

# Get Your Drums Ready For Recording



Recording acoustic drums is one of the most difficult studio tasks. The final recorded drum sound is due to a combination of the engineer(s) capturing the sound and the drummer's performance, but just as important is the sound of the drums themselves. Unwanted rattles and buzzes can go unnoticed when playing live, but in the studio, microphones pick up everything. The following are some tips to get your drums ready before you enter the recording studio.

## THE HEADS

A detailed discussion on different drumheads and how to tune them is beyond the scope of this article. They are mostly subjective decisions based on personal taste and the style of music being recorded. I will say that it is important that the drumheads are relatively new and tuned well. Drumheads will lose their elasticity and tone as you play them over and over and a new head can make a big difference in the sound of the recording. There are no set rules for how often to change your drumheads but when in doubt, put on a new head and tune the drum before you get to the studio.

## THE EDGE

While you've got the head off of the drum, let's check to make sure all of the other parts are in optimum condition. Let's start with the bearing edge. The bearing edge is the part of the drum that actually makes contact with the drumhead. Run your fingers around the edge of the drum to make sure it is free of nicks or dents. If the bearing edge doesn't create a seal with the drumhead, it can cause the drum to buzz and make it difficult to tune.

The main cause of these dents is when drummers strike the bearing edge with a drum key while tuning. (If you use a drum key to check the pitch around the tension rods when you tune, make sure you are not hitting the bearing edge).

If you find something wrong with the bearing edge, I recommend you take it to a skilled drum repair shop to have it re-cut. If your local music store doesn't provide this service, maybe they can recommend someone.

## THE DRUM

Measure the drum at different points of the bearing edge to make sure the drum is completely round. Put the drum on a flat surface and make sure it doesn't wobble and is not warped. If the drum is deformed, it can also make it very difficult to tune.

## THE HARDWARE

That also goes for the counter hoop that goes over the drumhead. Make sure that it's not warped or wobbly. Apply some machine oil or WD-40 to all the moving metal parts

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of the bass drum pedals and hi hat stands to keep them from squeaking. Make sure you have felt washers on all of your cymbal stands (where the cymbal rests on the stand) so there is no metal to metal contact.

On drums older than about 1970, it may be necessary to pack the lugs (the parts where the tension rods screw into) with some cotton. Older lugs use a spring to keep the tension rod receivers in place and this can cause rattles when playing the drum. Modern lugs use plastic to hold the receivers in place so there shouldn't be a problem with newer drums. If you're not sure, unscrew a lug from the drum and look inside to see if there is a spring mechanism. If so, just place a little bit of a cotton ball in the lug to keep the spring from making noise. Just make sure to secure all of the lugs tightly when you screw them back on to the drum.

### **THE SNARES**

The purpose of the snare wires on the snare drum is to rattle when the bottom head vibrates from the impact of striking the drum. That's what gives the snare drum its sound, but it can also produce unwanted sympathetic vibrations. For example, if a tom is tuned close to the pitch of the snare and it is also positioned close to the snare, striking the tom may cause the snares to rattle excessively.

If that is the case, try slightly de-tuning the four lugs closest to the snare wires on the bottom snare head. You can also try tuning the tom a little higher or lower to get its pitch away from the snare pitch. If that doesn't work, put little strips of felt between the snare wires and the bottom head. Do this sparingly, as it can choke the snare sound. In general, keep in mind that hearing the snares when you strike the other drums is normal and if the rattling is not excessive, it shouldn't be a problem.

You may find that it takes a lot less time to dial in a good drum sound if you take care of these minor details before you enter the studio. If you take care of your drums, your drums will take care of you (I'm not sure what that means but it sounded good in my head).

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