



Beginner's Guide to Mix & Master Your Song

by Honeycomb Lab

“Mixing is translation. Mastering is presentation.”

— David Cody



1. What Is Mixing & Mastering?

Term	What It Means
Mixing (Levels, EQ, panning, FX)	Balancing the sounds in your track so everything is clear and sits well together.
Mastering (Final EQ, limiter, stereo balance, glue)	Polishing the final mix to sound louder, cleaner, and more consistent across all devices.

Think of it like this:



Recording is raw footage.



Mixing is editing.



Mastering is the final packaging.



2. What You Need (Budget-Friendly Tools)

✂ DAW with Built-in Plugins

- ✓ FL Studio (Demo works)
- ✓ Cakewalk by BandLab
- ✓ GarageBand
- ✓ BandLab (browser)
- ✓ Audacity (limited but usable)

 **All of these come with:**

- EQ
 - Compressor
 - Limiter
 - Reverb
 - Stereo panning
 - Some have analyzers too
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3. The Mindset for Mixing

Rule	Why It Matters
Less is more	Don't over-EQ, over-compress, or drown things in reverb
Fix problems, don't hide them	Use tools to solve, not cover up
Check constantly	Play your mix on headphones, phone, laptop, car
Save versions	Don't ruin a good mix trying to make it "perfect"

4. Step-by-Step Mixing Guide (Using Stock Plugins)


Step 1: Organize Your Project

- Label all your tracks: Kick, Snare, Lead Vocal, Adlib, etc.
 - Color code if your DAW allows it
 - Group things: Drums, Instruments, Vocals
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Step 2: Set Levels First

- Start with everything at 0 dB
- Mute all → bring in one sound at a time

- Set the Kick or Vocal as your anchor
- Balance the rest around them

 Tip: Trust your ears, not your eyes. Louder ≠ better.

✅ Step 3: EQ Everything

Track What to EQ

Kick Low boost (~60–100Hz), cut mud (~300Hz)

Snare Boost 200Hz–1kHz, add snap at 5kHz

Hi-Hats Cut lows below 500Hz

Bass Low-pass above 200Hz

Vocals High-pass at 80Hz, cut harshness at 2–4kHz, boost air at 7–10kHz

Melodies Carve out space — EQ depends on vocals/instruments

✂ EQ = “frequency sculpting.” You’re making room so tracks don’t fight each other.

✅ Step 4: Compression

Track What Compression Does

Vocals Keeps level consistent


Drums Adds punch & control

Bass Tightens volume spikes

Master Bus Glue everything together gently

Starter Settings (for most tracks):

- Ratio: 3:1
- Threshold: -20 dB
- Attack: 10 ms
- Release: 40–100 ms
- Gain: +3–5 dB

 Tip: If you hear “pumping,” back off the threshold or ratio.

✅ Step 5: Panning

Tip

Why

Keep kick, snare, bass, vocals in the center These are your anchors

Pan hi-hats slightly left/right

Adds stereo width

Pan backing vocals or melodies wider

Makes main vocal pop

✅ Step 6: Add Reverb (Sparingly)

Use short reverb for drums

Medium reverb for vocals

Plate or hall for background instruments

💡 Never drown things. Reverb should be *felt*, not heard.

✅ Step 7: Volume Automation

Use volume envelopes to:

- Turn up quiet parts of the verse
- Fade in/out transitions
- Duck vocals behind big snares or FX

✅ Step 8: Reference!

Play a commercial song you like next to your mix.

Check for:

Is the vocal too loud or quiet?

Is the kick punching or buried?

Is there enough bass?

Is anything harsh or dull?

Does it feel balanced left/right?

5. Step-by-Step Mastering Guide (Stock Only)

You're not trying to reinvent the mix — just polish it.

✅ Step 1: Export your final mix as WAV

- 24-bit
 - -6 dB headroom
 - No limiter or reverb on master
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✅ Step 2: Import into New Project

Only your final stereo WAV

Don't master inside the same mix project

✅ Step 3: Mastering Chain (Stock Plugins Only)

Slot	Plugin	What to Do
1	EQ	Small cuts to harshness (2–4kHz)
High shelf boost if needed (10–16kHz)		
2	Compressor	Light glue
Ratio 2:1		
Attack: 30ms		
Release: 60ms		
3	Limiter	Set ceiling to -0.1 dB
Push input until it's loud but not distorted		
4	Optional Stereo Enhancer	If mix feels too narrow, widen gently

 **Check on headphones AND phone speaker. It should still knock on both.**






No DAW? Try This:

- Use BandLab's free mastering tool online
 - Or try LANDR free tier for one-off masters
 - Or ask a friend with FL Studio or GarageBand
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6. Common Beginner Mistakes & How to Fix

Mistake	Fix
Vocal too loud	Lower it 1–2 dB. Compare to pro songs.
Master is too quiet	Use limiter. Push until it's loud without clipping.
Harsh highs	Cut 4–7kHz slightly in vocals or master EQ
Muddy mix	Cut 200–400Hz in instruments or vocals
Flat-sounding	Use gentle reverb or widen stereo image a little

7. Final Tips from Honeycomb Lab

-  Mix at medium volume — your ears get tired fast
 -  Take breaks! Fresh ears hear better
 -  Trust feeling over meters. If it *feels* right, it's right
 -  Save versions: Mix v1, v2, Final
 -  Mastering is not fixing the mix. It's enhancing it.
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You're Ready to Polish Your Track

You don't need pro gear to make a clean, loud, emotional song.

You just need:

- Some focus

- Some reference tracks
- A basic understanding of EQ, compression, and levels
- And your ears

You got this.

Next time you hear your song and say,

“Damn, I mixed that?”

— that’s when you know you leveled up.

Go make it loud.

Go make it clean.

Go make it *you*. 🎧 🔥