0 dB full scale: The highest level that can be recorded in the digital domain. Recording beyond 0 dBFS results in severe distortion.

A&R: An abbreviation for artist and repertoire. A talent scout at a record label.

advance: A portion of expected royalties or fees paid before the royalties or fees are due, usually paid upon signing a contract and completion of the project.

airplay: When a song is played on the radio.

articulations: The way a note or phrase is played or sung.

art: A creative endeavor that you do for your own personal satisfaction.

attack: The first part of a sound or phrase.

automation: A system that memorizes and then plays back the position of all faders and mutes on a console.

Auto-Tune: A hardware device or plug-in used to adjust the pitch of a vocalist.

basics: See basic tracks.

basic tracks: Recording the rhythm section for a record, which may include all the instruments of the band, but may be only the drums depending upon the project.

baby band: A newly signed band that hasn’t released a record.

bit rate: The transmission rate of a digital system.

book rate: The advertised rate of a recording studio or rental.

bpm: Beats per minute; the measure of tempo.

bridge: An interlude that connects two parts of a song, building a harmonic connection between those parts.

bottom: Bass frequencies, the lower end of the audio spectrum. See also low end.

boutique gear: High-quality, hand-built musical or audio gear with a limited production run.

build: Usually a one- or two-bar section of a song where the volume builds from soft to loud.

buy-out: A production situation where you only get paid for your initial work and nothing thereafter.

chorus (in a song): The refrain of the song following each verse that usually contains the hook.

chorus (electronic effect): A type of signal processor where a detuned copy is mixed with the original signal, which creates a fatter sound.

click: A metronome feed to the headphones to help the musicians play at the correct tempo (see Chapter 8).

clip: To overload and cause distortion.

clipping: When the input electronics overload because the audio level is too high.

competitive level: A mix level that is as loud as your competitor’s mix.

contractor: The person in charge of hiring musicians for a union session. Occasionally non-union dates use non-union contractors.

converters: The analog to digital and digital to analog converters connected to a digital audio workstation.
cross-collateralization: Royalties from one agreement used to cover the losses or advances of another agreement.

cue mix: The headphone mix sent to the musicians that differs from the one that the producer and engineer are listening to (see Chapter 8).

D/A: Digital to analog converter. This device converts the digital ones and zeroes back into an analog waveform.

DAW: Digital Audio Workstation.

delay: A type of signal processor that produces distinct repeats (echoes) of a signal.

digital overs: The point beyond “0” on a digital processor where the red “over” indicator lights, indicating a digital overload.

double: To play or sing a track a second time. The inconsistencies between tracks make the part sound bigger.

downbeat: A session’s official start time.

feel: The groove of a song and how it feels to play or listen to it.

flanging: The process of mixing a copy of the signal with the original signal, but gradually and randomly slowing down the copy to cause the sound to “whoosh” as if it were in a wind tunnel. This was originally done by holding a finger against a tape flange (the metal part that holds the tape on the reel), hence the name.

groove: The pulse of the song and how the instruments dynamically breathe with it. Or, the part of a vinyl record that contains the mechanical information that is transferred to electronic information by the stylus.

guide vocal: See scratch vocal.

humbucker: A guitar pickup that uses two coils in reversed polarity to eliminate outside noise and interference (they “buck the hum”). Humbucking pickups have much higher gain than single-coil pickups.

hypercompression: Using too much bass compression during mixing or too much limiting during mastering in an effort to make the recording louder. Essentially leaves no dynamics and makes the track sound lifeless.

jingle: Any form of music used for an advertising spot on any media.

intermittent: Where the audio cuts in and out or crackles. Guitar cables are frequently intermittent.

intonation: The accuracy of tuning anywhere along the neck of a stringed instrument like a guitar or bass. Also applies to brass, woodwinds, and piano.

iso booth: Isolation booth. An isolated section of the studio designed to decrease or eliminate sound leakage.

ISRC code: An international standard code for uniquely identifying sound recordings and music video recordings. An ISRC code identifies a particular recording, not the song itself; therefore different recordings, edits, and remixes of the same song will each have their own ISRC code.

leakage: Sound from a distant instrument “bleeding” into a mic pointed at another instrument. Acoustic spill from a sound source other than the one intended for pickup.

Leslie: A speaker cabinet primarily used with organs that features rotating speakers.

lockout: A booking in a studio where you only get charged for 12 hours, but no one else can use the studio for the other 12 so all your gear and the gear in the control room can remain set up.

lossy compression: A digital file compression format that cannot recover all of its original data from the compressed version. Supposedly some of what is normally recorded before compression is imperceptible, with the louder sounds masking the softer ones. As a result, some data can be eliminated since it’s not heard anyway. This selective approach, determined by extensive psychoacoustic research, is the basis for “lossy” compression. MP3 and AAC are lossy compression schemes.
look ahead limiter: A mastering limiter that delays the audio signal a small amount (about 2 milliseconds or so) so that the limiter can anticipate the peaks of a sound wave in such a way that it catches the peak before it gets by.

low end: The lower end of the audio spectrum, or bass frequencies usually below 200 Hz.

master: A final version of a recording that is destined for distribution.

mastering: The process of turning a collection of songs into a record by making them sound like they belong together in tone, volume, and timing (spacing between songs).

Mellotron: A keyboard popular in the 1960s that used tapes of recorded orchestral instruments to generate its sounds.

multiband compressor: A compressor that is able to individually compress different frequency bands as a means of having more control over the compression process.

Music 1.0: The first generation of the music business, where the product was vinyl records, the artist had no contact directly with the record buyer, radio was the primary source of promotion, the record labels were run by record people, and records were bought from retail stores.

Music 2.0: The third generation of the music business that signaled the beginning of digital music. Piracy ran rampant due to P2P networks, but the industry took little notice as CD sales were still strong from radio promotion.

Music 2.5: The fourth generation of the music business, where digital music became monetized thanks to iTunes and later, others like Amazon MP3. CD sales dive, the music industry contracts, and retail stores close.

Music 3.0: The fifth generation of the music business, where the artist could communicate, interact, market, and sell directly to the fan. Record labels, radio, and television become mostly irrelevant and single songs are purchased instead of albums.

Music 3.5: The sixth generation of the music business where YouTube and other online video platforms become the new radio, and the digital side of the business begins to slowly morph from one of downloads to streaming.

Music 4.0: The seventh generation of the music business where streaming becomes the preferred music delivery method for the consumer, which makes it profitable on a wide scale and increases revenue for artists, songwriters, publishers, and labels.

native resolution: The sample rate and bit depth of a distribution container. For example, the native resolution of a CD is 44.1 kHz and 16 bits. The native resolution in film work is 48 kHz and 24 bits.

outboard gear: Hardware devices like compressors, reverbs, and effects boxes that are not built into a console and usually reside in an equipment rack in the control room.

out of phase: When the polarity of two channels (it could be the left and right channel of a stereo program) are reversed, thereby causing the center of the program (like the vocals) to diminish in level. Electronically, when one cable is wired backwards from all the others.

outro: The section of a song after the last chorus until the end of the song.

overdub: To record along with previously recorded tracks.

pad: Long sustaining note or chord.

pan: Short for panorama. Indicates the left and right position of an instrument within the stereo field.
panning: Moving a sound across the stereo field.

points: A percentage of sales or other revenues.

pocket: In the “groove” (the rhythm) with the song.

power chords: Long sustaining distorted guitar chords.

prechorus: A section of a song between verse and chorus sections. Not found in every song.

preproduction: A process of familiarizing an ensemble with the songs and arrangements before recording it.

producer: The equivalent of a movie director, the producer has the ability to craft the songs of an artist or band technically, sonically, and musically.

punchy: A description for a quality of sound that infers good reproduction of dynamics with a strong impact. The term sometimes means emphasis in the 200 Hz and 5 kHz areas.

record: A generic term that’s come to mean a recorded project released for distribution to the public. A record may be in the form of a CD, digital audio file, vinyl disc, cassette, or some distribution container not yet invented.

rehearsal: A practice or trial band performance.

release: The end of a sound or phrase.

rushed fill: A drum fill that waivers ahead of the beat.

scratch vocal: A temporary vocal recorded during basic tracking with the intention of replacing it later.

sequencing: Setting the order in which the songs will play on a CD or vinyl record.

single coil: A type of guitar pickup found primarily on Fender guitars.

spread: The time in between songs on a CD or vinyl record.

spec: A situation where no money paid upfront with the promise to be paid later if the production is used.

snare: A thin drum with springs or “strainers” underneath that create a “rattling” sound.

snare strainers: The string of springs on the bottom of the snare drum.

sympathetic vibrations: Vibrations, buzzes, and rattles that occur in drums other than the one that was struck.

track: A term sometimes used to mean a song. In recording, a separate musical performance that is recorded.

TV mix: A mix without the vocals so the artist can sing live to the backing tracks during a television appearance.

union date: A session governed by the by-laws of the union, including the pay scale.

tempo: The rate of speed at which a song is played.

vibe: The emotional atmosphere communicated to and felt by others.

voicing: The way the notes of a chord are distributed.

word length: The number of bits in a word. Word length is in groups of eight. The longer the word length, the better the dynamic range.