MASTERING FOR WINNERS

The Loudness War Veteran's Guide to a Competitive Master

10 rules • 24 years of experience • 0 surviving transients

The 10 Rules

01 Target loudness

Aim for −2 LUFS integrated. −1 if you love your fans. Anything quieter is a demo.

02 Limiters

Put a limiter on every channel. Then on every bus. Then on the master. Bounce, re-import, repeat until the file size goes down.

03 Dynamics

Dynamics are a myth invented by orchestras to sell more seats.

04 Read the waveform

If it looks like a sausage, you're doing it right. If it looks like a brick, you're a professional. If it's a solid rectangle, call me.

05 Quality control

Check your master on: the car, the phone, cheap earbuds and your neighbour's wall (see: Neighbour Complaint Letter).

06 True peak

If it isn't clipping, you're leaving loudness on the table.

07 Stereo width

Set width to 300%. Mono compatibility is for people who own one speaker.

08 EQ

Boost everything. If everything is boosted, nothing is boosted, so boost it again.

09 References

Find the loudest track in your genre. Beat it by 3 dB. Never listen to it at the same volume.

10 Streaming

Platforms will turn your master down to −14 LUFS anyway. We don't talk about that.