



My first recording studio was in my dorm room at Louisiana Tech University; I remember spending a lot of time getting the right sound with an incredibly limited budget.

If you're a college student musician moving into a dorm this fall, you might be considering turning your dorm (or small apartment) into a usable recording space, but your limited budget might make the goal of quality recording seem far off.

Fear not! It's never been a better time to set up a home studio; technology is growing fast, and the gap between expensive and inexpensive gear -- both financial and quality-wise -- is getting smaller every day.

Step One: The Recording Computer

Most everybody coming to college is bringing a computer with them; in fact, if you've got a computer made anytime in the last couple years, chances are it's perfect for recording!

Macs are widely considered the best for recording; their operating stability combined with built-in recording software make them perfect. If you choose a PC, make sure it runs with at least 1GB of RAM -- you'll also want a large hard drive, at least 7200 RPM, and make sure to defragment it often! Firewire and USB ports are also necessary for connecting your recording interfaces.

Step 2: Choose a Microphone

At very least, you'll need to choose a single microphone to do just about everything. If you've got a little bigger budget, you can choose two or three. It's up to you, your needs, and your budget.

If you plan on recording acoustic guitar and vocals, a single large-diaphragm condenser microphone will do great. Check out the Marshall MXL V67G; at \$99, it's a killer deal! Other great mics, especially for acoustic guitar, is the Oktava MC012, which are available cheap on eBay. It's up to you how much you spend, but just remember this simple rule: the better the source, the better the recording. Tune your instrument well.

Step 3: Recording Software

There's no doubt about it: Pro Tools is THE industry standard used in every major recording studio (and the majority of small home studios).

With cheap options such as the MBox series, it's never been a better time to start with Pro Tools. They contain everything you need to get started in one box, except speakers (monitors) and microphones.

If Pro Tools isn't in the cards for you, there's many other options. Apple's Logic is an awesome choice, as are many smaller packages, like Acoustica's Mixcraft. It's up to you and your budget what you use, but look for something with multi-track capability.



Step 4: The Recording Interface

Choosing what recording interface to use is difficult, especially with the huge selection within the \$200-500 price point.

If you plan to use Pro Tools, you'll need one of Digidesign's approved interfaces specifically for Pro Tools, either theirs or the M-Audio or Mackie compatible interfaces.

If you're wanting to use Garageband, you're in luck -- your Mac doesn't need anything other than a USB Microphone (check out Samson's USB line) and some speakers/headphones!

Anything else, and you'll want a good interface by a company like M-Audio or Apogee. It's up to you and your budget what you get.

Step 5: Audio Monitoring

In order to make great recordings, you'll need quality audio monitoring. In a tight situation like a dorm room or small apartment, you'll want to consider high-quality headphones or in-ear personal monitors.

Good speaker monitor brands to look for include Ediol, Event, and KRK. It's up to your budget what you choose, but the better quality, the better recording!

Considering headphones and in-ear style monitors, Sony's MDR-V6 is the standard for studio headphones, at around \$100. Future Sonics, Ultimate Ears, and Westone make great in-the-ear monitors which give you studio-quality sound directly in your ear.

Last But Not Least: Don't Forget the Accessories

Now that you're ready to record, don't forget the accessories! You'll have a computer, interface, microphone, and monitors, but what next?

Make sure to pick up at least one microphone stand, as well as a pop filter if you plan on recording vocals. You'll also want to make sure you have plenty of high-quality cabling between your components, and a power conditioner isn't a bad idea, either. From there, the sky's the limit! There's hundreds of fun recording toys out there -- and if you're like most of us, you'll find a reason to need most of them at some point!

Mastering & Selling

Keep in mind, after your studio masterpiece is done, you've got a little bit of work to do before it's ready for sale or distribution.

The first step is to have your album "mastered". This process makes your recording sound complete -- it evens out the levels, corrects minor frequency deficiencies, and makes your tracks flow. This process can be done by you, but the most efficient is to hire a service.

From there, you'll need to consider distribution and duplication. By far, the most popular way to sell your album indie is online via iTunes. With a few tools, you'll be on your way to indie recording success!

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