# DFS PRODUCTIONS, LLC. | PREPARING FOR MASTERING

Most of the projects we work with are recorded in a digital format. If you are mixing on a digital audio workstation or computer here are a few tips to achieve the best results.

**1. Your songs must be mixed and ready to go.**  This means your final mixes are complete, and you have full-quality stereo audio files of each song.  Remember, that's full quality audio we're talking about here; WAV is the best format, no MP3s. MP3s are not full quality audio files. Make sure the bit depth is at either 16 or 24 bit and sample rate is at least 44.1khz (standard CD quality).

**2. Take off any compression and limiting you may have on your master mix fader or bus.**  Effects on individual tracks are OK, but the master stereo file should be uncompressed and unlimited. We prefer that the music NOT go through any unnecessary processing. Over compression, limiting or excessive volume can degrade the signal. Your mixes may sound a little quiet, but that's actually a good thing. It is best to leave 2 to 4 dB of "headroom" on your mix. This "headroom" is essential for your mastering engineer to have space they need to apply as much compression and limiting as they feel is necessary without the track distorting.

**3. Be sure the EQ (high and lows) and instrumentation on the mix is well balanced.**  If they aren't, the mastering engineer may find it difficult to adjust certain frequencies in your master while keeping the overall sound nice and even. If a vocal track, drum part or guitar solo is too quiet/too loud in your mix, there is no way to fix this in the mastering process. Visualize your mix like baking a cake, all the ingredients must be in balance for it to come our correctly. The mastering process is the icing, a mastering engineer cannot apply icing to make the cake taste better but is unable remove ingredients that have already been baked or mixed!

**4. Be prepared to describe what you want.**  While all of the above steps are technical and deal with the audio file itself, you can help the mastering engineer (and yourself) by having a good idea of what you want beforehand. Suggestions of songs and albums you love the sound of is always appreciated so the mastering engineer knows how you intend to sound.

**5. Allow time for mastering in your timeline.**  This might be the most important tip. Many times your recording has taken much longer than expected, mastering becomes an afterthought and your cd is rushed to hit an already scheduled cd release or tour. Mastering can take a couple of days to 2 weeks in some cases. You will want to freedom to make adjustments, comments or even go back and fix your mixes if necessary to ensure you get your songs sounding the best they can be. Please allow for and build in ample time to master in your timeline – you will thank yourself for that extra day or two to make the adjustments or fixes needed and avoid regret.