

Here are a list of tips to help you start thinking about the recording process. Even if you are a seasoned pro, please take a moment browse through them. My goal is to make you comfortable with the process so you can focus on your performance and creativity. If you have any questions, free to call me direct at 859-536-8245 to discuss your specific situation. Hope this helps, and c'ya soon!



## General tips

**Know your material!** I cannot stress this enough. Why pay by the hour to rehearse — when you came to record? Unless you have scheduled a songwriting or arranging session with me, have your parts already worked out before arriving in the studio. You came here to do some serious business. Bring your party energy to the studio, but leave the groupies *at home*, this includes significant others and your kids. It is best to minimize the distractions and stay focused on achieving the best product you possibly can. No drugs are allowed on the premises. Smoking is only allowed outside — there you can puff away to your hearts delight.

**Be comfortable with who you are** — it really reflects through in recordings. If you aren't getting along with your bandmates...well...work it out *before* you get here because things can get intense when you are playing the same thing over and over and over and over, and over and over...

**Rehearse only the songs that you'll be recording for at least two days before the session.** For clean starts, use an eight beat count-off instead of a four beat count-off, with the last two beats silent. (Example: 1 2 3 4, 1 2 - - )

Practice the songs straight through, including intros, endings, and dynamics. **Practice the songs with *and* WITHOUT the vocals.** Work out all your solos before you get to the studio.

**Get a good night's sleep** and make sure everyone is in a good mood before the session. Don't party.

**Keep up the rehearsals even after you have scheduled your session date(s).** If you have any doubts to your readiness for recording, then it's time to get back in the rehearsal. If possible, use a cheap 4 track recorder to pre-produce recordings. With one of these, you can go through the motions of what will happen in the studio, saving expensive studio time later.

Depending on how large your project is, I may require a deposit. Deposits are non-refundable with less than six months before the date(s), so **schedule your recording sessions only after you are ready** or are certain that you *will be* by the time your date(s) are here.

**Tip:** Make a checklist well ahead of your studio day. When *you* pre-plan, it allows us the opportunity to deliver a more polished product.

# What are you going for?

These might seem like obvious questions but they are critical. You need to communicate clearly to your producer and engineer: Are you doing a demo or a master? Who will be listening to it? Where and how will it be distributed?

Note that the costs of a demo are much lower than a master because your performance won't need to be "perfect" and the fine-tuning won't matter so much. Demos are made to get noticed or used as a promotional. Masters are made to generate sales, whether that be of CDs or concert tickets (which is how most artists recover their investment).

If you're in a band, you all need to agree what standard you're aiming for. It's not a good idea to call upon the engineer as umpire in the studio with the clock ticking.

**You will need to spend A LOT more time on rehearsal than you ever do in the studio.** Note that the consensus is that twelve to fifteen hours of studio time are required for a three — track demo with band and vocals.

An exercise you could try prior to going into the studio is to try to make an "exact" copy of a chart record closest to your type of music. Listen to the instrumentation, the production and particularly the use of multi-vocals.

**Think about arrangements *but let things evolve.*** Be aware that, however well rehearsed you are, it will never turn out *exactly* how you imagined it — that's the beauty of music.

# Choosing the studio and producer

"You're not just hiring the equipment, you're hiring the people", emphasizes Jim Bob of Carter USM, adding that with today's technology "you don't need to go to a big studio any more" to get a good sound.

In addition to helping you create arrangements, recording the instruments and even bringing in outside musicians and vocalists, Kevin can help you put together your web site and other multimedia materials. (see [www.kykev.com](http://www.kykev.com))

# Do you need Kevin to be part producer, or just strictly as an engineer?

Although both producers and engineers have very similar roles, the difference is usually clear cut. The difference in many cases is that the producer is the financial sponsor of the recording process, obtaining money from a record company in order to do this, or offering the use of house recording facilities free of charge.

A producer not only enables a recording, he or she is also involved in overall quality control, song selection, arrangements and performance and will usually be involved in rehearsals and gigs. A producer is also reimbursed through a percentage of record sales and performance royalties. Three per cent is common but

points can reach as high as fifteen. The duration of such a contract is typically 12 to 24 months. Rights to recordings may remain with the artist, producer, or record company depending on the contract.

Typically when working with Kevin, you are getting both an engineer and also a producer (or co-producer). But **you must clearly communicate** everyone's roles in advance to Kevin. Let him know how much or little input you want from him or from other band members/vocalists.

## Vocalists

**Don't blow out your voice the night before a session.** If you happen to have a gig — don't overdo it or you'll be worthless the next day for permanent voice recording. Don't eat dairy products (like milk, cheese, etc.) during the day of the recording session — seriously! Get some rest the night before — it really does help. You are the one right up front on the recording — everything shows through! Warm-up your voice (without stressing it!) on the way over in the car. Warm it up — don't blow it out.

## Drummers

Drummers should check that their stands, stools, and other hardware are in working order and are rattle and squeak-free, since these noises will be picked up and amplified *even more* by the microphones. WD-40 to kick and hi-hat pedals and drum throne.

**New heads are an *absolute* must. Please seat your heads at least a day** (preferably one week if you are not gigging heavily). If you plan on putting new heads or changing them during the session, also plan on additional billable hours...they will stretch and need to re-tuned often. Tune your drums so we can spend time on other areas! Enough said.

Cheap cymbals always sound cheap, so consider bringing good quality cymbals or renting if you need too. Bring plenty of spare sticks, and different types.

Most important...**DRUMMERS COME TO THE SESSION ONE HOUR BEFORE THE REST OF THE BAND!** Really! If you are paying per project or for a day rate, you will not be charged for coming in early. This allows your kit to be setup and gives it time to adjust to room temperature — while allowing the engineers to setup mic's and get starting levels while you tune/warm—up. This way the other band members are not waiting for you to setup, and listening to your kick 8,000 times in a row while we get a good fat sound.

## Guitarists and Bassists

Prepare your instrument to sound the best it can.

**An absolute must — NEW STRINGS one day before the session.** This goes for bassists too (it is easier to remove high frequencies than to try and boost what isn't there to begin with). Tune and break in the strings without wearing them out again. Then tune-up again. Check the intonation or get your ax adjusted by a pro after you put new strings on. Bring extra batteries and spare strings (yes bass players also) and plectrums with you.

**It is a good practice for ALL guitarists and bassists to use *the same* calibrated tuner.** Wherever and whenever possible — use the best cables you can afford. Be sure to allow you, your guitar, and your amp(s) to come to room temperature so there's no funny intonation going on. It is important to stay relaxed and have fun at the session. A common pitfall with inexperienced players is to play with too much pressure on the fretboard when you are tense — stay relaxed and keep it fun!

## During the session...

**Come prepared** to perform the songs you want to record. Treating a recording studio as a practice room is a very expensive hobby indeed.

Consider whether you need outside instrumentalists or vocalists and make arrangements accordingly. If needed, Kevin can help you locate musicians and vocalists. See also [www.themusicdifference.com/musician/](http://www.themusicdifference.com/musician/) .

**Wear comfortable clothing and remember to leave at home anything (jewelry, mobile phones etc.) that might make a noise and spoil the recording.**

Speaking of interruptions, **respect everyone's time by turning cell phones and pagers OFF when you get here** (mine will be off as well). Do NOT put them on vibrate either. **When a mobile device rings (even on vibrate), all kinds of interference is picked up by the recording equipment**, besides, we will work much faster without the interruptions. You can check your messages when we take breaks.

**Start the songs cleanly and wait till the tape is rolling before turning up your volume** (unless we've gated your instrument).

**Don't talk, play, or move for a count of ten after you finish a take.** Wait for the last notes to die away completely.

**Don't jam or play between takes or songs.** Either tune up or sit quietly. Messing about just wastes everybody's time.

You may have to change your normal amp settings to get a better recording sound. Sometimes your stage settings don't work in the studio and we may have to experiment to get your sound back — even to the point of switching amps or going directly into the mixer. **Place faith in your engineer.** He or she knows *their* room, equipment, and sound of their monitoring system much better than you, and will know how to get the most from their room. Unless you are intimately familiar with their monitoring environment, do not make EQ suggestions and so on while they are mixing. FYI, I prefer to work alone at the mixing and mastering stage anyhow.

**If you make a mistake during tracking, don't panic, but point it out.** Most of the time, we can punch in a replacement later. If one song isn't working as you want, forget that song and move on to another song, or we can take a short break if you prefer. Don't bother with "I'm sorry" or "I'll get it this time." You're just putting more pressure on yourself. Mistakes happen. Just relax and try it again.

Recording can be very stressful when you are new to it — don't make it any harder on yourself. **If you feel yourself getting tense about a song, suggest that we take a break.** A break after every couple of songs can help *a lot*. **Be open to suggestions and changes.** "Screw-ups" sometimes turn out great. Maybe you didn't hit the note you wanted — but the note you hit may be better.

**Get there in plenty of time to avoid stress**, particularly if the studio is hidden away or in a potential traffic jam area. Don't be coy about starting to set up in the waiting area. This will be time saved when the clock is ticking.

Once you're set up, **tune instruments carefully, including drums**, and run through your songs, although vocalists should hold back. You'll be hoarse by the end anyway but try to organize yourself so you last out the session.

This is when you'll start to feel really strange. Studios are alienating places. Depending on how your engineer is going to work your project, you may be wearing headphones. "You'll feel isolated and weird," says Eric Lindsay. The best remedy is to know what you're doing.

**If the headphones bother you too much, try freeing one ear** so you can hear sounds going on around you.

**Close your eyes and think about the consumer you have in mind**, whether A&R person, purchaser of your record or even your mother. Artists used to gig to make it, but nowadays they tend to use electronic media. Not only is raw humanity lost but the skill of being an entertainer also.

**Keeping those eyes closed, connect with your "audience"**, particularly if you're the singer. Be prepared to bear your soul in the studio to get the message of that love song across. Don't overdo it. Keep it honest. If yours is a rock number, "imagine you are on stage in front of hundreds of people", suggests Myles Wakeham. "Make the song come alive." Drummers in particular should not hold back.

**Record your best song first whilst you're fresh.** If recording a demo, this song should also be **track one** on your CD. The recipient may only listen to the first fifteen seconds of your vocal and then toss it in the can. You may also opt to start your recording session with your easiest song to sort of warm up.

In most cases, you will be laying down the rhythm/drum tracks along with a scratch vocal first, which are the foundation of a song. It may be necessary to play along to a click track (metronome), so make sure you are familiar with this.

If your song has vocals, the next step is to usually record a temporary guide vocal if you haven't already done so. Overdubbing guitars and keyboards follows. Then it's time for the real vocals, additional percussion and maybe some solo instrument lines to fill in the gaps.

**Do not skip taking lots of short breaks** (like 5 minutes) during the session. If you are tired and need to refresh, speak up! The engineer needs short breaks as well. Yes, you aren't paying us to sit around, but your work will be better for it. Some of the best takes happen directly following a short, refreshing break.

Other considerations are food, bottled water (particularly for the vocalists), a notepad and pen, money (cash is always good :-), and CD-R's, if the studio is not supplying these. A good book might help you through the duller moments. There is a lovely garden and patio out back where you can hang out and sip herbal tea when taking breaks. I'm a big fan of taking a long lunch break and there tons of excellent restaurants in Lex we can go to. If you have booked a large project and we have been recording all day, stick around and I'll treat you first class dinner in the back yard.

Unless yours is a very simple one or two hour project, **do not ask me to mix on the same day.** It is better to let your engineer mix *on their own* the next day when ears and ideas are fresh.

Always plan to do fewer tunes rather than a lot of tunes quickly. **If you are working on a limited budget and we have planned on recording 12 tunes or so over the period of two days, understand that there are compromises being made.** If you would like more time put in on your project for a more polished project, please increase your budget and let me know.

There is nothing worse than having lots of tunes you are embarrassed to play for people and nothing more satisfying than listening to a song you are completely pleased with.

Focus on bass, drums and lead vocal. It is critical that the bass and drums have a “locked” performance. **During the initial tracking session, view all the other tracks as support for an energetic, tight drum and bass pass.** If the other instruments nail a “keeper” part, consider it a blessing. Have the drum and bass players hold an extra rehearsal, otherwise, plan to overdub other parts to focus strictly on their performance, if possible.

**If your song has vocals, THEY are the most important part.** Without an outstanding vocal performance, lyrics, and melody the musicianship of the band is just wasted energy.

Analyze your song structure. Look for spice and other elements that will make the track more interesting. This could include percussion, background harmony parts, sound effects, guitar/key fills, etc.

**Gear checklist:** Bring with you: all amps/FX pedals/processors you could possibly use. Remember, the “best sounding” instrument/sound may not be the best for the track. Bring all guitars, keyboards and their stands, tuner, capo, picks, percussion (shaker, tambourine, congas, bongos, etc.), snacks (veggie tray, fruit tray, chips etc.)

**Typical workflow:** Although it's NEVER the same for every song or band, here is a typical scenario: Take 1: Levels for engineer — check headphone mix, players recall parts and generally “warm up.” Take 2: Parts are there but not as tight as necessary. Take 3: This one is picked over by the producer, engineer, and band members and suggestions might be offered to players. Take 4: Performance is usually there and tight. Take 5: Try to top #4. Compare these two for best take.

**Average times for one song:** 1 hour for main instruments, 1 hour additional instruments, 1½ hours for vocals, 1 hour for background vocals, ½ hour for adding spice (percussion/FX), 3 hours minimum for mix.

**Be prepared to spend quite a bit of time allowing the engineer to “get sounds”,** including changing microphones, microphone placement, drum tuning, player placement, etc. Time spent in a tracking session getting a great sound is deducted directly from mix time spent attempting to “fix” poor sounds. Never “fix it in the mix” unless absolutely necessary. Be assured, the session will go very quickly once the engineer is satisfied with all the sound and technical issues. This is not wasted time.

**Perform and practice to a click track or metronome when possible.** The studio reveals, in extreme detail, any tempo inconsistencies. The studio will provide you a click track if necessary.

**Do NOT bring friends of significant others to any sessions.** This is a time when the band needs to focus on each other. If we are having dinner in the backyard at the end of a day session, that is the perfect time for them to join us and hang. If the weather is nice, we can also set up the big screen in the back yard and watch a movie with dinner — the perfect way to cap off a long day of work!

If you're not actively involved in the tracking and mixing, utilize the studio lounge (back yard). Allow the participants to fully concentrate in the critical listening environment.

**Headphone mix:** Your engineer will work with you on your headphone mix. However, you won't hear your instrument in headphones as you're used to hearing it live. It may take some getting used to. Try lifting a headphone side off one ear to hear yourself better. Make sure to communicate and let them know exactly what you need in your phones.

## Very important:

This is one is a *biggie*, and one that MANY people overlook: **Provide all band members AND the engineer copies of the lyric sheets, and sheet music.** You would be amazed at how much time this saves us! I also read music, orchestral scores, etc...and it helps for me to follow along marking times and taking notes while tracking so we can go right to specific passages when re-recording and editing. It makes your session go much smoother. One of the benefits of having an engineer who is also a musician.

**Be prepared to be in the studio for a certain amount of time and to spend a certain amount of money.** Discuss this expectation in advance with your engineer so everyone's on the same page. The engineer will then work with you to keep the project within the time and monetary goals you have set. This prevents the distraction of worrying about how much it's going to cost. And if something you ask me to do is going to push you over your pre-established budget I can let you know BEFORE we do it. During the session, your primary goal should be to keep your focus on the creative process, not the administrative crap.

**Tuning OFTEN is important.** Even if you think you're in tune, please check it — especially after doing any leads or songs requiring a capo.

**Allow the engineer to make suggestions concerning your sounds or vocal performance.** For example: you may love the sound of your guitar cabinet with the bass EQ cranked, but the engineer is trained to view how the sounds fit into the mix and to look for sounds competing for the same frequency spectrum. He may explain that the bass boost in your cabinet will compete with the bass guitar in the mix and recommend a more neutral bass setting. This could apply to any instrument. The goal is not to make each instrument sound great by itself but to sound great in a mix with many other elements.

Finally, **at all cost, keep your session fun!** It will translate into the best finished product. Work through creative differences outside the studio and if tensions rise in the session, take evasive action. Move on to the next song and comeback to the one you're having trouble with, or take a break. Your attitude will come across on the finished product.

## Backup options

**You are responsible for backups.** Do not depend on me to archive your raw material. Storage is expensive, so if you plan on re-visiting your project at a later date, it is your responsibility to do so. In general, I keep recently recorded material for about one month after your session. After that, I archive the final two track masters and toss the rest of the material. You will not be able to return to the project unless you have taken responsibility for backups.

**Option 1:** The best way is to purchase a new off the shelf 80 gig hard drive and an Alesis HD24 caddie. In order to read the files, you (or another studio) will also need an HD24 or an Alesis Fireport Firewire adapter so

you can transfer the files into their favorite editor (WinXP). Total cost for the hard drive, caddie, and FirePort is about \$300. The benefit will be in the time savings (billable hours) when you are importing your material later.

**Option 2:** This option is not nearly as good or reliable, and requires considerable time on my end to make, but we can archive raw wave files on to CD-R's or DVD-R's if you prefer. When revisiting a project at a later date, or with another studio, it will take more time (money!) to prepare the tracks. Some projects will need 10 to 25 or more blanks (which you provide) and we will bill you (at a discounted rate) for burning the media. This option is *more expensive* for larger projects, but less expensive for smaller projects (one or two song demos may only require 3 or 4 cds and take an hour or so do burn). Price varies depending on how much data there is, so please ask for an estimate *at the very end of all your project*.

You should also ask for the track sheets for your session (if available). These are engineering notes that could help another engineer figure out what was done.

## What to do with your demo

Whether your demo is one song or three or more, you will want to ensure it reaches the right ears. If you're looking for a recording contract, this will include A&R managers from appropriate record companies. It is worth researching the foreign market here as it is perfectly possible to make it big in Germany, Iceland or Japan, for example, whilst remaining unknown in the United States.

Finally, don't underestimate the kudos a local radio DJ or independent station can enjoy from spotting a hit before everyone else. You might get a play and even an interview from them and, even though the top stations are long shots, lightning can strike. The local bookstores and music shops here in Lexington are very open to independent releases as well.

## Get a web site

One of the easiest ways for promoting your music is with a web site. Web site are *mainstream* for the music field...there really is **no excuse** for not having one. If you are not technically inclined, Kevin can help you pull all your materials together on a web site and tie them in with your existing marketing. See [www.kykev.com](http://www.kykev.com) for more info.

## Conclusion

At the end, thank the engineer or producer who has worked with you. You are welcome to listen to your material at the very end of a session, but no product leaves here (and that includes work tapes, pre-mixes on CD-R, data files, etc.) until your final bill or 100% of the estimated amount has been paid (if we are in the middle of a session and you want to take work files home). Cash is good. We can also do credit card online if you need to.

**All the best! And c'ya soon!**

