

Mixing Headroom Cheat Sheet

A practical level checklist for avoiding clipped, cramped mixes.

Starting Point

- Pull faders down before balancing.
- Keep the master from clipping while writing.
- Use gain plugins or clip gain instead of pushing every channel fader up.

Track Levels

- Leave headroom on individual channels.
- Turn loud samples down before adding plugins.
- Do not solve a bad balance with a limiter.

Busses

- Route drums, bass, music, vocals and FX to named groups.
- Watch bus clipping before blaming the master.
- Use bus compression only for a clear reason.

Master

- Aim for clean headroom before the limiter.
- Export a no-limiter pre-master when sending to a mastering engineer.
- Keep a limited preview for vibe checks only.

Quick Test

- If lowering the master fader fixes the problem, your mix is too hot.
- If lowering individual groups fixes it, your gain staging was the issue.