



Vinyl Pressing

vs.

Lacquer Cutting

Vinyl pressing and lathe cutting both make playable records, but they are very different manufacturing methods with different costs, output sizes, and sound characteristics. Pressing is the standard industrial method for larger runs, while lathe cutting is a manual, one-at-a-time process that is better suited to small quantities, tests, and special editions.

What vinyl pressing is

Pressed vinyl is made by first cutting the audio into a lacquer master, then using electroplating to create metal stampers, which are used in a hydraulic press to mold heated PVC into finished records. Because the same stamper can produce many copies, pressing is efficient for larger runs and generally offers the most consistent results across copies.

What lathe cutting is

Lathe cut records are made by cutting grooves directly into a blank disc, typically one record at a time. This makes the process more flexible for small orders and custom projects, but it is usually slower and more labor-intensive than pressing.

Main differences

Factor	Vinyl pressing	Lathe cut vinyl
Production scale	Best for medium to large runs	Best for small runs and one-offs
Manufacturing method	Molded from metal stampers	Grooves cut directly into each disc
Consistency	High consistency from copy to copy	More variation between individual discs
Turnaround	Efficient once the plant is set up	Slower per unit because each disc is made individually

Factor	Vinyl pressing	Lathe cut vinyl
Durability	Typically more robust as a mass-produced record	Often described as more delicate, depending on material and maker
Cost per unit	Usually drops with volume	Often higher per copy for small quantities

Sound and quality

Pressed records are generally the benchmark for commercial vinyl quality because the process is standardized and designed for repeatability. Lathe cuts can sound good, especially for limited or custom releases, but quality varies more from one disc to another and is more dependent on the cutter, blank material, and setup.

Which one to choose

Choose pressing if you need a professional release, consistent sound, and multiple copies for retail, distribution, or touring. Choose lathe cutting if you want a small batch, a personalized gift, a test release, or a niche project where uniqueness matters more than mass production.

Practical takeaway

For most artists planning an album or EP release, pressing is the better long-term choice. For demos, singles, collector items, or highly limited editions, lathe cutting can be a creative and cost-effective alternative.

