

Making a test recording – guidance notes for using GarageBand

Please note – these are basic notes only, to create clear & simple recordings of your song for teaching purposes and to show other people. For further information on how to use 'GarageBand' please watch the many tutorial videos available on YouTube etc.

To start a new recording:

1) Turn on GarageBand, click File > New > New Project > Empty Project > Track Type choose Audio, using a microphone or line input, tick the box 'I want to hear my instrument as I play & record'. If you're going to use simple earphones with an inbuilt mic make sure the bottom two input/output checks say 'Built-in Microphone' and 'Built-in Output'. If using a USB plug in mic, a window will pop up asking you to OK this message: 'The previously selected interface "Built-in Output" will be used instead for this session' – click OK. Plug headphones into the computer or use Bluetooth ones, for monitoring, if you use a USB mic.

Then click 'Create'

2) Your arranging window opens. Name, save and folder your new project. For now ignore most of the 'Track Settings' & 'Controls' at the bottom of the screen, and the 'library' & 'Sounds' setting to the left. Just ensure that the 'Input' in the Recording Settings (below the track list) is set to 'Built-in microphone' or the USB mic that you've chosen – if you get any feedback click 'Feedback Protection' and the Monitoring button next to it (the yellow light will go off).

At the top you'll see the 'Transport Bar' (stop/play/record buttons etc), the tempo etc and the metronome button. And your first track to record on, called 'Audio 1' until you rename it.

Now you're ready to start!

If you want to sing to a metronome click:

The Metronome click button is at the top, in purple. By singing to a Metronome click you will be able to keep your song in time. The benefits to this are 1) singing perfectly in sync with the other parts you're recording, and 2) being able to use the timeline to copy and paste, if required, as the timeline 'notches' will correspond to the metronome clicks.

Playing the Metronome click whilst recording can create a 'bleed' of the click sound into your recording. To reduce this you can create a 'click track' which can then be deleted or muted at the end. To create a 'click track' you need to first find the tempo you want to record at – experiment without earphones by clicking 'play' and adjusting the Metronome tempo to the left of the Metronome button. You can also adjust the volume and tone of the Metronome in GarageBand Preferences. When you're happy with the tempo of your song you need to record the 'click track'. Using the track already there on the screen (Audio 1), bring the cursor to the start of the timeline and simply click the red 'Record' button on the Transport Bar and record 4 or 8 bars of clicks. By keeping the '1-2-3-4' purple button unchecked, next to the Metronome button, you'll get 4 beats 'intro' beforehand. Once you've recorded 4 or 8 bars you can then copy and paste to create more than enough clicks for your song.

Rename this track so you know it's just the 'click track' and can delete it at the end of your project.

If you've recorded a 'click track' you then need to turn off the Metronome at the top of the screen otherwise it will 'bleed' into your recording (unless you want this bleed). You can adjust the volume of the metronome using the slider button on the track itself.

If you want to sing to keyboard anchor notes:

The benefit of this is that your song will remain in tune and won't 'slip' – almost unavoidable in acapella singing. You can either just play one note as a drone, or play the key anchor notes of your song, as mapped out in your rough 'map' of your song. As this is just a guide to keep you in tune, this track will be deleted at the end of the project, like the click track.

This section is for digital keyboards, making a 'midi' recording. If you use a piano or non-digital keyboard you will follow the notes for audio recording, using your mic to pick up the sound of the instrument (as demonstrated on the tutorial video).

To create an midi track of your anchor notes, create a new track by clicking on the last track you're created (in this example the 'click track') and then Track > New Track > Track Type - Software Instrument > Create. This process will be repeated when you record your final bassline, if you use a keyboard to do this. The benefit of creating a midi recording is you can change it on-screen, amending errors, changing notes at a later time etc.

Connect your keyboard to the computer and the midi connection (your digital keyboard is known as 'midi') will be recognised – click 'Use' to confirm. Select the sound of your choice, I like a natural piano

sound. It doesn't matter for this section as it will be deleted after singing your vocal parts. You're now ready to record the key notes, using the click track to stay in time – the click track will be heard through the keyboard speaker but won't be on the recording.

Adjust the volume of this keyboard track to suit. You're now ready to record your vocal parts, and have the click track to keep you in time and the keyboard notes to keep you in tune. You can, of course, proceed straight to vocal recording, I just find it really useful to have the recording clearly sung. Once you're finished recording your song you'll delete this keyboard guide track.

Recording the vocal parts:

Clicking on the last track recorded (in this example the keyboard anchor notes), create a new track (see above stages) and click Track Type – Audio using a microphone or line input, tick the box 'I want to hear my instrument as I play & record' and if you're going to use simple earphones with an inbuilt mic make sure the bottom two input/output checks say 'Built-in Microphone' and 'Built-in Output'. Or the USB mic input if you choose that option. Click 'Create'. Just as you did when creating the click track.

In the 'Recording Settings' beneath the Track list you can adjust the volume level of your recording – play with this and ensure you don't get any distortion if too loud.

Record your vocal parts one after the other, naming them as you record them. This is where the fun begins! I usually start with the melody (main tune) whichever part that's in. Then I play with the harmonies until I'm happy with it.

Recording the bass part:

As a woman I find singing the bass part the trickiest thing. What I usually do when I'm ready to record the bass part is to delete the keyboard anchor notes track and re-record the bass part on the keyboard. I then sing over this an octave above, using the Audio Track recording procedure, as above.

Deleting the click track altogether? I find it useful for teaching purposes to not delete the click track but turn the volume down low. Then singers can hear the beats faintly in the background.

Finishing touches:

If you want to add any reverb to sweeten the sound you can do this by clicking the 'Plug-in's below the Recording Settings box. You need to do this per track. There are other settings under 'Controls' and 'EQ' to the right of the 'Plug-in's settings. I advise watching YouTube tutorials for these extra finishing touches. They're not really necessary for test recordings, however. You just want a clear recording to show other people and use for teaching purposes.

To create Fade-ins and Fade-outs – create a 'Master Track' by clicking 'Track' and clicking 'Show Master Track'. Click on this new Master Track and then click 'Mix' on the top menu bar and then 'Create Volume Fade-out'. You'll see the volume changing on the track – although it only shows Fade-outs you can also create Fade-ins by tapping on the line at the beginning to create 'dots' which can then be moved up and down. You can do this procedure anywhere along the volume line to adjust the volume.

Creating the final MP3s:

When you're happy with your song you want to create MP3s – of the whole song and also individual parts.

Firstly you need to create a 'loop' to include the whole of your song, to the point where you finished. Using the cursor, drag it along the timeline where the bar numbers are. You'll see the loop in yellow – pull it to the end of your song recording. Holding the Control button on your computer will give you fine control over the length.

To do this, adjust the volume faders on individual tracks. For individual part MP3s I find it helpful to have the other parts faintly in the background, so singers can hear their part in relation to the other parts in the song.

When you're ready to create the MP3, click 'Share' at the top of the screen and choose how you want to 'export' the MP3. I usually 'export to disk' and folder it away.

This process will create good enough recordings of your song at practically no cost. A USB mic & headphones will obviously give you a better quality recording. The MP3s you create of your individual parts are also invaluable for scoring your song.

Happy recording!