

# How to Make a Perfect Mix Tape or CD

A compilation of songs burned onto a CD or arranged in a playlist can be a thoughtful gift for someone you appreciate. If well done, a thoughtfully arranged mix tape will convey appreciation for your recipient as well as awe them with your fantastic taste. All you have to do is know the person you're making it for, include a wide range of songs, and arrange the music in a pleasant and logical way.

**1 Listen to a wide range of songs.** If you want to expand your music library before you start making playlists, check out services that can recommend new artists to you. See Sources and Citations below for some ideas.

**2 Consider the audience.** Is this compilation for yourself? Your friends? A significant other? Select music that's appropriate for the tastes of the listener. Your grandma might not like a compilation of your favorite death metal songs, but she may enjoy rare jazz recordings from when she was young.

**3 Create a message with the mix (optional).** Do you want your playlist to let someone know how you feel about him or her? If so, listen carefully to the lyrics of each song that you include in the mix, and make sure they're aligned with what you're feeling.

**4 Gather a rough draft.** Assemble a "rough draft" of your playlist by compiling a lot of songs you're thinking about including. You probably won't use all of them in the end, but this step helps you narrow down your options.

**5 Edit the playlist (optional).** If you gathered more songs than you needed for your playlist or mix, start eliminating those that aren't a perfect fit. Are the lyrics slightly wrong? Does the music make the song fit poorly with the other songs? Could someone use this song to misinterpret your meaning? Ask yourself these questions as you think about what to cut.

**6 Arrange the tracks.** Think of the playlist as a prolonged listening experience - you don't want the listener to get bored or skip songs.

- Start out with a few tracks that grab the listener and get his or her attention.
- Group songs of similar tempos together, and gradually move into slower or faster tunes.
- End the mix on a high note, with one a song that you think will really stick with the listener. Tying in the last song to the theme of the compilation can make it much more effective.

**7 Make adjustments.** Finalize your track arrangement and listen to the version a few times. Feel free to remove some tracks and add others. It's possible that you may realize new tracks you'd like to add late in the process.

**8 Title your mix (optional).** If you're sharing your playlist electronically, give it a title that reflects the theme of the mix. Or, if you're out of ideas, name it after the person you're giving it to.

• Picking a set of songs that really define a specific (possibly current) time in your life can be appreciated later when you put on the album and are reminded of days gone by.

• Avoid picking several songs from one artist. Rather, focus on a wide range of artists. Especially try to avoid including two songs by the same artist back-to-back. Of course, there are always exceptions, such as songs that are made to be played together (such as "The Hellion" and "Electric Eye" by Judas Priest, "Depths" and "Surfacing" by Chapel Club "We Will Rock You" and "We are the Champions" by Queen, or "Brain Damage" and Eclipse" by Pink Floyd) and two songs that have special meaning to your intended audience.

• Watch your attitude! Be certain you are in the mood you wish the CD to convey when you make the mix CD - otherwise, other feelings are likely to seep into the songs you choose.

• Make the compilation running time no longer than necessary - if possible, keep it under an hour.

• The most important thing is to burn early drafts on a CD and to listen to the mix yourself, from beginning to end, to better imagine what your intended audience will think when they listen to it. Listen in as many different places and speakers as possible: your computer speakers, your car stereo, cheap headphones, high-quality headphones, etc. Keep a notepad with you to write down ideas to improve it.

• Making cover art or creative liner notes can make the compilation more personal.

## Top 10 Tape Tips by Rob Sheffield (Love is a Mix Tape)

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Rob Sheffield, author of [Love is a Mix Tape](#), has created this [list of Top 10 mix tips](#) for The Independent on the best tips for arranging your mixtape:

1. Start with a Buddy Holly song. Every mix tape that starts with a Buddy Holly song gets a smile going 10 seconds after you press play.
2. Pick a song with the name of the person you're making the tape for - depending on the name. All Marthas love The Beatles' "Martha My Dear," but all Beths hate Kiss's "Beth" - and what Roxanne really wants to hear "Roxanne" again?
3. It's useful to ponder what kind of mood you're trying to create. If it's an angry break-up tape, you must include the Buzzcocks' "Ever Fallen in Love". If it's a sad break-up tape, you must include Frank Sinatra's "The Night We Called It a Day". If it's a make-out tape, try Al Green's "One of These Good Old Days". If it's a road-trip tape, you're going to throw in The Clash's "Janie Jones", the music gods' gift to automotive technology.
4. Twenty-minute avant-jazz freakouts? Some other time.
5. Try to put the Aretha Franklin song at the end of Side One - no matter who the next singer is, they're going to sound sickly and timid trying to follow the Queen of Soul.
6. Mix it up stylistically. If you were in the mood to hear the same kind of music for 45 minutes at a time, you'd just put on an actual album.
7. Think of a different silly title for each side of the tape, such as Hall Side and Oates Side, or Pork Side and Beans Side.
8. Cut out scrapbook pictures of old movie stars and use them as a cover for the tape case. (I'm partial to Ava Gardner in The Hucksters.)
9. When in doubt, James Brown. You're never not glad to hear him, especially after a few too many Elliott Smith and Jeff Buckley ballads.
10. If you're a male, and you happen to be making this tape for a female in whom you have some sentimental or carnal interest, think twice about including Bob Dylan's "Just Like a Woman" or AC/DC's "Let Me Put My Love Into You". Trust me on this one.