



KMJ45 FIELD GUIDE · MIXING

Top *Five* Mixing Mistakes to Avoid

The secret to exceptional masters isn't always in the mastering. More often, it's in the mix.

SERIES

KMJ45 Field Guide

FOCUS

Mix → Master

BY

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BEFORE I START

Great masters start with great mixes. Mastering wizardry cannot rescue a problematic mix, so the most valuable work nearly always happens *before* a track ever reaches the mastering stage.

At Studio KMJ45 I have spent two decades watching how mixing decisions determine mastering outcomes. Since 1999, working with everyone from major labels to underground talent, I have seen the same five errors compromise results again and again. Address them before mastering and you will dramatically improve the final product. Here they are.

01

LOW END

THE MISTAKE

Excessive Low-End Buildup

Uncontrolled bass frequencies below 200 Hz create a muddy foundation. Mastering compression only exaggerates it, leaving a weak, unfocused sound.

POTENTIAL REMEDIES

- 01 High-pass non-bass elements strategically, reserving the lowest frequencies for kick and bass.
- 02 Apply multiband compression on the low frequencies to tame peaks while keeping the power.
- 03 Use mid-side EQ to keep bass content mostly mono, which usually improves headroom and translation across systems.

02

DYNAMICS

THE MISTAKE

Over-Compression

When a mix arrives at mastering with little dynamic range, there is almost nothing left to shape, so the master struggles to feel loud and punchy.

HOW TO ADDRESS

- 01 Lean on parallel compression to preserve transients while adding sustain and body.
 - 02 Keep mix-bus compression light, around 2 to 3 dB of reduction, to protect the dynamics.
 - 03 Aim for at least 2 to 3 dB of dynamic range in the final mix, so mastering has room to breathe.
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03

GAIN STAGING

THE MISTAKE

Inadequate Gain Staging

Gain staging is simply the level at each point in your chain. Too hot and it distorts, too low and noise creeps in, and no plugin downstream can fully fix it.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- 01 Check levels after each plugin. If one is making things noticeably louder or quieter, adjust.
 - 02 Aim for the final mix to peak around -3 dBFS, leaving headroom so the mastering engineer can work without changing your sound.
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04

FREQUENCY
MASKING

THE MISTAKE

Conflicting Frequency Masking

When several elements sit in the same frequency range they obscure one another, leaving a congested mix where the important parts struggle to be heard.

WAYS TO IMPROVE

- 01 Give each key element its own frequency "home" with complementary EQ.
- 02 Use a spectral analyser to spot problematic overlaps.
- 03 Try frequency-dependent sidechaining so elements duck subtly out of each other's way.

05

SPACE & EFFECTS

THE MISTAKE

Excessive Reverb & Delay

Too much reverb or delay washes the mix out: transients blur, low-mid mud builds up, and definition disappears in a way mastering cannot easily fix.

SUGGESTED APPROACHES

- 01 High-pass reverb returns around 200 to 300 Hz to stop low-frequency buildup.
- 02 Build depth with several shorter reverbs rather than one long wash.
- 03 Automate reverb sends up in sparser sections and down in busier ones for more dynamic control.

WHEN YOU WANT IT DONE PROPERLY

Let me take the mix as well as the master.

If you are wrestling with a mix, or you simply want professional results without the learning curve, I am happy to handle both stages for you. Drop me a line and tell me about the track.

[START A CONVERSATION →](#)

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