



# SMART MIXING

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

### **INTRODUCTION (2)**

THE DILEMMA

WHERE TO START

### **THE PROCESS (4)**

TAKE NOTE

THE MIXING CYCLE

# INTRODUCTION

## THE DILEMMA

Hey guys, Brenden Bytheway That Audio Guy. I know there is so much information out there about audio. So many people say to do one thing and other people say to do the opposite. So you feel like you're stuck. **Where do you go?** How do you know what's right and what's wrong?

Well the truth is, none of it is wrong. And technically, none of it is "correct". I hate that term in mixing. There is no correct way of doing anything in mixing. **If it sounds good, it works.** That's where people stumble. At That Audio Guy, we focus on teaching concepts and ideas that have helped me to be able to work with some of the biggest brands in the world and have my music heard by over a billion people.

## WHERE TO START

When I first started I was lost. I was missing a sense of direction. I didn't have a clear, linear path to making better music. There was no process. It all felt so random. I was able to find a YouTube channel that I really connected with, but I just sat and vegged out on all of the videos. When they said things like, "Ok, so let's pull up our EQ and throw a high-pass

on that, because you all know what that does..." I'd sit there and think, "Actually, no. I don't know what that does. I don't know what that is." I wasted hours staring at my screen trying to figure out where to start.

Over the years I've identified patterns that keep popping up. **There are trends with all mixes**, regardless of musical style. Steps that I find myself taking every single time I mix in order to get the results I want. Let me show you.

# THE PROCESS

## TAKE NOTE

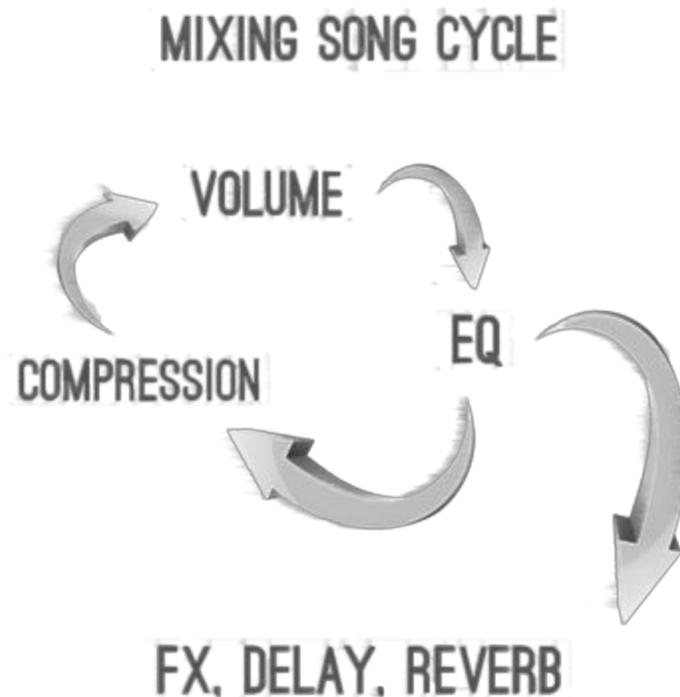
Every time I sit down to a mix, the first thing I do is take notes. Lots of notes. I like to tackle them in this order:

- What is/are the main element(s) of this mix? What is the “lead” instrument/voice that needs to be heard?
- What needs help? (Referring to an instrument or track that wasn’t recorded well.)
- What should stand out more? In what areas is this mix lacking? (Referring to EQ spectrum, imagery, depth, largeness of mix, spatial placement of the mix, etc.)

Why do this? Does an airline pilot take off without a flight plan? Taking notes will give you an overview of where you want to go. Way too many people start their mix reaching for their awesome-looking plugins without having any idea what they’re going to do with them. So take note: always start a mix by taking notes. Give yourself a plan of where you want to go.

## THE MIXING CYCLE

Now that we know where we want to go with our mix, how do we get there? The process that I tend to follow every time I mix music is simple enough to understand. I call it the mixing cycle.



## VOLUME BALANCE/GAIN STAGING

This is where the mix begins. It's important to get all the tracks to sit well with each other first by **ONLY using your volume fader. DO NOT TOUCH A SINGLE PLUGIN.** It isn't going to sound perfect, but it will give you an idea of the steps

you need to take in order to reach your mix goals. How will you know how to shape tracks with EQ or bring them forward with compression if they aren't sitting relatively close to where they will be in the final mix?

So where do you start? I like to start by grouping instruments. For example, you could start by balancing the entire drum set. Get it to sound natural and how you want it to sound in the final mix. From there, send it to a bus or group and treat it as one track. Now, instead of focusing on the kick and snare in the mix, you're focusing on the drum set as a whole. I similarly balance pianos, pads and synths, guitars, vocals, etc.. After your groups are in place, you're only working with a handful of tracks. If the drums need to come up, they come up as a whole. Now you're not micromanaging. This will save you hours.

Proper gain staging gives you clear direction. You can see exactly what you have to work with. Some things you initially thought were problematic may not be so bad once you turn the volume down. So don't skip it. Gain staging sets the stage for your entire mix.

## **EQ**

After the mix is balanced, we move to the next stage in the cycle. Learning to make the right moves with an equalizer could possibly be the most important skill an engineer can develop. If volume balance is a doctor's visit, then EQ is surgery. How do the elements of your song sit together? Are there different tracks in the mix that have competing frequencies? Is the mix harsh, muddy, or boxy? The EQ stage is where the elements of your song find their happy place.

What is EQ? EQ is a "surgical" tool designed to enhance what's good about your mix or clean up what's not working. It's surgical because we have control over select frequencies of a track. This allows you to tame unwanted information without turning down the whole track. Hearing different frequencies and how they are interacting in your mix will take time to develop. The EQ stage is really where your mix will start to find its clarity, warmth, and balance.

## **COMPRESSION**

After EQ comes compression. Compression is one of the most powerful, yet misunderstood tools in mixing. It gives your tracks punch. It gives them life. People say compression is what glues your tracks together. But what does that even

mean? Don't let compression scare you. Think of it as a scarecrow. From far away it looks like a dead guy hanging on a stick. But once you approach, you'll find something a lot less scary. Compression allows us to glue our tracks together by controlling the dynamics. It allows us to bring the peaks of our signal down and the body, or average level, up. It can bring elements of your mix to the front, but can also destroy impact if not controlled properly.

So how do you know if you're doing it right? Your music should sound musical. There is no right or wrong way to use a compressor. It is a musical tool. And depending on your source, there is a certain sweet spot where it gives your track life that it didn't have before. Push it too far, however, and you might kill it. Have you ever heard a dry vocal recording? Even if the singer gives a great performance, it's going to sound a little on the dull side. A compressor can massively enhance that vocal and do wonders. Keep it musical. Too many people overthink compression. Let it become your friend and you'll see how helpful it can be.

## **RINSE AND REPEAT**

Volume balance, EQ, and compression are the three pillars of mixing. Find harmony between the three and you will be churning out amazing mixes that you didn't think were possible. Treat each stage of the mixing cycle as if that were your last. Don't rely on the next stage to fix things. Do whatever it takes to get a "radio ready track" before moving on to the next step. If you feel like there are still things you're missing, restart the cycle.

I often get asked, "How long should a mix take?" There is no right or wrong answer. I've had mixes where I've spent hours in the cycle to get the mix where it needed to be. I've also had mixes where one cycle was enough. The key is to plan ahead and to have a process that keeps you on track while also encouraging you to be creative.

## **SWEETENING**

I like to save FX, reverbs, and delays for the last stage of mixing. These tools exist to enhance your mix. After messing with sweetening, I almost always jump back into the cycle to address new issues. And yeah, there are going to be times where delay and reverb and some FX play a role in creating the vibe for your main track. However, for the most part, I

like get the mix to a point that I'd be comfortable to release it as is before hitting the sweetening stage. That way, my near perfect mix will only be enhanced. Bake the cake first, then put the frosting on top.

# WHAT NOW?

## THE CALL

We have a product and we want you to use it. We created That Audio Guy because we want to change people's lives and the way they interact with audio. We wanted to create a central resource, a hub, for other passionate creatives looking to bypass everything slowing them down. **We wanted to create the solution.**

- How do I make my music sound the way it does in my head?
- How can I market my music and grow an audience?
- Can I earn money making and producing music?
- How do I deal with clients?

Let me share with you what I've learned. Head over to [itsthataudioguy.com](http://itsthataudioguy.com) to find out more.