro Tools etiquette—*this is essential.* Not checking fades with the Auto Region Fade In/Out Length (Windows > Preferences > Operation) set to "O ms" is the most common cause of clicks and pops in tracks.

Consolidate tracks into solid audio starting from the beginning of the session when you are completely finished editing them.

> This will present the mixer with the cleanest possible session. A sixty-four track 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 not needed for mix.

> This will also make the session more manageable.

Delete all playlists not needed for mix.

> At this point, you should really trim down your session to just the tracks that are needed for the mix.

Remove all unused audio files before closing session.

> Doing this after completing the above two guidelines should bring your session down to just the files that will be needed for the mix. This will

make the session extremely manageable, really consolidating the number of files for archiving and restoration. (Caution: <u>Do NOT</u> **Delete** unused audio files. This command will permanently <u>ERASE</u> files from hard drive, and cannot be undone. Please consult manual.)

Organization

Arrange tracks in logical order from top to bottom (e.g. drums, bass, guitars, keys, vocals).

This will be greatly appreciated by the mixer.

Keep the Aux Input returns of submixed tracks (e.g. BG Vocals) adjacent to the source tracks.

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

Place 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.

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

Leave any optional tracks showing, but de-activated and clearly labeled in the comments 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 session. Explain this clearly to the mixer in the comments.

Place a blank track labeled "---UNUSED---" between the tracks to mix and the unused tracks.

This makes it very clear which tracks are for the mix. A Master Fader (set to no output) or a MIDI track will use no DSP. The comment on each of the unused tracks may also start with ALT, UNUSED, or REF.

Keep <u>all</u> tracks to be mixed showing and essentially above/to the left of the "---UNUSED---" marker.

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, mute, hide and generally move below/to the right of the "---UNUSED---" marker all tracks not to be used, but being left for reference.

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 why they are not being used and then deactivate and hide them.

Leave comments showing for mixer to see when opening the session.

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

Routing Outputs

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

If you have more tracks than you have outputs for, route all the remaining tracks to the last two outputs.

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 route Aux Input to Outputs 1-2.

File Management, Storage and Documentation

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

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.

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

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

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

We suggest 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.
- *Notes*
- *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.

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

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.

> This also greatly simplifies backups and copying of data.

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.

This will insure all the files from the session are included, while eliminating all unnecessary files. Creating the most compact session possible, which will be easier to save to your selected media.

Follow these steps:

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**. <u>Do NOT</u> 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.

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 session and all its files in your possession when sending a session out.

This is in case the data is lost or damaged.

For final archiving of sessions at the end of a project see the _Master Delivery Recommendations_ at www.grammy.com/pe_wing/guidelines.

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

Pro Tools Session Info Document

Use the _Pro Tools Session Info Document_ to keep all information about your session for future users.

Included in the same folder as these guidelines, this document replaces both tape box labels and some recall documentation. (See the _Session Info Document_ for additional information.)

Always keep the _Pro Tools Session Info Document_ in the same session folder as the session file it is referring to.

So all users can find it.

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.

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

Always include your name and contact information in the _Operators_ section of the _Session Info Document_.

So you can be contacted if there are any questions

Always update the _Session History_ section with the dates worked, the work done and your name.

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

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.

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

And remember, you can never have too much documentation.

Pro Tools Session Guidelines For Music Production

Quick Reference Guide – v2.2b1

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.
- The final results of work done in other sessions should be imported into the Master session.
- Always label audio tracks *before* recording, and 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...
- Confirm that computer's Date and Time are set correctly to insure correct time and date 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 is recommended to improve session interchange between all Pro Tools systems.
- Make sure you save the session to a level on your audio hard drive where you and future operators can locate it.
- Confirm that VSO setting is un-checked in the Session Set-Up window when using SYNC I/O or USD.
- Create some form of tempo map in the conductor track for appropriate music styles.
- Always include the Click plug-in on an Aux Input, or create an audio click track, for appropriate music styles. Keep at top of session if possible (shown or hidden).
- Create Memory Location markers of song's arrangement.
- Include key and modulation information in File > Get Info...

- When using Auto Delay Compensation make a note in File > Get Info... so users of software earlier than Pro Tools 6.4 will know to compensate.
- It is highly recommended to include a tuning note on its own track at the beginning of the session. Keep at top of session if possible (shown or hidden).

Cleaning Up

- Clean all edits and punches, make sure there are <u>no</u> clicks and pops with the Auto Region Fade In/Out Length (TDM only) set to "O 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.
- 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 <u>all</u> 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.

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* incase 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.

Mix Master and Mix Slave Sessions

These are Master sessions being prepared for mixing or sessions in the mixing phase, either through a console or inside of Pro Tools.

The Basics

- There should be only one Mix Master and optionally one or more unique Mix Slaves for each mix.
- The Mix Master should be labeled "Song Title-MIX" when there are no Mix Slaves, and conversely "Song Title-MIX MSTR" when there are 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 used and document settings in comments.
- Make sure some form of tempo map is in the conductor track if appropriate for musical style.
- 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" labeled with song title and date on a pair of 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.
- If possible, contact the mixer regarding whether you should leave the remaining nonessential automation in the session or delete it.

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 flys (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 the lead vocal is tuned, it is recommended to leave a clearly labeled un-tuned version of the vocal on another track.
- Optionally, you may leave un-tuned versions of other important tracks that were tuned. Label clearly.

Cleaning Up

- Clean up tracks by going through them and deleting loud noises and other extraneous elements you don't want in the mix.
- Check that all edits and punches are clean, make sure there are <u>no</u> clicks and pops with the Auto Region Fade In/Out Length (TDM only) set to "O 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 from top to bottom (e.g. drums, bass, guitars, keys, vocals).
- Keep the Aux Input returns of submixed tracks (e.g. BG Vocals) adjacent to the source tracks.
- Place 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.
- Leave any optional tracks showing, but de-activated and clearly labeled in the comments as to their status.
- Place a blank track labeled "---UNUSED---" between the tracks to mix and the unused tracks.
- Keep <u>all</u> tracks to be mixed 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 not to be used, but being left for reference.
- 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 route to Outputs 1-2.

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*. <u>Do NOT</u> 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.
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- 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.

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- Use the *Pro Tools Session Info Document* to keep all information about your session for future users.
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- 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.