

Cubase mastering workbook

Prepare the mix, build a four-stage master chain, hit -14 LUFS with -1 dBTP without crushing it, then deliver the right files.

Preparing the mix and building a master chain

Lesson 07 · 14 min

Mastering starts in the mix: export a stereo file peaking around -6 dBFS with no limiter on the master, then open it in a fresh Cubase project. Mastering your own mix in the same project is possible but tempting — you will keep fixing the mix instead of finishing it.

A master chain is usually four modest moves in this order: corrective EQ, gentle compression or a tape-style saturator, tonal EQ, then the limiter. Each stage should be a decibel or two, not a rescue.

DO THIS

- 01 Export the mix: 24-bit WAV, project sample rate, master fader at 0, no limiter, peaks near -6 dBFS.
- 02 New project → import the file → insert Frequency EQ, Compressor, Maximizer in that order.
- 03 Corrective EQ first: high-pass at 25 Hz, then no cut or boost larger than 1.5 dB.
- 04 Compressor: ratio 1.5:1, slow attack (30 ms), auto release, threshold for 1–2 dB reduction on choruses only.

Check yourself — Bypass the whole chain. The unmastered mix should already sound like the record, just quieter and softer around the edges.

Loudness: LUFS, true peak and the Maximizer

Lesson 08 · 15 min

Streaming services normalise, so chasing maximum loudness costs you dynamics and gains you nothing. Target roughly -14 LUFS integrated for streaming, with true peak at -1 dBTP. Louder masters are fine for club or CD delivery, but they are a separate render, not the default.

Cubase's Loudness Track and the Control Room meter both read integrated LUFS. Set the target, then push the Maximizer's input until you land — if you need more than 4–5 dB of limiting to get there, the mix balance is the real problem.

DO THIS

- 01 Enable the Loudness Track (Project → Add Track → Loudness) and run an offline analysis of the whole song.
- 02 Set the Maximizer output ceiling to -1.0 dB and enable true-peak detection.
- 03 Raise the input in 0.5 dB steps until integrated loudness reads about -14 LUFS.
- 04 Check the loudest chorus for pumping and flattened transients; back off 1 dB if the drums lose their snap.

Make it yours — Render one master at -14 LUFS for streaming and one 2 dB louder for club play. Label the files clearly so you never send the wrong one.

References, final checks and delivery

Lesson 09 · 13 min

A reference track is the only reliable way to hear your own master. Import two commercial songs you love in the same genre, drop their levels so they match your loudness, and switch between them.

Match by loudness or you will simply prefer whichever is louder.

Then deliver properly. A 24-bit WAV at the project rate is the master; a 16-bit 44.1 kHz version with dithering is for CD; the MP3 is only for listening and emailing. Fade-outs, a half-second of silence at the top and correct metadata are part of the job, not an afterthought.

DO THIS

- 01 Import two reference tracks, gain-match them to your master, and A/B on three systems: monitors, phone speaker, earbuds.
- 02 Trim the start to leave 0.3–0.5 s of silence and draw a short fade-out on the last event.
- 03 Export the master at 24-bit WAV; export a second version at 16-bit 44.1 kHz with dither for CD delivery.
- 04 Export a 320 kbps MP3 for listening, fill in the ISRC and title metadata, and archive the project folder.

Check yourself — Sleep on it. Play the master first thing the next morning against the references; the mistakes you cannot hear tonight are obvious in twelve hours.

CHECKLIST

- ☐ Mix exported at 24-bit, peaks near -6 dBFS, no master limiter
- ☐ Master chain: corrective EQ → compressor → tonal EQ → limiter
- ☐ Integrated loudness about -14 LUFS, true peak -1 dBTP
- ☐ Loudness-matched A/B against two reference tracks
- ☐ 0.3–0.5 s of silence at the start, fade at the end
- ☐ 24-bit WAV master, 16-bit dithered CD copy, 320 kbps MP3