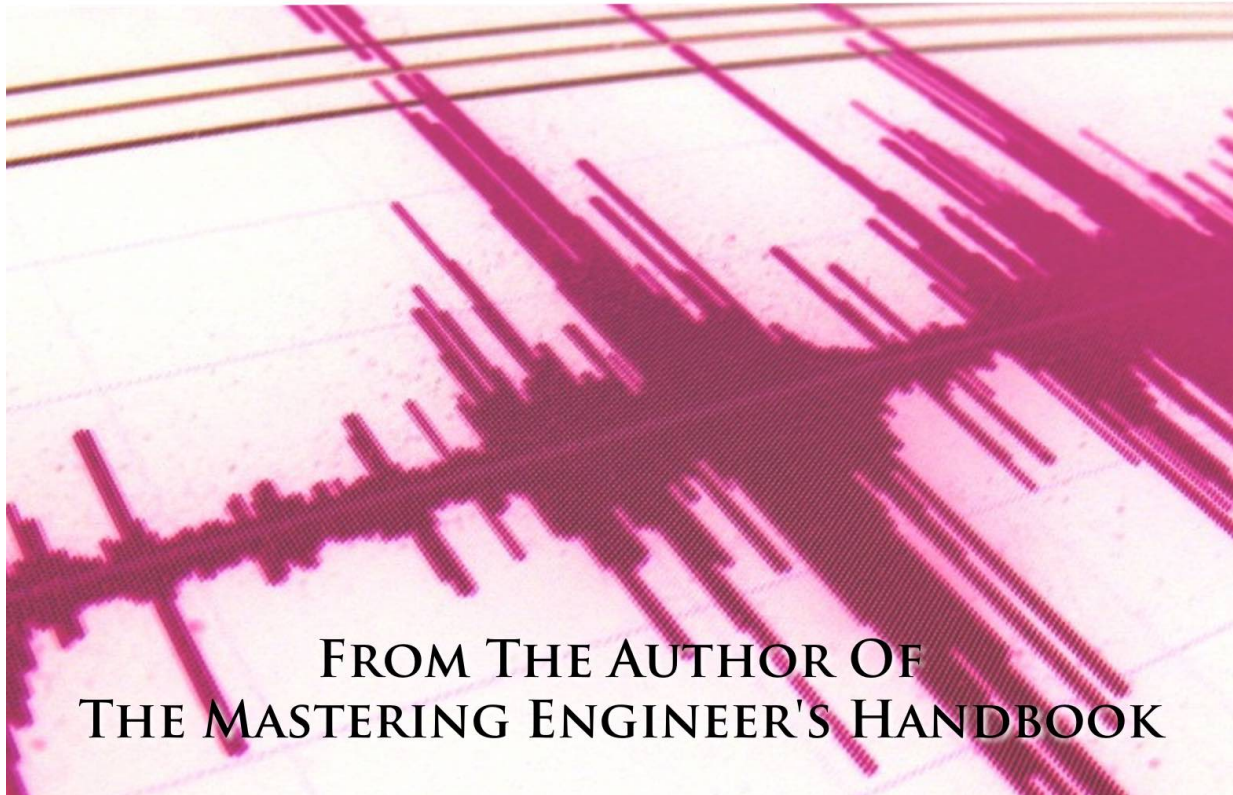


BOBBY OWSINSKI'S

# MASTERING YOUR SONGS IN 6 STEPS

Tips For Successfully  
Mastering Your Own Music



FROM THE AUTHOR OF  
THE MASTERING ENGINEER'S HANDBOOK

# ***Mastering Your Songs In 6 Steps***

*Tips for Successfully Mastering Your Own Music*

by Bobby Owsinski

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# Mastering Your Songs In 6 Steps

We know that it's a lot better to have a pro master our recordings than to try to do it ourselves, but that's not always possible. Usually it's a matter of money, since a professional mastering job may cost more than the original recording in some cases. If you're reading this it probably means that you're on a budget so your only alternative is to try to master your music yourself.

When I began writing the latest edition of [\*The Mastering Engineer's Handbook\*](#), one of the things that I wanted to find out from some of the mastering greats was how they approached a project. In other words, what were the steps they took to make sure that a project was mastered properly. Interestingly, the majority of them follow 6 primary steps, some consciously followed and some unconsciously.

Following these steps just like the mastering greats do will ensure that not only will your project sound better, but you'll avoid some of the pitfalls of mastering your own material as well.

*NOTE: What you won't read is how to use the compressor or EQ (there's lots of info already available on that). Instead, you'll get the nitty-gritty of what mastering engineers really do.*



# 1. Listen to all the tracks

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If you're listening to a collection of tracks such as an album, the first thing to do is listen to brief durations of each song (10 to 20 seconds should be enough) to find out which sounds are louder than the others, which ones are mixed better, and which ones have better frequency balances.

By doing this you can tell which songs sound similar and which ones stick out. Inevitably, you'll find that unless you're working on a compilation album where all the songs were done by different production teams, the majority of the songs will have a similar feel to them, and these are the ones to begin with.

After you feel pretty good about how these feel, you'll find it will be easier to get the outliers to sound like the majority than the other way around.



## **2. Listen to the mix as a whole, instead of hearing the individual parts**

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Don't listen like a mixer, don't listen like an arranger, and don't listen like a songwriter.

Good mastering engineers have the ability to divorce themselves from the inner workings of the song and hear it as a whole, just like the listening public does.



# 3. Find the most important element

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On most modern radio-oriented songs, the vocal is the most important element, unless the song is an instrumental.

That means that one of your jobs is trying to make sure that the vocal can be distinguished clearly.

This can be achieved with a combination of EQ and compression.



# 4. Have an idea of where you want to go

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Before you go twisting parameter controls, try to have an idea of what you'd like the track to sound like when you're finished.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is there a frequency that seems to be sticking out?
- Are there frequencies that seem to be missing?
- Is the track punchy enough?
- Is the track loud enough?
- Can you hear the lead element distinctly?





## 5. Raise the level first

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Unless you're extremely confident that you can hear a wide frequency spectrum on your monitors (especially the low end), concentrate on raising the volume instead EQing.

You'll keep yourself out of trouble that way.



## 6. Adjust the song levels so they match

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One of the most important jobs in mastering is to take a collection of songs like an album, and make sure they each have the same relative level.

Remember that you want to be sure that all the songs sound about the same level at their loudest.

Do this by listening back and forth to all the songs and making small adjustments in level as necessary.

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***Remember:*** *Even if you can't get the songs to sound just like your best sounding CD, you're mastering job will only be considered "pro" if you can get all the songs to sound the same in tone and volume!*

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# Bonus: 2 Compression And EQ Tips And Tricks

**Tip #1: The key to getting the most out of a mastering compressor is the *Attack* and *Release* parameter controls.**

These have a tremendous overall effect on a mix and therefore are important to understand.

In a typical pop style mix, a fast attack setting will react to the drums and reduce the overall gain. A slower attack to let the drum transient through will result in a punchier sounding track.

**Tip #2: Keep comparing the EQ'd version with the original version as well as other songs that you're mastering.**

The idea of mastering, first of all, is to make the song or program sound better with EQ, not worse.

Don't fall into the trap where you think it sounds better just because it sounds louder. The only way to do this well is to have the levels pretty much the same between the EQ'd and pre-EQ'd tracks.

That's one of the reasons why [IK Multimedia's T-Racks](#) works great for DAW mastering. It has an A/B function that allows you to compensate for the increased levels so that you can really tell if you're making it sound better or not.



# Get 4 Free Mixing Tricks!

I've been collection mixing tricks for a long time from some of the greatest mixers of all time - guys who have mixed legendary acts like The Beatles, Rolling Stones, The Who, Toto, Eric Clapton, Bonnie Raitt, Steely Dan and The Eagles to contemporary stars like Beyonce, Black Eyed Peas, Pink, Shania Twain, Blake Shelton and Lady Gaga.



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# About Bobby Owsinski

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Producer/engineer Bobby Owsinski is one of the best selling authors in the music industry with 24 books that are now staples in audio recording, music, and music business programs in colleges around the world, including *The Mixing Engineer's Handbook*, *Social Media Promotion For Musicians*, *Music 4.0: A Survival Guide For Making Music In The Internet Age* and more.

He's also a contributor to Forbes writing on the new music business, his popular blogs are nearing 6 million visits, and he's appeared on CNN and ABC News as a music branding and audio expert.

Visit Bobby's music production blog at [bobbyowsinski.blogspot.com/](http://bobbyowsinski.blogspot.com/), his Music 3.0 music industry blog at [music3point0.blogspot.com](http://music3point0.blogspot.com), his Forbes blog at [forbes.com/sites/bobbyowsinski/](http://forbes.com/sites/bobbyowsinski/), his podcast at [bobbyoinnercircle.com](http://bobbyoinnercircle.com), and his website at [bobbyowsinski.com](http://bobbyowsinski.com).

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