YOUR BAND GUY BAND GUIDE TO

6-STEP CHECKLIST TO PRO MIXES (LOGIC EDITION)

Are you ready to STEP your mixes up? (get it? I'm sorry...)

If you are anything like me, when you start mixing you jump into it headfirst. EQ here, compress over there, bring this volume up, pan this a little more to the left.

I mixed like this for YEARS. And things would sound better at first, but my mixes NEVER sounded finished. They never sounded professional.

And this is because they weren't. In retrospect it's obvious why this wasn't working. I was focusing on the parts and not the bigger picture.

It wasn't until I started mixing with a plan that my songs started to actually sound professional.

And following this plan has changed everything. It's enabled me to mix pro sounding music ANYWHERE with any DAW.

So let's get right to it, what is this plan?

Step 1: Static Mix

Step 2: Master Track Processing

Step 3: EQ

Step 4: Compression

Step 5: Effects

Step 6: Automation

Before you start, I recommend you take a few minutes to make sure all of your editing is done and removing/bypassing all plugins on the master track and any plugins on individual tracks that aren't part of "the sound."

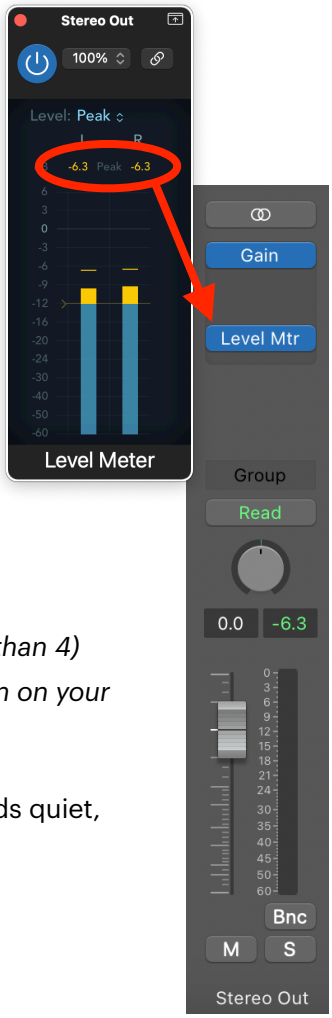
Specifically, take off any preset EQs, compressors, reverbs, etc. But obviously leave on any guitar amp plugins because they are definitely part of "the sound"

STEP 1: STATIC MIX

Goal: Get the mix as close to how you want it to sound in the final mix with **ONLY volume and panning.** Try to get the low end, width, and clarity you want before moving on.

Set the song to loop at the loudest part of the song, bring all of your faders all the way down, all of your pans to center, then bring tracks up in order of loudness and importance.

In a lot of mixes, this means **start with your kick, snare, and vocals then fill in around it.**



Tip 1: You need to **keep headroom** at the top of your mix so you don't get any digital clipping by mixing too loud.

Pull up the Level Meter plugin as the **last plugin on your master track (also called Stereo Out).**

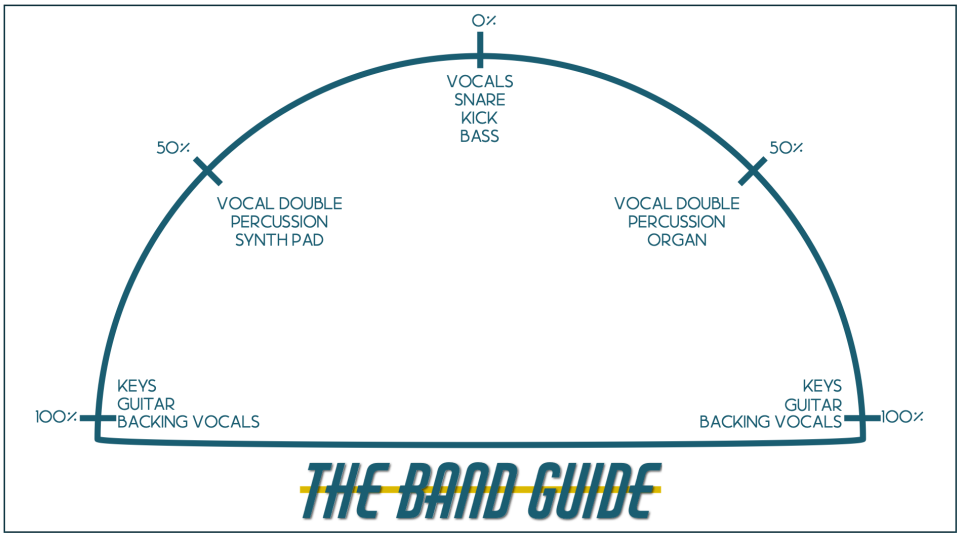
As you start bringing up your volume faders, make sure you **NEVER hit over -3db on the max indicator** (bottom right corner) in the loudest section of the song. If you start to get close or go over with only a few elements in, pull the volume down on those faders.

Pro Tip: If you start to get close or go over and you have a lot (more than 4) faders where you want them, just add a gain plugin as the first plugin on your master track and use that to turn it down.

*REMEMBER: Mixing is NOT about making your song loud. If it sounds quiet, turn up the output volume on your interface.

Tip 2: Take advantage of WIDE panning. If you want your mix to sound wide, some elements have to be panned 100% to either side.

Here's a helpful guide you can follow to get you started...



STEP 2: MASTER TRACK PROCESSING

Master track processing, or top down mixing, is key for a great mix. The master track (aka "Stereo Out") is one place that your entire mix runs through. By doing just a little processing here we can move our mix in the right direction and save time later in the process. When you are starting out, focus on just EQ and Compression.

Goal: Jumpstart your mix and get it sounding closer to the final product. This is SUBTLE processing on your master track but just a little bit can go a LONG way here.

EQ: Just the built in Channel EQ will do a great job here. **Focus on 3 areas**. The **low** (100hz and below), the **high** (3khz and above), and the **midrange** (200-600hz).

Does your mix feel muddy or dark? Try a small boost somewhere 3khz and above.

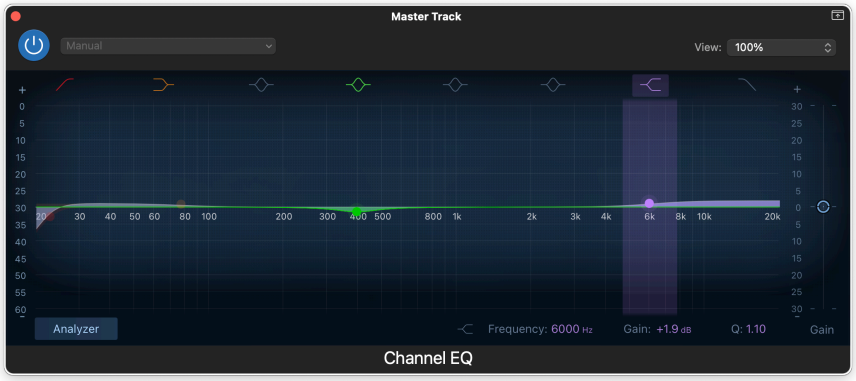
Does your mix feel harsh? Try a small cut 3khz and above.

Does your mix feel thin? Try a small boost 100hz and below.

Does your mix feel boomy? Try a small cut 100hz and below.

Does your mix feel boxy? Try a small cut somewhere between 200-600hz.

***NOTE: Keep all of these moves +/-3db or LESS (super small).**



Compression: We are using compression here to "glue" our track together. Again, think SUBTLE. I like to use the compressor set to "Vintage VCA" for this type of compression. Turn **Auto Gain OFF.**



Slow Attack: 10-30ms

Medium Release: 100ms+ or Auto

Ratio: 1.5, 2, or 3 (lower for lighter music, higher for louder music)

Threshold: Pull it down until you see the meter hitting around -1 to -4db.

Make-Up Gain: Use this to make up any gain turned down by the compressor (typically somewhere between 0.5db and 2db).

STEP 3: EQ

This is the first step where we are actually processing individual tracks!

Goals: **1) Minimize the BAD**

2) Highlight the GOOD

3) Make SPACE for every source

Put another way: Reduce muddiness and harshness, add fullness and clarity, and create space for everything to fit in your mix.

I know EQ can look intimidating, but it doesn't have to be. It's really broken down into **2 moves** (boost or cut) **and 6 zones.** Use this guide to determine what you need on your individual sources.



Tip 1: If you struggle to hear EQ, boost it like CRAZY to hear the frequencies, find something that sounds good or bad (depending on your goal) then reduce it to a more reasonable range.

Tip 2: Most EQ moves will end up somewhere around +/-4-6db. Do as little as you can, but as much as you need. Almost every mix I have at least one EQ move that might be +/-9-15db!

STEP 4: COMPRESSION

Compression is one of the least used and understood mixing tools by people starting out but most used by pros. Don't let it get confusing, try to think of it in the simplest terms:

Compression is an automatic volume fader.

When a sound **gets too loud**, the compressor will **turn it down**. **(Threshold)**

How quickly it turns it down will affect how it sounds. **(Attack Time)**

- If it's slow to turn it down, that initial hit will be let through and make it **extra punchy (great for drums).**
- If it's super fast to turn it down, it will clamp down on that hit and make it **smoother and less punchy**.

How quickly it turns it back up will determine how much the quieter parts are impacted. **(Release Time)**

And finally, you'll use **make up gain to balance the volume** so you don't lose any volume along the way.

Goals: Add punch, add sustain, contain the dynamics, or add presence.

Think of the loudest and the quietest points of your audio. If you turn down the loudest parts, you'll be able to hear the quieter parts better.

If your kick isn't cutting through the mix well enough, compression can make it punchier so you hear/feel it more.

If a word on a vocal is getting lost, compressing the louder words will make that quieter word louder.

If you want your bass to sustain more, compressing the louder part and slowly letting off the release will allow the sustain of the bass to be more present.

Pro Tip: Turn OFF auto gain on the stock Logic Compressor.

STEP 5: EFFECTS

When it comes to balancing and highlighting through a sense of SPACE in your mix, effects are the tool(s) for you. And by effects, we are only really talking about **reverb and delay.**

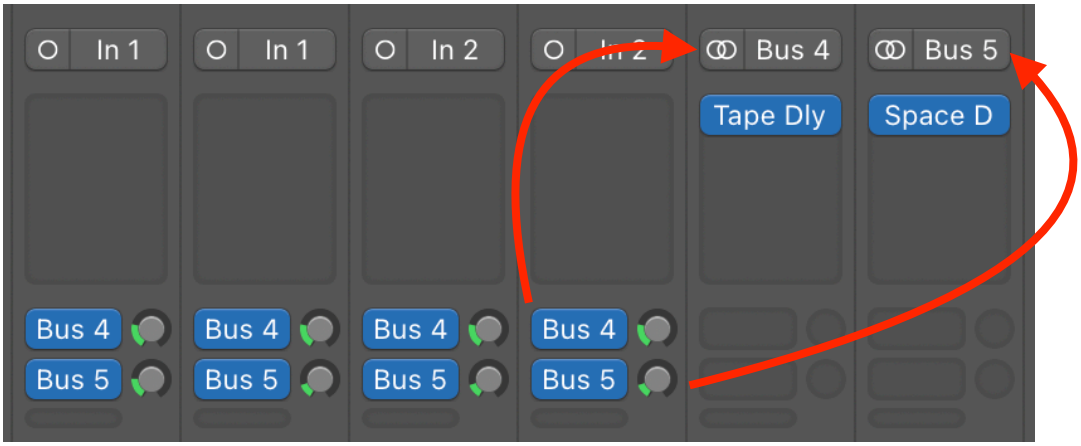
The most common effects in professional mixes are:

1. **Room reverb:** a small, realistic space for most (or all) of your parts to live in.
2. **Medium- long reverb:** typically on vocals or on a part that needs to sit further back in the mix
3. **Timed delay:** Typically on vocals to make them sound huge, lush, and interesting.
4. **Slapback delay:** typically used on lead vocals (and other lead elements) to add thickness, warmth, and sometimes width.

Now, before you go adding reverb to everything- it's worth noting that reverb is often VERY subtly used in pro mixes. Be intentional and often scale it back just a

little bit. **The best effects are often felt not heard.** If you're not careful, you can end up turning your clean and clear mix into a muddy, cloudy mess.

Another important thing to note is that in a lot of cases using **effect sends (aka buses)** are huge time savers and can lead to a more cohesive sound in your mix. An effect send is a track with just reverb or delay on it and you can send your other tracks to that reverb/delay and it will subtly mix in underneath your track. Instead of setting up 100 reverbs and delays through your mix, you only have to set up 3 or 4.



By creating a bus I have way more control over the sound of the effect and can tailor it to fit perfectly in the mix (add eq, chorus, distortion, etc). I also get more control over the automation of it which leads me to...

STEP 6: AUTOMATION

Automation is so cool.

Back in the day to do automation on an analog console you'd have to manual turn up faders and twist knobs in real time along with the track. Mess up? Too bad. Need to turn more than 2 things at once? You have to hire a second engineer or intern to turn knobs for you.

Now we can just tell your DAW to turn up those faders and twist those knobs for us. And there's no limit on what you can tweak and how many things can be tweaked at once.

A big mistake a lot of people make is that they automate the volume WAY too early. Compression will do most of your volume balancing, so you want to save automation for the very end and use it as a final touch.

To bring up automation in Logic just press “a” on the keyboard.

Once it’s up you can select what you want to automate from the drop down menu on the track you want to automate.

As I mentioned, you can automate anything. But some **common things to automate are:**

- **Lead Vocal volume:** making sure every word can be heard and the vocal feels SUPER close and upfront for the listener (also called “vocal riding”)
- **Pan Knobs:** having the pan of some elements move in key moments of the song can be very interesting and engaging
- **Effects:** It’s very common for effect levels to shift throughout the song. For example, vocal effects are often louder in the choruses and quieter in the verses

Always plan some time to automate at the end of your mix, but don’t spend forever on it (you can spend 10x longer automating than you did mixing if you let yourself)!

And that's it! You've finished your mix!

But here's a quick little bonus tip for you.

You know how I said mixing is NOT for making your song loud? Well that's true. Mastering is when we make our song loud. **But what if you just want to quickly make your song louder** to take it out to the car or to listen to on your phone?

Easy.

1. Go to the **master track** (stereo out) and change your setting on your Level Meter to **Peak & RMS**
2. **Add an Adaptive Limiter plugin** BEFORE the Level Meter but AFTER your EQ and compression
3. Set **Output Ceiling** to **-1db**
4. **True Peak Detection: ON**
5. **Increase the Gain** on the limiter until you are seeing **around -12db on your RMS meter** in a loud section of your song (but *listen* and make sure it's not making your mix sound weird and pump-y).

FAQ

Why this order?

1. We are working working from broadest changes to smallest changes
2. Each step affects the next step

In the static mix, we set the volume and pan to the exact right levels. These settings are going to impact the EQ moves and compression settings we set on the master track. The master track processing will impact the EQ moves we make on individual channels. We don't want to compress before we EQ because, unless we have a 100% perfect recording, then we will be bringing up the bad along with the good through a compressor. And finally, all of the volume, panning, EQ, and compression settings we set in steps 1-4 will impact how we apply effects and when and what we automate.

What if I want or need to do something out of order?

It's 100p okay to go back to fix something, but try to completely nail each step before moving onto the next, and never skip steps.

FINAL THOUGHTS

YOU GOT THIS! You have all the tools you need to make GREAT sounding music RIGHT NOW. Don't worry about if you have the right plugins, sample packs, DAW. You already do, you just have to learn how to use it to its fullest potential and I am here to help.

Was this guide helpful to you? Let me know! Hit me up at: bandguy@thebandguide.com

Your band guy,

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If you want to learn EVERYTHING you need to know about mixing directly from me, you will love my complete course on mixing: ***Ultimate Mixing System***

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