

IS YOUR SONG READY TO DEMO?

Common Song Demo Questions

1. Have you had your song professionally critiqued?

A good critique of your song by a professional (or three) is one of the smartest things you can do before spending money to have your song recorded.

You don't want to learn an expensive lesson the hard way by recording your song and learning through feedback from professionals later on that the lyrics needed more work or that your melody or arrangement just isn't working.

You want your song to be strong and competitive, and if you recorded your song before addressing these weaknesses, you will have to go back in and re-record your demo to make the required fixes.

Most professionals have had their work critiqued throughout their careers, which ultimately contributes to their professional development.

Critiques generally range from \$15 to \$30 per song. (See our RESOURCES section under our blog page for recommendations of professionals who can help you with getting your songs properly evaluated.)

A. How can I submit my song for a critique if I don't have a demo to play?

This is not the conundrum it appears to be. There are different ways to tackle this obstacle without needing to record a demo first. And if you only have lyrics, you should still have those critiqued first before having someone write a melody for you and record a demo.

Most of us carry around a smartphone that can record voice memos and is more than adequate for singing into a rough work recording, allowing a professional to critique your lyrics and melody.

B. I can't sing very well, won't that give a bad impression?

Absolutely not. Professionals can hear through less-than-perfect singing and understand what the writer is trying to accomplish.

The professional will evaluate your song based on the strength of its lyrics and melody, rather than your vocal or musical performance. They will give you feedback relating to any weaknesses they perceive in the song's lyrics, melody, and arrangement that will help elevate your song to professional standards.

C. I can't sing or play an instrument — now what?

If you can't sing or play an instrument, try to find someone who can, then make a recording with your phone.

If you only have the lyrics, that's enough to submit for critique. Most often, it is the lyrics of a song that require the most professional polish.

D. I can't afford to get my song critiqued. What else can I do?

See if there are any local songwriting organizations or groups in your area that you can attend and/or join, such as [NSAI](#). You can usually participate in one or two workshops at no cost. This way, you can get feedback from other songwriters.

Another option you can combine with this, if you can play an instrument and perform your songs live, is to get out and play at writers' nights, open mics, or other functions and test your songs on an audience. If you can sing, but can't play, get a friend to play while you sing. If you don't sing or play, perhaps a friend can perform your song for you. Observe which songs of yours evoke the strongest positive reactions from your audiences. If your song isn't getting a response from the audience, chances are it may not be ready to record.

2. Get multiple critiques if you can afford it

Opinions vary in life, and not all of them are correct or wrong. When it comes to professionals, some will disagree on what is right or wrong with a song, on what matters and what doesn't, and so on. Everyone has their preferences.

For the above reasons, it may help to have your song evaluated by more than one person. This helps discern between what is "one person's opinion" and what multiple pros see as problematic.

When you review feedback from two or more critiques, you want to look for the issues and weaknesses that appear to be consistent among the feedback you have received. If more than one person points out the same problem, it's likely an issue you should fix.

Make the fixes and get another critique

Also, if you can afford to do so, it's beneficial to resubmit your revised work for evaluation. At this point, you may ask the professional directly if they believe your song is ready to demo.

3. I've had my song critiqued, and it's ready—now what?

The first step is to decide what type of demo you will need and which instruments will bring out the most in your song.

a) Is your song a ballad?

If so, a piano/vocal or guitar/vocal may be enough to demonstrate the quality of your song.

b) Is your song dependent on a strong groove or beat?

If so, it will most likely need a band. More on this in a moment.

4. Identify the goal of your song

This means:

a) Are you planning to try to get other artists to record your song?

If the answer is no, then record any style of demo that will make you happy.

However, if you want to pitch your song to other artists for recording, ensure that your demo showcases the song in a style and arrangement that fits the artist or genre.

Then consider the following...

5. The reality of pitching songs to professional artists

Be aware that you are competing with professionals who are also trying to get their songs to the artist, and they are likely bringing in demos that sound like finished, radio-ready album tracks.

No matter how much you hear about people in "the business" who can listen to a good song with just an acoustic guitar and vocals, recording a radio-ready demo takes the guesswork out of it and ensures your song is presented in the strongest light.

a) Are you planning to play your song for a publisher?

Are you hoping to get a publishing deal as a songwriter?

Consider that publishers hear hundreds of songs, and first impressions count. Your demo should sound pitch-ready from the first second.

6. I don't have the budget to give my song what it needs—now what?

Consider this: More is not always better. Most of the time, less is more. As music producers, part of our job is to make recommendations to help you in deciding on what instruments will bring the most out of your song. We only recommend what we feel is necessary.

If a full band is required to give your song what it needs, but you only have the budget to record a guitar or piano and vocals at the moment, we'll advise you if we think you should wait.

However, there is always the option of recording a guitar-vocal or piano-vocal demo now and upgrading it with other band instruments (such as drums, bass, and electric guitar) later, once you have the funds. You'll also save money* because you've already recorded one instrument and the vocals, which can be added to the existing recording.

We want satisfied customers. What and how you record depend on what you need.

Or say you want a radio-ready demo for your song, but you only have the funds for a basic band version now. It's easy to add those additional instruments later to give your song a more polished, fully-produced feel.

**Please note that when you upgrade a guitar or piano and vocal demo to a band demo, or a basic band demo to radio-ready, you will incur an additional expense for studio time, as you will also need to remix the entire song, as the equalization and levels of existing instruments may need to change to blend well with the new additions.*

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