



Guitarist Studio Survival Guide

Producer Conversation

In order to prepare properly for any tracking session, it is crucial to have an in-depth conversation with the producer/engineer prior to going into the studio. You will want to discuss their process, what to expect, what gear you will be using, who will be doing the tracking, etc. Having a clear picture of the end to end process will relieve pain points that could occur otherwise.

Mental Prep

Tracking can be an intense process and it is important to be prepared to be pushed in the studio. The number one rule here is to check egos at the door. Keeping an open mind, and being open to try different things will only make the record better. A good producer will ask you to do it again and again... and again. You may be asked to record a part that isn't yours, and you may even have to give up recording your favorite part because someone else can record it in a way that serves the song better. The end goal should always be to make the best possible record, and keeping a positive mindset through these challenges will make for a much better studio experience.

Song Prep

It should go without saying - but, LEARN YOUR SONGS before entering the studio! I mean, REALLY learn them. If you have to stop and practice each section while tracking your producer is not going to be stoked, and you will be wasting time and money. Take the time to practice as much as you can before heading to the studio, and you will reap the benefits of having additional time to experiment in the studio instead of blowing a ton of time trying to nail that one part you could have been practicing.

Gear

Having your gear dialed for tracking is a big part of having a great experience. There's nothing worse than not being able to perform well because your gear is malfunctioning. Removing these variables will result in better takes and a more efficient tracking session.

- Guitar

Before tracking it is crucial that you have your guitar setup properly. I highly recommend having your local professional do a full setup on your guitar, paying special attention to the exact tuning you will be recording in. An important thing to consider is if you will be traveling a long distance to the studio you will be recording at. Changes in temperature, humidity, and the abuse of traveling are all factors in this equation. If this is the case, do your research(or ask your producer) and find a local shop near where you will be recording to perform the setup.

- Strings

Nothing sounds worse than a dead set of strings. No exceptions here, change your strings!!! Typically, I recommend 1 set of fresh strings for each song you will be recording on rhythm guitar(1 stereo set of tracking), 1 set of strings for every 2-3 songs for lead tracking. If you are heavy handed, or sweat a lot while playing, you may need to change strings for each side of stereo rhythm tracking. Get to know your playing, and expect that your engineer should be listening for the condition of your strings.

- Picks

Believe it or not, picks change your tone quite a bit. In addition to bringing a ton of your favorite picks, I recommend experimenting with a few different picks to get used to the feel of different picks, but also to see which picks may work/sound better for different types of riffs. I recommend having all of these options- a Jazz III style pick in nylon and tortex, Standard style pick in nylon and tortex, and a TIII style pick in nylon and tortex for a happy medium. .88 is by far my favorite thickness for general rhythm tracking. You can go up or down depending on the part and tone you like.

- Strap

Pretty simple here. If you stand while you play, make sure you have a strap that isn't going to drop your guitar while you're nailing that fully diminished sweep section. Only recommendation here is a big comfy strap to maintain comfort on long sessions, and maybe some strap locks.

- Footrest

A largely overlooked piece of gear. If you sit while you play, having something to put your foot on can add a lot of comfort and help with accuracy in your playing. You can buy a fancy nylon string players footrest, or go low tech with a coffee can or a box.

- Pedals

Using your own pedals while tracking is common. If you're going to use your own, make sure they are properly functioning, and you have the necessary batteries or power supplies for them.

- Cables

Studios will generally have a nice selection of top shelf cables for you to plug into. If you will be using your own cables, make sure they are of a high quality and in good order. Although subtle, cables will affect your tone, and longer cables will have more of an effect than shorter cables.

- Amp/Cab

As with your guitar, having your amp and cab in top shape is a must. Be sure to take your amp serviced by a professional before entering the studio, and check to make sure your speakers are in good shape. Oftentimes, you will be using amps/cabs that are in the studio, and they may even have the same gear that you have. Check with the studio for a gear list. Bonus tip: If your homie has a dope amp/cab the studio doesn't have, see if you can borrow it for another option.

Final Thoughts

If you take the time to prepare and remove as many variables as possible, you will maximize your time and money in the studio and be able to produce the best possible recording. Lastly, remember to have fun. The best recording sessions I've had are always the ones with the most laughter!

Cheers!