tonebase Academy | Recording Course

I. The First Steps

ACADEMY

Your Instructor: Martin Zimny

Suitable For: All Levels

A tonebase Workbook

"Recording yourself offers distance for critical listening. This is why it is so valuable as a tool for feedback: listen to your own music as if you didn't record it, and you will get great insight into your interpretation and musicianship"

What You Need

• Laptop and Headphones

• Microphone: (either a USB Microphone or audio interface with a microphone)

• Reaper (60-day free evaluation period which can be indefinitely prolonged)

Contents

Lesson Summary

Classical guitarist and recording engineer Martin Zimny walks you through the first steps of recording yourself in a professional production environment. You will follow the signal flow from your microphone into the digital audio workstation (DAW) Reaper and record your first takes of a piece of your choosing.

What You'll Learn:

• Setting up a recording session

• Routing your microphone signals into the DAW **Reaper**

• Microphone placement 101

• How to record your very first takes in a professional production scenario!

Before we start

Recording yourself can be as simple as capturing a video on your smartphone or as overwhelming as balancing a multitude of signals during a live broadcast. In general, capturing an audio signal onto your hard drive is always the same. You want to get the signal in front of your microphone into your computer. Today we will learn exactly how to do that!

Let's start with your digital audio workstation or **DAW**. For this course, we will be working with **Reaper** as it offers a 60-day evaluation period which can be extended. It is still a very inexpensive product if you decide to buy a small business licence for $60 (compared to products like Apple's Logic Pro ($200), Steinberg's Cubase Pro ($588), or Magix's flagship product for classical music production Sequoia ($2975)).

<u>Click here to download Reaper</u>

For our purposes, Reaper is a perfect choice, but these steps can be translated to any other DAW as well. If you are already comfortable using a different DAW, you will still find a lot to improve in your recordings with the tonebase Recording Course!

This 5-week course includes a live session every Monday at 11 AM PST (beginning on January 11th). To participate, navigate to Community -> Live Events from the dashboard, or click the link below:

<u>CLICK TO WATCH THE LIVE SESSION</u>

Finally, this course is designed to be used alongside the tonebase forums. To get the most out of this course, first check out the **Rules and FAQ page**. Check the forums regularly for information about the next session. Please use this thread if you have questions about the live session, the workbook, or the first steps. Now, let's get started!

<u>CLICK TO VISIT THE FORUM THREAD FOR WEEK 1</u>

Gear Checklist

First, let's talk gear: you will need a **desktop** or **laptop computer** as the destination for your signals. Tablets can work, although the recording experience isn't quite the same yet. Keep in mind that **Reaper** isn't available for iOS or Android yet, but Steinberg released software called **Cubasis** for multitrack recording on mobile devices. We will focus on working with a laptop or a computer.

Dedicated **headphones** will make your life easier. Not only is a good pair of cans vital for evaluating the quality of your signals, as they are your window into the world of audio, but they will also prevent any nasty feedback loops from your speakers into your microphones.

For the microphone, we have a universe to choose from. I would recommend getting a dedicated **audio interface** like a <u>Focusrite Scarlet 2i2</u>, as it offers you the flexibility to connect different and multiple **microphones**. Going with an audio interface would mean you would need to buy 1-2 microphones and XLR cables as well; therefore, the initial investment would be a bit higher.

On the other hand, we have **USB Microphones** which already have an audio interface built-in and only connect to your computer via a USB cable. They offer an all-in-one solution for quick recording, but they aren't as flexible in comparison to an audio interface.

The workflow only differs slightly in the first steps of setting up your recording session, so either a USB Microphone or an audio interface with dedicated microphones will do fine!


Checklist:

○ *Laptop or desktop computer*
○ *Reaper*
○ *Microphone + Audio Interface (or USB Microphone)*
○ *XLR Cables (if using an audio interface)*
○ *Headphones*

Setting up reaper

After you installed Reaper, you want to connect either your audio interface or your USB Microphone to ensure that your music flows through the microphone into your DAW and onto your hard drive!

1) Head over to **Options – Preferences** (or simply hit the shortcut ctrl/command+P) and select **Audio – Device**.

2) Now select **ASIO** as your audio stream to enable your computer to use an external audio device. For your ASIO driver, select the driver of your interface or your USB Microphone.
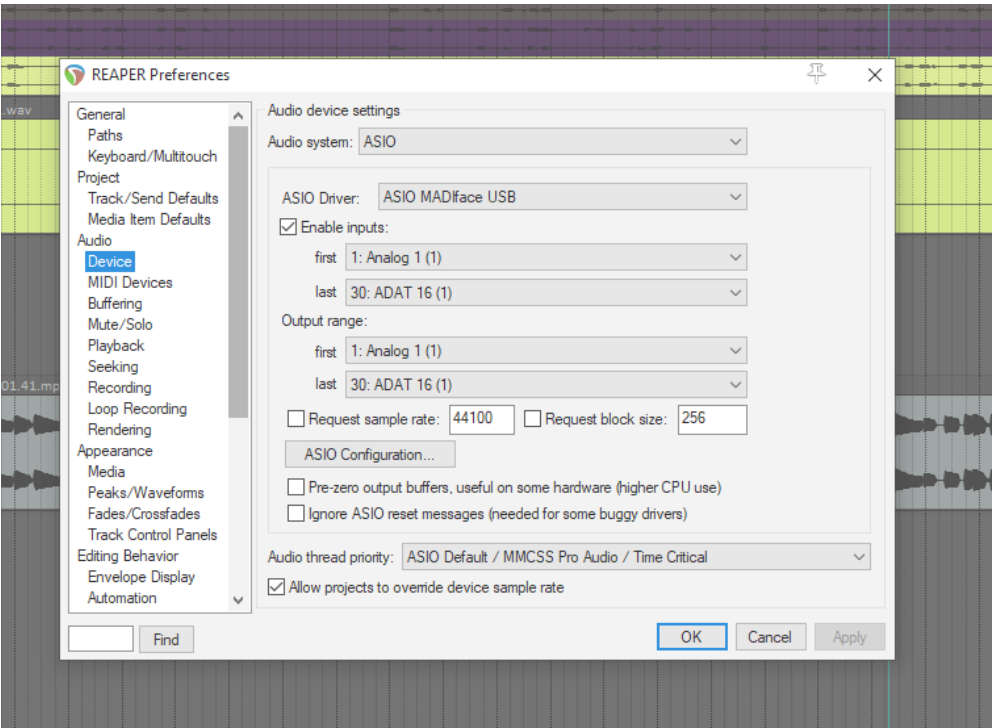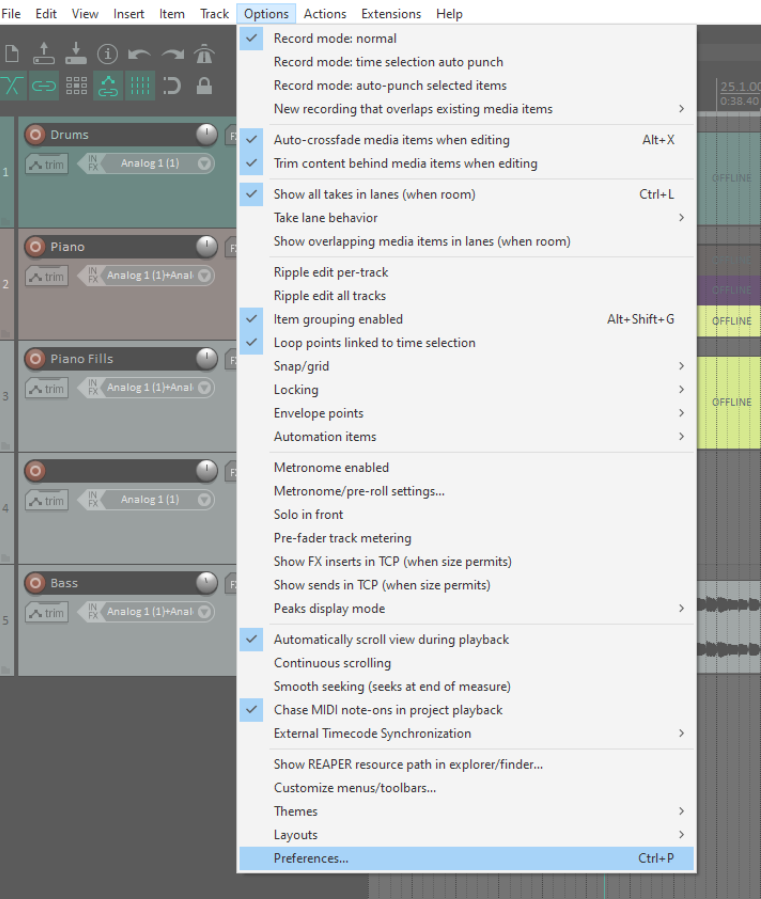

3) Don't forget to check the box "Enable inputs" to ensure that Reaper accepts the channels provided by your hardware. The rest of the options can remain as they are

Now that we've set up the overall preferences, we are ready to prepare our audio workbench!

Head over to **Track – Insert new track**. As with every professional software, there are multiple ways to do the same thing. You can hit the shortcut ctrl/command+T or simply double click on the gray area on the left.
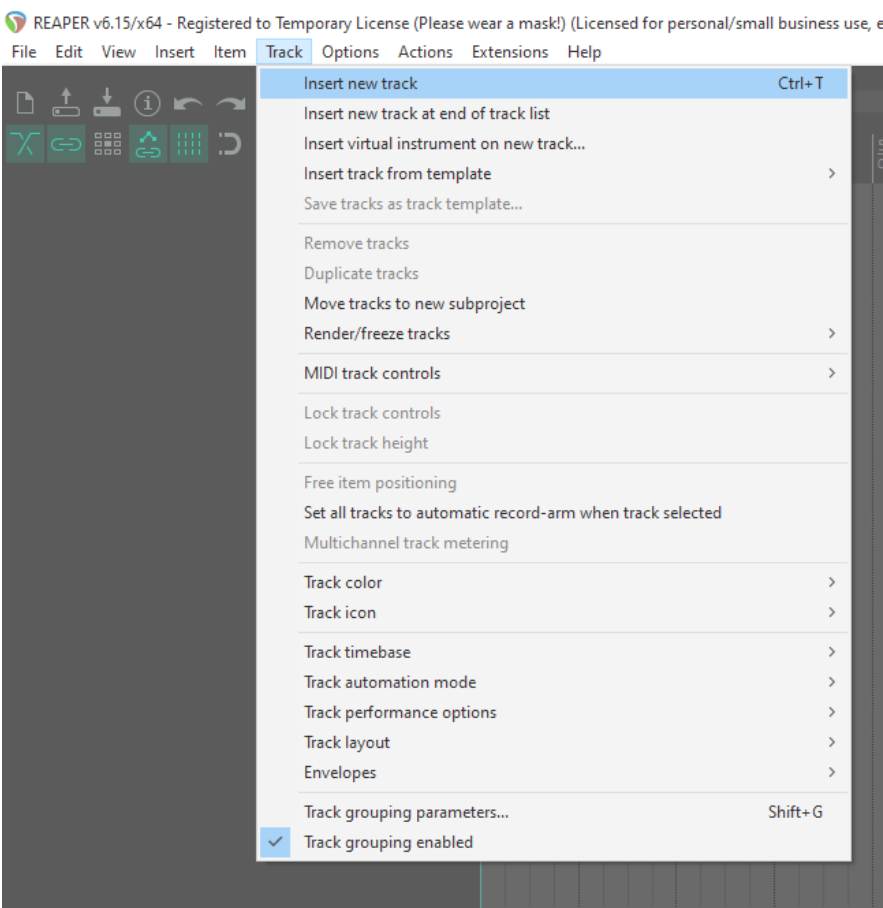
Congratulations, you just created your first track! Now we need to assign an input for this track so that the audio of your microphone can reach that track. Right–click on the red Record Button on the left of the track and select Input: Mono or Input: Stereo. Here, you can see the channels offered by your interface for signal input. Select the channel in which you have plugged in your mic, or simply select your USB microphone, if using one.
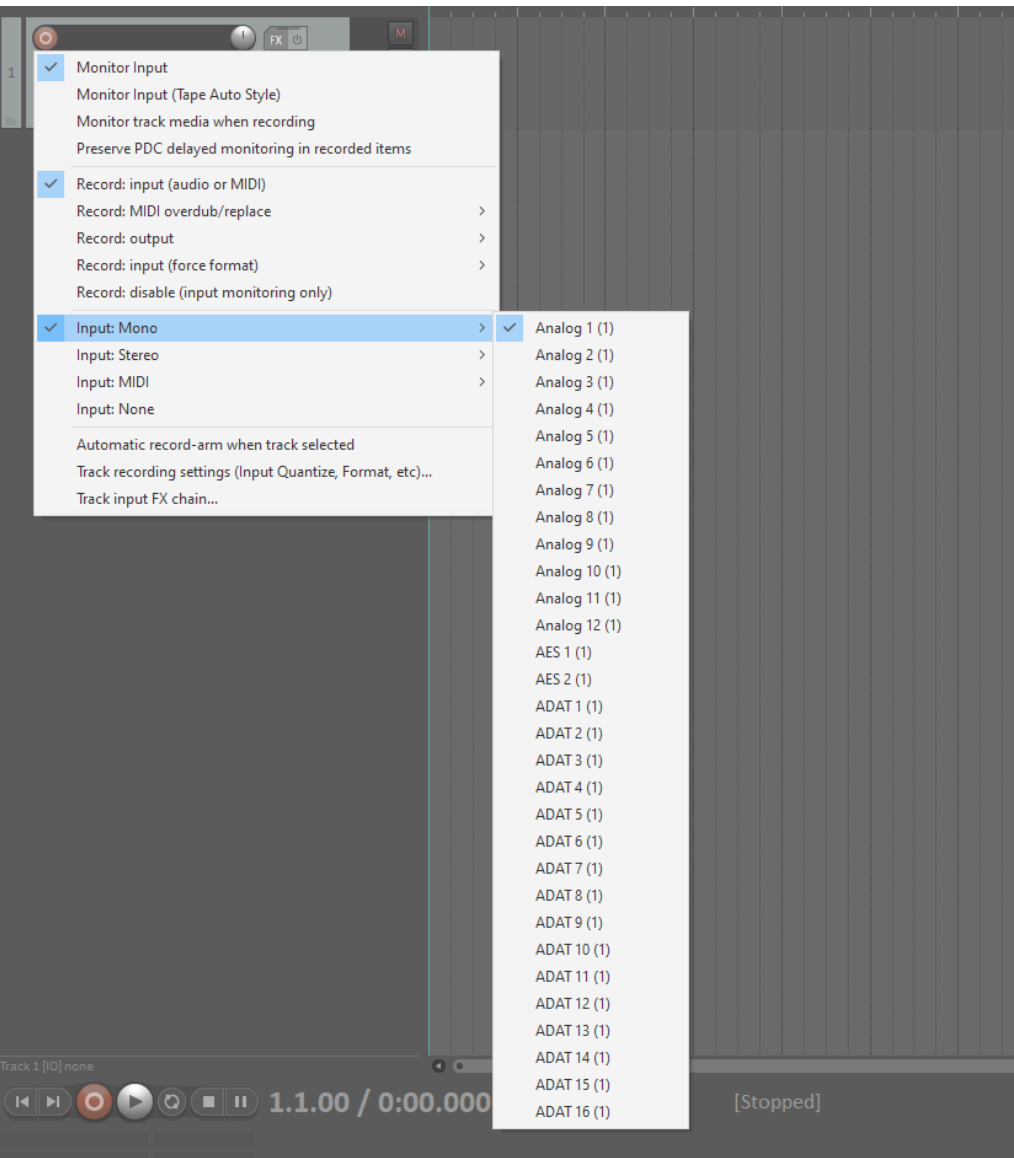
If you've set up everything correctly, you should be able to arm your track head by clicking the red recording button on the track header. If your microphone is already gained (controlled by the "gain" or "level" position on your audio interface or USB microphone), the metering should show some action!
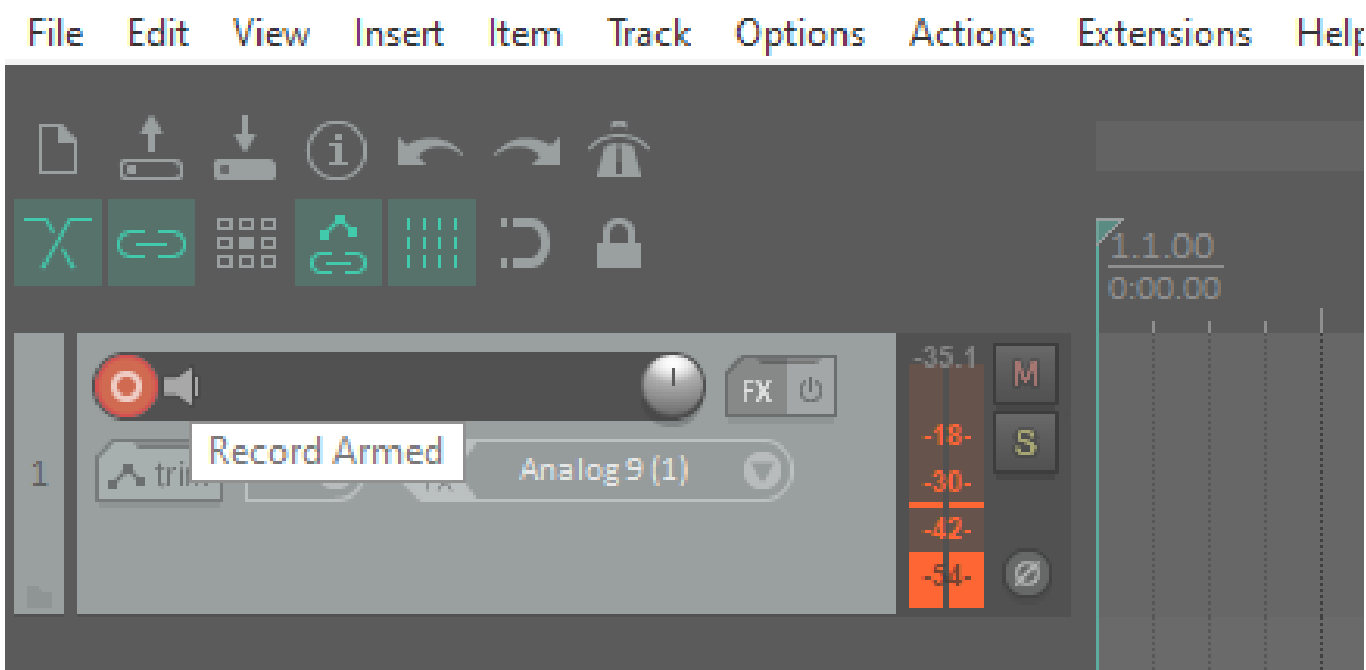
To record your first test take, you can hit the Record button in the transport control or simply press the shortcut ctrl/command+R. Congratulations—you just started your first recording!
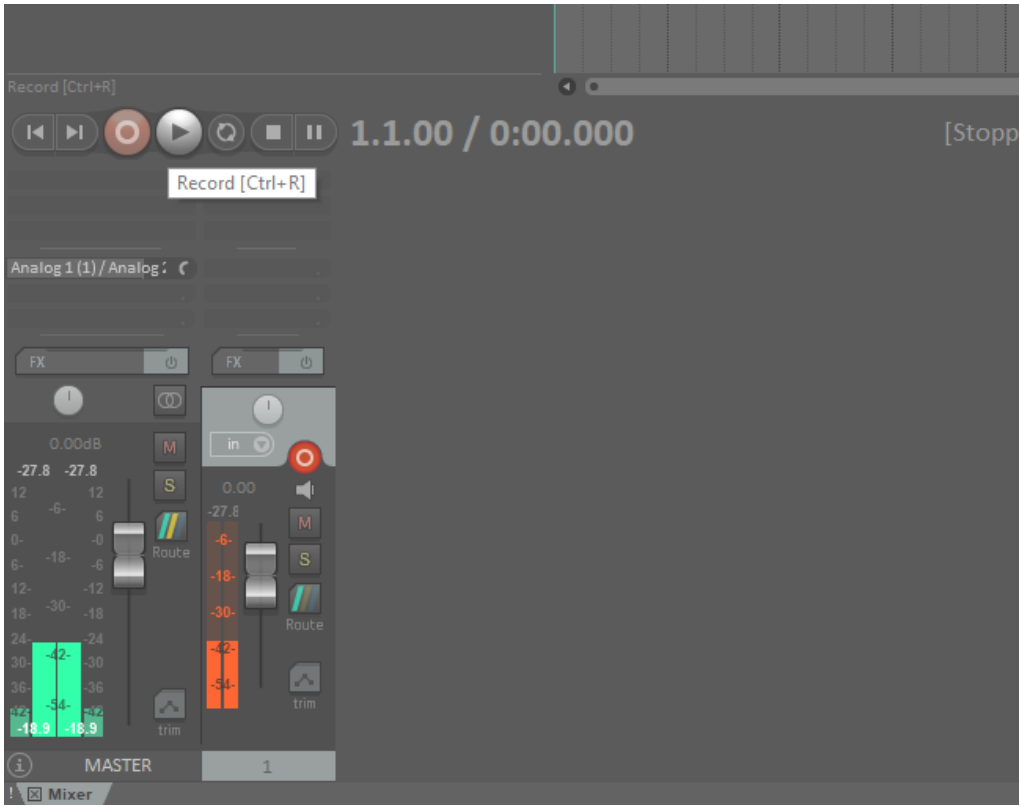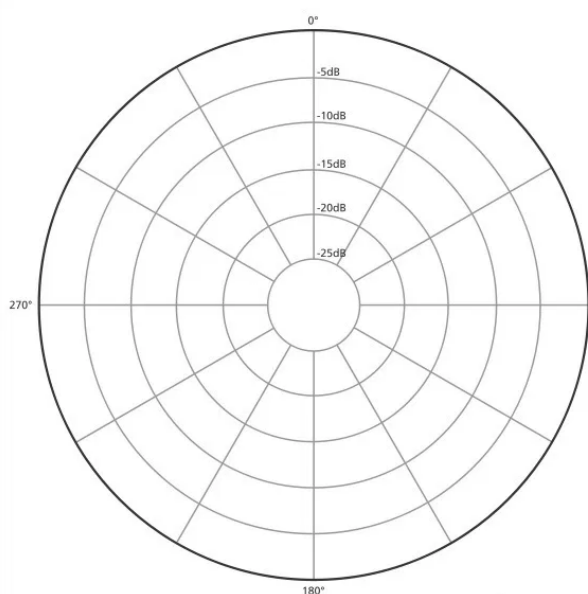
Soundcheck

When recording yourself, you always need to consider your environment. Here are three questions that are worth asking prior to placing your microphones:

• *Am I placed in the best sounding room of my apartment/house?*

• *Am I placed in the best sounding spot of that room?*

• *Can I somehow improve the acoustics in that spot?*

If the spot you're sitting in is sounding rather harsh or has a nasty flutter echo, consider changing your spot! Microphones are like magnifying glasses; what you are hearing naturally in the room while playing will only be emphasized during the recording session as you won't be distracted by your own playing. That is the reason why recording yourself is so valuable in the first place, it offers you distance for critical listening.
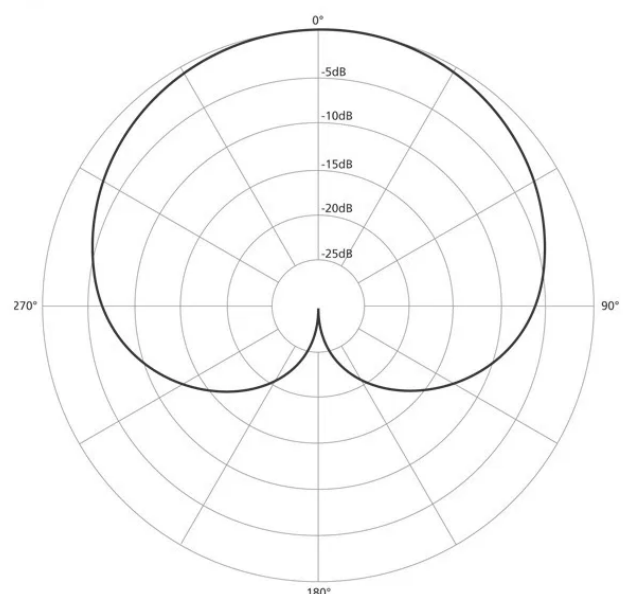
The choice of **polar pattern** (also called pickup pattern) also influences the characteristics of the sound. Each microphone comes with its own preset polar pattern, meaning it picks up sound in different directions. Omnidirectional mics pick up 360° of sound, while a cardioid only picks up sound on one side. If you record in a room that doesn't offer a nice natural reverberation or has some noise coming in from one direction, you may want to choose a mic with a **cardioid** pattern instead of an **omnidirectional** pattern.
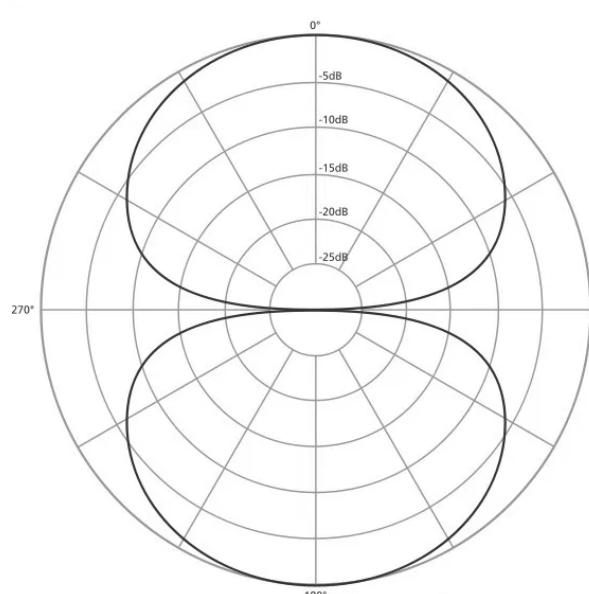
Omnidirectional	**Bi-directional (Figure Eight)**	**Cardioid**

Once you've found a spot that you like and placed your microphone in front of your guitar, record one or two takes and listen back to your recording. You are now doing your soundcheck. Below, I created a soundcheck cheat sheet for you to protocol your positions:

Take number	Position and Polar Pattern of Microphone	How does it sound?

After you find a position that you like, you can start your production for the tonebase Recording Academy!

Assignments

Each lesson in this course contains one or more assignments. These are due by next week's session (January 18th). Share these with your fellow recording artists in the dedicated forum thread—let's talk and discuss them!

○ Record at least 4 takes of a piece of your choosing.

○ Listen back to the recording with the score and mark the notes where mistakes have been made or where you don't like the interpretation.

○ Describe objectively the quality of your sound and try to find words that describe your interpretation. Analyze the music objectively, as if you didn't record it yourself.

Questions

Use the questions below to check your understanding of the material from this session. Use the dedicated forum thread to post further questions or discuss topics from this workshop. Martin will post the answers on the forum a couple of days after the individual live stream takes place.
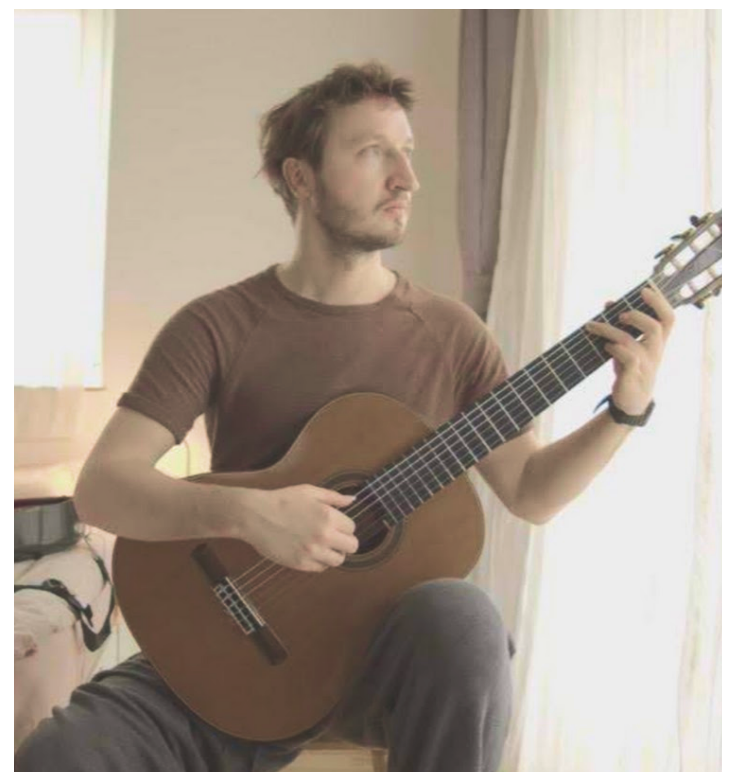
1) What is a DAW?

2) What is the difference between a USB Microphone and a microphone that is connected to an audio interface?

3) What is the polar pattern of a Microphone?

About Your Instructor: Martin Zimny

Martin Zimny, born in 1988 in Munich, Germany, graduated with a Master's of Music from the Robert Schumann Hochschule in Düsseldorf, Germany with Cuban guitarist Joaquín Clerch. He has won prizes in several national and international competitions and played concerts across Europe and India. He has taken part in festivals and workshops in Austria, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, and Serbia. Martin has been working as a guitar instructor for almost 10 years. After his degree in music, he studied Engineering for Audio and Video at the University of Applied Sciences in Düsseldorf. Today, he continues to perform and teach while working as a professional recording engineer.

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