Professional Music Mixing Checklist

1. Session Preparation

Before touching any faders.

Project Setup

- Set correct **sample rate and bit depth** (usually 44.1k/48k, 24-bit).
- Confirm **BPM and time signature**.
- Name all tracks clearly.
- Color-code tracks (Drums, Bass, Synths, Vocals, FX).

Track Organization

- Group tracks:
  - Drum Bus
  - Instrument Bus
  - Vocal Bus
  - FX Bus
- Remove unused tracks.
- Align recordings to grid if needed.

Gain Staging

- Ensure no track peaks above **-6 dB**.
- Average levels around **-18 dBFS**.
- Disable unnecessary plugins.

2. Static Mix (Most Important Step)

No plugins yet.

Balance

- Set fader levels so everything is audible.
- Start with **drums and bass**.

Typical order:

1. Kick
2. Snare
3. Bass
4. Main instruments
5. Vocals
6. FX

Panning

- Kick → Center
- Snare → Center
- Bass → Center
- Lead vocal → Center

Spread instruments:

Example:

- Hi-hats → 10-30 L/R
- Guitars → 40-80 L/R
- Pads → Wide
- FX → Random/wide

Goal:

✓ Clear stereo field

✓ No masking

3. Drum Mixing

Kick

Checklist:

- High-pass around **25-35 Hz**
- Boost **60-100 Hz** for weight
- Cut **200-400 Hz** for mud
- Boost **3-5 kHz** for click
- Compression (3-6 dB reduction)

Snare

- High-pass **80-120 Hz**
- Boost **200 Hz** for body
- Boost **5-7 kHz** for snap
- Compression: medium attack

Hi-Hats / Cymbals

- High-pass **300-500 Hz**
- Add air **8-12 kHz**

Drum Bus

- Bus compression (1-3 dB)
- Optional saturation
- Optional parallel compression

4. Bass Mixing

Goals:

✓ Tight with kick

✓ Clear low end

Checklist:

- High-pass **20-40 Hz**
- Cut **200-350 Hz** mud
- Boost **700-1.5 kHz** for definition
- Compression (4-6 dB)
- Optional saturation

Kick vs Bass rule

If kick is **60 Hz**, bass should sit around **90-120 Hz**.

5. Mixing Instruments

Guitars

Checklist:

- High-pass **80-120 Hz**
- Cut **250-400 Hz** mud
- Boost **2-5 kHz** presence
- Double track for width
- Pan L/R

Synths / Keys

Checklist:

- High-pass **100-200 Hz**
- Reduce masking with vocals
- Add stereo width
- Use subtle chorus or delay

Pads

Checklist:

- High-pass **200-400 Hz**
- Spread wide
- Use reverb

6. Mixing Vocals

Cleanup

- Remove breaths (optional)
- Remove noise
- Clip gain for consistent levels

EQ

Typical:

- High-pass **80-120 Hz**
- Cut **200-400 Hz** mud
- Boost **2-5 kHz** presence
- Boost **10-15 kHz** air

Compression

Two stages often work best.

Compressor 1:

- Ratio: 3:1
- Reduction: 3-6 dB

Compressor 2:

- Gentle leveling

De-Esser

Target:

- **5-8 kHz**

Vocal FX

Common chain:

- Delay (1/4 or 1/8)
- Plate reverb
- Parallel compression
- Saturation (very subtle)

7. Depth & Space

Create **front-to-back depth**.

Reverb Types

Short room → drums
Plate → vocals
Hall → pads

Checklist:

- Use **send/return**, not inserts.
- High-pass reverb around **200-400 Hz**.
- Low-pass around **8-10 kHz**.

Delay

- Quarter note
- Eighth note
- Ping-pong stereo

Automate delay throws on vocal phrases.

8. Stereo Imaging

Checklist:

- Low frequencies **mono below 120 Hz**
- Pads and FX wide
- Lead elements near center
- Use stereo imager sparingly

Rule:

If everything is wide, nothing sounds wide.

9. Automation

Adds life to the mix.

Automate:

- Vocal levels
- Reverb send
- Delay throws
- Instrument levels
- Filter sweeps
- Mutes

Checklist:

✓ Chorus louder than verse
✓ Build energy through song

10. Mix Bus Processing

Keep subtle.

Typical chain:

1. **EQ**
    - Small cuts
2. **Glue compression**
    - Ratio 2:1
    - 1-2 dB reduction
3. **Tape saturation**
4. **Limiter (for preview only)**

Leave **-6 dB headroom** for mastering.

11. Reference Checking

Always compare to professional mixes.

Checklist:

- Similar genre reference
- Level match reference
- Check low end balance
- Check vocal level
- Check brightness

12. Mix Translation Tests

Test your mix everywhere.

Checklist:

- Studio monitors
- Headphones
- Phone speaker
- Car
- Laptop speakers
- Mono compatibility

13. Final Technical Checks

Before export.

Checklist:

✓ No clipping
✓ No unwanted noise
✓ Silence at start/end
✓ Correct fades
✓ Automation clean

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14. Export Settings

Typical export:

- WAV
- 24-bit
- Same sample rate as project
- No limiter if sending to mastering

Pro Mixing Habits

✓ Mix at **low volume**
✓ Take **ear breaks** every 30-40 minutes
✓ Use **reference tracks**
✓ Use **subtractive EQ first**
✓ Less plugins = better mix

Fast 10-Step Mixing Workflow (Quick Version)

1. Organize the session
2. Gain stage
3. Static mix
4. EQ cleanup
5. Compression
6. Drum bus processing
7. Reverb & delay
8. Automation
9. Mix bus glue
10. Reference and Export