



Sequencing Your Music for Vinyl: A Guide for Artists Preparing for Mastering

If you're preparing a release for vinyl, the sequencing decisions you make before your project reaches a mastering engineer are critical to ensuring that performance translates as well as possible to the format.

Why Vinyl Sequencing Is Different

Unlike digital formats, vinyl is governed by the laws of physics. A needle reads a groove cut into a rotating disc, and everything about how that groove is cut — its depth, width, and spacing — is affected by the audio signal it carries. Loud signals cut wider, deeper grooves. Heavy bass frequencies cause the groove walls to shift dramatically. Too much of either, and the needle skips. Too little groove spacing, and you run out of real estate before your program ends. Sequencing for vinyl means working within these realities, not around them.

LP Sequencing (12-inch, 33⅓ RPM)

The standard LP plays at 33⅓ RPM and can accommodate roughly 18 to 22 minutes per side under optimal conditions, though this is not a hard ceiling — it is a quality ceiling. The more program time you pack onto a side, the quieter and more compressed the cut must be to fit. Around 20 minutes per side is generally considered the sweet spot for most genres. Pushing past 22 to 24 minutes per side will result in a noticeably compromised sound.

Side length and loudness are directly related. A side with 15 minutes of program can be cut louder and with more dynamic range than a side with 22 minutes. If your music is dense, loud, or bass-heavy — think rock, hip-hop, or electronic — keeping sides shorter will serve the sound better than maximizing runtime.

Track order matters more than most artists realize. The outermost grooves of a record (the beginning of each side) offer the best playback conditions. The stylus has the most linear tracking at the outer edge, which means the first tracks on each side will always sound the most open and detailed. As the needle moves inward toward the label, the geometry becomes progressively less favorable — inner grooves are more prone to distortion, increased surface noise, and a general narrowing of the soundstage. This makes the inner portion of a side naturally better suited to quieter, more mellow, or less sonically demanding material. For this reason, your most dynamic and detailed tracks should be placed early on each side, while softer or more intimate tracks tend to sit more comfortably toward the end.

A general LP sequencing principle worth following: open strong, sequence dynamically, and close each side with something that feels resolved. Avoid placing multiple high-energy, loud, or bass-intensive tracks back to back on the inner portion of a side.

7-Inch Sequencing (45 RPM vs. 33⅓ RPM)

The 7-inch format is most commonly used for singles and EPs and introduces its own set of considerations. The key decision is speed.

A 7-inch cut at **45 RPM** offers significantly better audio quality than one cut at 33⅓ RPM. The faster rotation means the groove moves under the stylus more quickly, allowing for better high-frequency reproduction, improved stereo separation, and a louder, more dynamic cut. For most single releases — particularly anything in rock, pop, soul, or dance — 45 RPM is the right choice.

A 7-inch cut at **33⅓ RPM** allows for longer program time but at a cost to fidelity. This is occasionally used when an artist wants to fit more music on the format, but it is generally not recommended if audio quality is the priority.

In terms of runtime, a 7-inch at 45 RPM should ideally carry no more than around 4 to 5 minutes per side for optimal quality. Pushing toward 6 minutes will require a quieter, more conservative cut. For dance music or genres where loudness and low-end impact are central to the listening experience, keeping the A-side under 4.5 minutes gives your mastering engineer the most room to work with.

Genre Considerations

Different genres place different demands on the format. Here is a general reference:

Genre	Recommended Max Side Length	Speed	Bass Notes
Rock / Pop	18–22 min (LP) / 4–5 min (7")	33⅓ (LP) / 45 (7")	Moderate; manage stereo width below 200 Hz
Hip-Hop / R&B	16–18 min (LP) / 4 min (7")	33⅓ (LP) / 45 (7")	Heavy sub-bass requires strict mono below 150 Hz
Electronic / Dance	12–15 min (LP) / 3.5–4.5 min (7")	33⅓ (LP) / 45 (7")	Prioritize mono bass; shorter sides strongly recommended
Jazz / Acoustic	20–22 min (LP) / 5 min (7")	33⅓ (LP) / 45 (7")	Naturally controlled; wider dynamic range is achievable
Classical / Orchestral	18–20 min (LP)	33⅓ (LP)	Widest dynamic range; side length especially critical

