



The #1 Rule Of Home Recording

GRAHAM COCHRANE

Thank you so much for downloading your free copy of my new eBook and for signing up for The Recording Revolution Newsletter! Be on the lookout for regular updates and news from yours truly.

My site is dedicated to helping musicians get the most out of their home studios by helping them waste less money and time on the unimportant things and focusing their efforts on making music. This eBook is no exception. Inside you'll see how I break down the #1 rule in home recording and how this one mental shift will open up worlds of creative possibilities for your music making future!

So enjoy **The #1 Rule of Home Recording** and please feel free to pass my site on to those whom you think might benefit from this information as well! Cheers!

Graham Cochrane
TheRecordingRevolution.com

For Such a Time As This

We live in an amazing age of technology and communication. This is especially true in the music and recording industry. Computers changed everything. Then the Internet created a global economy so fierce that manufacturing competition has driven prices down tremendously. Never before have we seen such a "perfect storm" of affordability, accessibility, and power as it relates to recording equipment.

If you are a musician, songwriter, or producer reading this now (it is 2010 as I write this) then you my friend live in a privileged age. You have more opportunity than generations before you ever had to both write, record, and distribute your music, professionally and with relative ease.

Why is this important? It is imperative that you understand that in one way, the art and practice of music recording is unchanging. There are truths about audio, and techniques that are just plain fact and will never change, regardless of technological advances. BUT...and this is a big but, it is crucial that you are aware that in another way, everything about recording music has changed.

The Problem

There are so many more choices these days when it comes to recording gear. From computer choice, to Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) choice, to plugin choice, to microphone choice; the list becomes nauseatingly long. And because so many of us musicians have jumped into home recording with a passion, products are being marketed to us at a ballistic rate every year.

This causes mass confusion for many, and even worse, endless debates and arguments on Internet forums over software and recording gear. Maybe you've been a part of those debates, I know I have. Have they really gotten you anywhere? Did they help you make

more music...or better recordings?

If you just so happen to like spending your time and energy (and even your money) on gear lust and debate, then this eBook is not for you. If, however, you prefer to use the tools at your disposal to create new, creative, exciting music and to do that at a level of quality and professionalism that people will take it seriously, then read on to see how the #1 rule of home recording can help you!

The #1 Rule of Home Recording

When it comes down to it, you need to have the right frame of mind to succeed at home recording. **Before you even begin buying gear or pressing the "record" button you need to have the right mentality about the whole process.** But first let me define a few terms so we are all on the same page here.

By "home recording" I mean exactly that. You want to have a basic recording studio in your home or office. This is opposed to building a commercial facility with all of it's wonderful trappings (and price tags). Home recording used to be a joke of a term, but today it should be taken seriously.

By "rule" I mean a principle. Principles are something you believe in completely and they direct you. They help you make decisions (usually quickly) as you simply try and align the possible options before you with your guiding principles.

So What Is It Already?

Enough of the setup. Here it is in plain English. The #1 rule of home recording is...

Limit your options like your life depended on it!

There. Pretty simple. Disappointed? Don't be, in a minute you'll see just how important this rule is to your music. Confused? No fear, by the end of this eBook you'll see exactly how this rule plays out in all of your gear purchasing and recording decisions.

This rule goes against everything we believe in these days. People want the most options possible. They want to know that they aren't locked into any one thing. We believe more options will give us more creative opportunities. This is especially true when it comes to home recording gear. "Why should I limit my options?" you might be thinking. Here's why...

Too Many Choices Shift Our Focus

It's an age old paradox: the more options you have available to you, the more likely you are

to shift your focus and energy away from your original goal at hand, namely being creative in the studio.

When it comes to home recording, the #1 rule helps keep us focused on the right thing: making music. If you want to record your acoustic guitar for a new song and you own 4 different mics, you'll more than likely spend a lot of time deciding which mic to use. Maybe you'll try them out and listen back, or you'll read online to see what people think about the mics you have. But if you only had one mic at your disposal, you'd be free to start learning mic placement and getting a great sound into your session.

What you need in your studio are a few important tools to accomplish your recording goals. Then you need to focus on using those tools to their full potential. What you *don't* need are too many options to choose from that might distract you from developing your craft.

Too many people spend days, months, and years of their lives feeling like they are knee deep in the recording world, when they actually haven't made any traction on improving their skill. I don't want that to be you.

Applying The Rule

The rest of this eBook is going to clearly lay out the application of the #1 rule to each main area of building and using a home studio. Specifically we will look at core topics in these two categories: Home Recording Gear and Production Technique.

Home Recording Gear

- Computer/Software
- Audio Interface
- Microphones

Production Technique

- Recording
- Editing
- Mixing

Limiting your options in how you approach buying gear for your studio is invaluable as this is the area people most waste time and money. We have way more choices than we need these days and we love to debate within ourselves (and with others) what purchases are going to take our music to the next level.

But the reality is, most purchases you make aren't going to take your music to the next level... simply practicing and learning your craft is the best way to improve your recordings. Enough said.

The same is true for production technique. I believe we have too many choices and options when it comes to unlimited edits, undos, plugins, and automation. We'll take a look at how to easily apply the #1 rule to your technique in the studio and I firmly believe you'll see your productivity increase.

As we go through each section, I want you to see how the idea of limiting your options will actually be what allows creativity to flourish, not the other way around. Let's take a look!

The #1 Rule and Your Computer/Software



When it comes to home recording these days, 99% of the time you're going to want to go with computer recording. More often than not you already own a computer that is capable of being the hub of your recording studio. If that's the case, you already have eliminated one decision!

If however you need a new computer, or you'd rather keep your personal computer separate, you have a million options awaiting you. Let me make it easy for you...

Go with what is familiar to you. Mac or PC, laptop or desktop. What matters most is that you like the product and you feel comfortable working with it on a regular basis, not what brand it is.

I work with producers all the time who record and mix great music on both Macs and PCs, so let's not go there right now. Instead use either what you have or what you know. My only suggestion is get as much RAM as you can afford and don't look back.

These days working on a laptop doesn't mean sacrificing power either. So if you like to be mobile, or intend to take your gear to other places to record, then go portable. It's a great option. Plus when you're back home you can hook that laptop up to a bigger screen if you need to.

Just pick something, don't spend too much, and move on. Plan to keep it for at least 3 years and then reassess the situation. That wasn't too hard now was it?



The Computer Determines The Software

If you have your computer picked out, then that will also help make your recording software decision much, much easier as not all DAWs work on both Mac and PC.

The big players are as follows: Logic and Digital Performer are Mac only, Sonar and Audition

are PC only, while Pro Tools, Cubase, Live, and Studio One are all dual platform. They are all fabulous programs and will get the job done for you. Which one should you go with though? That's a question only you can answer.

Most producers have their favorites, however, and **I'll come out right away and tell you I'm a Pro Tools guy myself.** I've used most of the programs out there, but at the end of the day I always come back to Pro Tools for writing, recording, editing, mixing, and mastering. Do I recommend Pro Tools? Yes! But will it be the deciding factor in how your songs turn out? No!

Don't Over Think This

Investing in a piece of recording software is indeed a big deal. But, and this is a big but, don't over think this decision. Pick a piece of software that fits your budget and go with it. At the end of the day, **when people listen back to your finished songs they aren't going to be able to tell what program you used to record or mix.** Nor will they even care! All they care about is whether or not the song sounds good!

I will say this, however. If you intend to get into this business professionally one day (i.e. work in a studio, mix for big name clients, engineer music for picture in Hollywood) then you probably want go the Pro Tools route since that is the most widely used program in the industry today, by far.

But other than that, it really, truly, honest to goodness doesn't matter which program you go with. **People waste too much time on Internet forums debating DAW software and being big fan-boys.** Don't be one of those people; limit your options, pick a piece of recording software, and then get to making music! You'll have a lot of time left over for something more important, like taking your girl out on a nice date!

The #1 Rule and Your Audio Interface



Since most of us don't have a \$200,000 mixing console in our spare bedrooms you'll need some way to get all of your sounds (guitars, vocals, keyboards) into your computer's recording software. This is where an audio interface comes into play.

Most DAWs work with just about any brand of audio interface. This leads to an endless list of boxes to choose from. Let me give you a suggestion...**use the #1 rule of home recording and limit yourself to just 2 channel interfaces.**

Here's what I mean...

Don't Buy More Than You Need

Most people buy into the hype that they need a fancy audio interface that can do everything and is made with premium components that give you "that sound". While it's true that many of the features available in today's high end interfaces are great, they aren't necessary to make killer recordings and be prolific in the studio.

Unless you need more than 2 channels to record drums (and that's [debatable to some](#)) all you'll ever need is a simple 2 channel USB audio interface. You'll need it to come with at least one microphone preamp with phantom power (see the next section), line-in inputs for guitar cables and keyboards, stereo outs, and at least one headphone out. That's it!

With that information you can pick your budget and just find something that fits those parameters...**But I'll save you the trouble and give you my picks!**

You can pick up either of these puppies for under \$150.

[M-Audio Fast Track](#)

[Presonus AudioBox USB](#)

[Focusrite Scarlett 2i2](#)



Either of these interfaces give you pro quality signal flow and minimum fuss. Yes there are plenty of other products on the market, and if you want one of them, be my guest. It's your money. **But at the end of the day since I'm trying to get you to limit your options and spend less time worrying about gear,** just trust me and grab one of these guys!

What About External Preamps?

Let me just address the question of buying external preamps. If you need more microphone preamps for the additional inputs in your audio interface (for input 2 on the Fast Track for example) then by all means go for it. Just grab a budget pre and get busy recording.

If however you're pondering buying more preamps just to "change things up", let me give you a piece of advice. **Unless you do this for a living, day in and day out, you really have a lot of better things to spend your time and money on than building a small collection of preamps.** You're likely not going to notice an improvement in quality to warrant the purchase. Plus the pres that come in your interface sound great already! Why look elsewhere?

The #1 Rule and Your Microphones

Ah, microphones. Can't live with them and can't live without them. Obviously microphones are an essential part of the recording process and can have more to do with how your recorded material turns out than any other part of your studio. **But man do they cause so much distraction from the big picture!**

Without going into too much detail, there are three main types of microphones: dynamic, condenser, and ribbon (with dynamic and condenser being the most widely used). Dynamic microphones are great for use on stage in live settings. They are very durable and can take a beating. They also tend to be very directional in that they will only pick up what's directly in front of them (kind of crucial with a bunch of noise on stage).



Condenser microphones, namely large diaphragm mics, use a different technology to pick up audio and convert it into electricity; and they do it in a way that brings so much detail and realism to the recording that for years engineers have turned to them as the workhorses of the studio.

The \$100 Rule

The popularity of large diaphragm condenser microphones has led to a surge of choices in the marketplace. And since this technology is neither new or hard to copy, prices of mics have come down tremendously (unless you're buying classic name brands like Neumann). What does this mean for you and me? It means **it's time to pull out a little bonus principle I like to call the \$100 rule.**

The rule is simple: **don't pay any more than \$100 on a microphone for your studio.** That's it. There are just too many great sounding microphones on the market for under \$100 to justify paying anymore. Now, if you WANT to spend more than \$100 on a mic don't let me stop you. Some of the world's best mics cost way more than that.

But the simple truth is no one is going to know the difference in the final mix, especially if you're new to this. The \$100 rule helps narrow your options so you can grab a great mic and get to it. But of course, let me give you some suggestions:

[Samson C01](#)

[M-Audio Nova](#)

[Audio Technica AT2020](#)

[Behringer B1](#)

Anyone of these four mics is going to do wonders for your studio. They are great for miking vocals, acoustic guitars, amps, percussion, and drums. This can be your most valuable purchase in the studio (and definitely [the best \\$100 you'll ever spend](#)).

To be honest with you, I still use my old Behringer B1 to this day on many clients, and with fantastic results! And to think, that microphone costs less than the sales tax on most "vintage" mics. Sheesh! Save the money and take your mom out for a nice steak dinner. She'll appreciate it.

The Big Picture

What's more important sometimes than saving money, is saving time. If you have just one main studio microphone, that is one less decision you have to make when it comes time to record. What that allows you to do is focus more on mic placement. Then, when you get a bad sound you won't just blame the mic and grab a different one. Instead you'll adjust the placement until you get a better sound.

This is how you learn my friends! **Limiting your options shifts the focus away from gear and toward YOU!** Hopefully you want to get better at this art. If you do, then try to eliminate anything that blame-shifts your bad recordings to gear and not to you. You'll get better in time. That is certain.

The #1 Rule and Recording



When it comes to actually recording in your home studio, there are seemingly limitless options of how to go about laying your tracks down. Whether it's different techniques or mic placement options, you have a lot to sift through. I'm totally fine with that. **The art of recording is just that, an art. It isn't just science, so there isn't just one or two ways to get a great sound.** In

fact, I want you to spend a lot of time getting unique and great sounds.

So how does this rule of limiting your options work in this part of the process? It all starts with this revolution of recording we are living through...the hard drive era. We no longer have limitations of how much tape we have to record to. In fact, with the price of storage so low these days you could almost say we have unlimited space available too us. And you know what that leads to...unlimited takes!

Resist The Urge

The moment I was first introduced to computer based recording, I saw the potential for recording millions of takes. **At first it made sense to me to just record as much as you can and then pick the best take or takes later.** But over the years I have come to realize how much of a hindrance this philosophy was, rather than a help.

I honestly believe that having unlimited takes and hard drive space has made us lazy. It seems we've lost that sense of urgency to try to perform our best in the studio and capture a great recording in a few takes. That was part of the magic of recording; it was a challenge to get that once-in-a-lifetime performance!

More importantly, having that feeling of pressure to produce (even slight pressure) created a sense of focus in the studio. Having limits and parameters tends to focus us. It makes us better! And that is how you should approach your home recording. Limit yourself. Here's what I mean.

Set False Boundaries

You need to setup some pretend boundaries, some self imposed limits to your recording process. One simple limit to set up is the number of takes you will record on any given part. For example: When recording lead vocals, give your singer a few warm up tries through the song but ultimately only record three takes. This should be plenty of material to comp together later if need be.

With drummers I tend to capture only two takes through a song once they are good and ready. That gives me a couple of options of fills if I need them, but not so many takes that it lengthens my editing process by a few hours that I don't have.

The idea here is that you want your focus and creativity to be placed on the sounds going into your system, not how many versions you can get. You're only creating more work for yourself later if you do this, plus you are reducing that sense of urgency I mentioned a moment ago, which will probably dilute your creative potency rather than spark it.

Back To The Basics

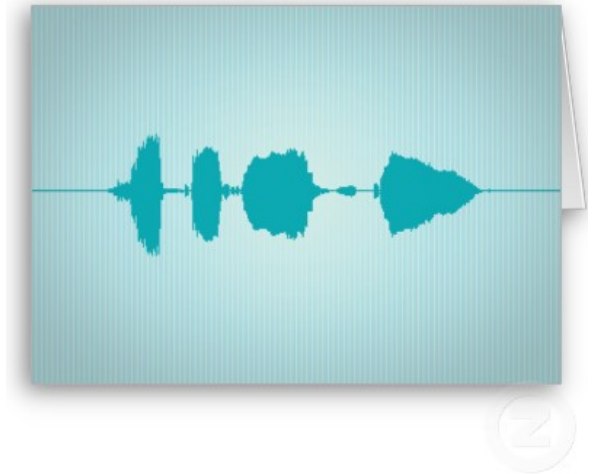
When it comes to recording, we all need to go back to the basics. Millions of takes is not how you get a good recording. Take a good musician, have him play a good song, on a good instrument, into a good microphone, with good mic placement, into a good audio interface...and you'll get a good recording. Every time. It's that simple.

The #1 rule helps us get back to what's important...capturing a good song well. Use your ears, be creative, and have fun. But don't trap yourself with the future burden of having to sift through too many takes. Be confident enough to get a good recording and move on.

The #1 Rule and Editing

Editing in a program like Pro Tools is a double-edged sword. On the plus side, we no longer need to physically cut and splice together tape. What a pain that must have been! But not anymore...with a couple keystrokes we can simply cut, copy, and paste our way to edited bliss without breaking a sweat.

This leads to the downside of digital editing. It never ends. You are never done. You can always edit it some more. Plus with unlimited "undo", there's no fear of committing to something or trying a weird edit. You can always go back in time as if the edit never happened. As much as I love the undo button, it can be my demise.



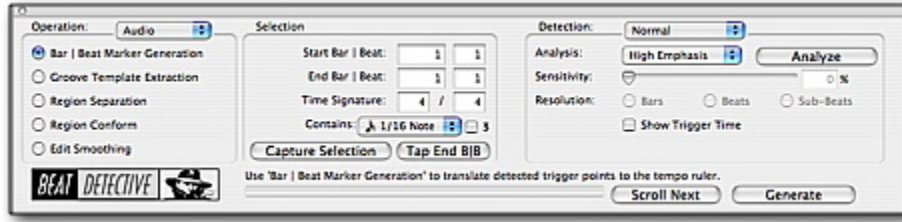
Don't Fix What's Not Broken

One big way the #1 rule will help you in your editing is if you limit your edits to only fixing what needs to be fixed, and not just changing things for the sake of changing them. In other words, be intentional with your edits.

Have a plan when you go into edit mode. Use your DAW's editing features as tools to help you craft together beautiful tracks that are in time and cleaned up, not simply as a magic wand to help you get a recording that never really happened. Sure you may use pitch correction software to polish up an otherwise almost perfect vocal, or you may use a function like Beat Detective to tighten up a solid drum performance, **but don't view editing as a fall back for bad recording.**

We're All Guilty

We've all done it before, so I'm calling my number too. It's just that I've wasted so much time in the studio tweaking edits and cutting up audio regions till there's hardly any music left! Is that the point of all of this? Heck no! The point is to make great music, and that starts with great recording like we discussed a minute ago.



When we have too many options available to us in our software, we tend to be less decisive and want to "hold on" to every take, seeking "perfection." Well, news flash for all of us...perfection does not a great song make. The right "feel" and "vibe" go a lot farther than a perfectly quantized, in tune performance.

A Better Approach

So how *should* we handle edits? The way I like to approach editing is simply preparation for mixing. I know it sounds obvious, but hear me out. We may all think that's what editing is, getting a song ready to mix, but is that how we approach it when we actually sit down to edit?

A typical home studio editing session goes something like this: fire open the session, start lining up the drums a bit, tune the lead vocal, then tune the backing vocals, then fix the bass line that is off during the bridge, then start editing together a new bass fill in the final chorus because the one we recorded just doesn't cut it, then undo all that and start over, then copy line one of chorus 2 on the backing vocals and paste it every where else, then...

Whew, I'm exhausted just thinking about it. And that is just the beginning. How do I know? Because I've done it...a hundred times! But here's the better way to approach it that has served me well over the years.

Ask yourself these questions: **Are there any pops or clicks that need to be cut out? Does anything cut in or out too abruptly? Are my drums and bass lining up in a nice groove? Am I missing any parts that I'll want in the mix?**

Seeing The Forrest For The Trees

Asking these types of questions will help refocus you in this stage. Remember what editing is all about: simply preparation for mixing. **If you see the big picture here, you'll edit faster, cleaner, and with more purpose than ever before.** You don't want to hang around the editing stage forever since mixing is what will really take your song to the next level.

But when are you ready to mix? You'll know when you're done editing when the song starts to sound a bit mixed already. All of your tracks should be clear and relatively distraction free.

Just keep thinking of how you want this song to sound when it's done. Let editing do it's job and then move on.

The #1 Rule and *Mixing*

Mixing is a lot of fun. It is that magical stage in the recording process where all your great tracks come together and create a unified and cohesive song. **It is also the most dangerous area of music making today and the clearest example of not adhering to the #1 rule in home recording.**



Because today's computers and DAWs offer seemingly unlimited tracks and plugin effects (mixed with powerful automation), many people feel the need to use it all. These countless options can actually lead to longer than necessary mixing sessions. And on top of that, the mixes don't even sound that great! What's the point of using all your plugins and spending all that time if at the end of the day you don't get a great mix?

Let's Do The Time Warp, Again

If you go back 20 or 30 years ago, the typical album was mixed on an analog console with a fixed number of available tracks, usually 24 or 32. Effects were achieved through the use of outboard gear, that you would "plug in" to the mixer as an insert. If you had one vintage Fairchild compressor for example, then you could only use it on one track. The same went for your reverbs and delays, etc. You had a series of constant limits to how much you could do.

But did that hinder the engineer's ability to mix a great album? Heck no! Some of music's best mixes came out of that "limited" analog era and will stand the test of time! So why could great songs be mixed with only 24 tracks and a handful of outboard compressors and EQs and yet people today complain that 48 tracks and "unlimited" uses of their SSL Mix Bus plugin is not enough? We have gotten lazy.

Redefine and Simplify

The lack of limits conditions us to move without thinking; to aimlessly throw plugins around and automate levels. We "feel" that we are mixing, but in reality we are just doing busy work. **Real mixing starts with a plan. Listening to the recorded and edited tracks and knowing the destination; where you want the song to arrive.** At that point, you try and find a way to get it there.

Applying the #1 rule will help. Here are some simple suggestions:

Start by creating a false boundary of 24 to 32 tracks. If you need more than that, then bounce down to free up a track. In a program like Pro Tools you can always "keep" the original track, but just hide it and make it inactive. Having a finite number of tracks to mix with will help keep you focused and will make you analyze why you want to do what you want to with each move.

Choose one or two compressors and EQs and use them exclusively. Grabbing a different compressor or EQ for different tracks may seem sexy and professional, but it's not helping you mix. What you need is to just pick one as your go-to plug and stick with it. It will help you learn that plugin (how it works and sounds) and you will get better results each time. Trust me on this. When you are mixing for major label talent and you are getting bored, *then* feel free to use different EQs on everything. But for now, keep it simple.

Limit yourself to a set number of hours to mix a song. Depending on how new to this you are your time may vary, but decide what you think is reasonable for the type of song you're mixing and time yourself. Setting a "deadline" will force you to keep thinking big picture when you mix. I guarantee you'll find yourself dissecting some small minute part of the song that really in the end most people won't notice. Looking up at the clock will pull you back to reality and push you to just get the song sounding sweet as a whole.

Actually Listen To Your Mix

Do you take the time to sit back, close your eyes, and actually *listen* to your mix? I mean, not just look at the mix on your screen, but *hear* what's going on in your song. Many times we tend to somehow skip that part. We "see" what needs to be fixed and changed: the meters don't seem to be peaking at the right spot, that compressor seems to be slamming hard, that EQ curve seems to be too steep, etc.

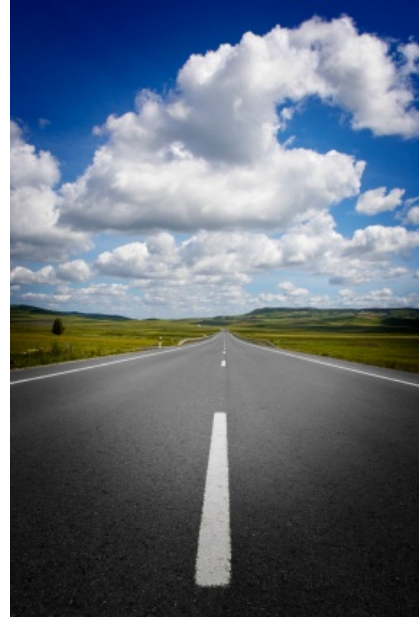
In my humble opinion, when it comes to mixing, limiting your options might just be the very best thing you could do. Too many options keep you zeroed in, looking to fix the song. When you are "limited" you can be free to think more about how the song is sounding. It seems obvious, but many of us forget it.

Where Do We Go From Here?

At the end of the day, recording and producing music is a very fluid and subjective process. Many of us musicians get our creative release out of being in a studio and making something from nothing. But what I'm trying to get across is the counter intuitive idea that **limiting your options on all fronts will actually be the very thing that frees you up to be more creative than ever before.**

And that's what I want for you and your music. I know you have great ideas and want to get them out there. I know you value a good recording and mix when you hear one. The last thing I'd hope to see is you getting bogged down with decisions around what gear is "best" and which production technique is going to "fix your mix". Instead I want you to take a simple studio setup and a plan and just go make killer music!

The #1 rule of home recording is simple: **Limit your options like your life depended on it.** But that doesn't mean it isn't powerful. This one simple guiding principle has and continues to be the greatest catalyst for my creativity and productivity in my studio. I have written more, recorded more, and mixed more music and with greater sonic quality as a result. You can too!



The Next Step

If you've gotten this far in the eBook, then you clearly are trying to invest in this whole recording thing. I know that it matters to you. You want to make excellent recordings for either your music or somebody else's. As you look to where to go from here let me give you some advice...

If you are new to the whole home studio world and don't have any real gear, then here is what I recommend you do next. Decide what your budget is for your studio ([you actually don't need more than \\$300](#)), buy the basics that I've discussed here, and don't look back at what other gear you "could have purchased". Instead invest your energy and time into learning your DAW and the art of recording. My site can hopefully be a valuable resource to you as you begin this life long journey of perfecting your skills, so [start there](#) for sure.

If you are knee deep in this thing and are looking to improve your craft then I highly recommend you just start committing to completing projects. Set some deadlines for songs or albums you want to work on and just do them. A great place to start is with my [One Song One Month Challenge](#). It's a simple, free 5 week video tutorial series on producing a song from start to finish. If you can do a song in a month I figure you can get a lot done in one year!

Thank You For Reading

As we wrap up *The #1 Rule of Home Recording* I just want to personally thank you for downloading the eBook and signing up for my weekly newsletter. If it weren't for readers like you my site would be pointless!

TheRecordingRevolution.com exists to help and encourage people like you to be the next generation of creative musicians and producers; hopefully I am doing just that. But just so I know that my content is helpful to you, please send me an email or leave a comment on the blog and let me know how I'm doing!

You can reach me via email at: graham@therecordingrevolution.com.

Once again, thank you so much for reading. I wish you the best of success as you start making even more amazing music in your studio!

Graham Cochrane
TheRecordingRevolution.com

