

# 6 STEPS TO FIX YOUR MUDDY MIXES



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## What Can You Do When Your Mixes Lack Clarity?

You might have a similar problem to many other engineers: *Dealing with muddiness in your mixes.*

We all want nice and clear mixes, full of thick low-end that doesn't overpower our pristine highs right?

A muddy mix is when the lower mids of your mix get cluttered up and all the bottom end seems to lack definition.

You can't hear the differences between the bass drum and the bass guitar because they take up the same space, resulting in a cluttered mix.

Even the lower end of the vocal is trying to pull some weight down there, way out of its league.

So what can you do when your mixes lack clarity?

### 1. Start With Your Drums

Start by soloing your drums and see if you notice any abnormal boominess. The bass drum is a big contender for this so make sure it isn't occupying too much low end space.

Also, there is a buildup of potential low mid energy when you have all of your drums soloed at once, so be sure to listen to them as a complete instrument. Make note of every drum that's adding a lot of extra low-end to your drum sound. This doesn't have to be only the kick drum mic, but it could also be the overall low-end from the overheads or the bleed from the snare drum.



## 2. Go Through Your Other Instruments, One by One

After soloing your drums, add in other instruments and see if they add extra boominess. Bass guitars, keyboards playing lower register parts and other instruments that have their fundamental frequencies in the low-end are the usual suspects here.

Maybe two different instruments are competing for the same spot in the frequency spectrum, which results in an even muddier sound.

## 3. Filter Where You Need

After finding the offending instruments, filter out what you don't need. Vocals can be filtered out quite high, depending on the range and sex of the singer.

Guitars can be filtered as high as 200Hz or more if they **aren't playing a major part in the song**. Filter out the unnecessary low end in all the instruments and see if your mix sounds better.

As a general rule, all instruments except bass and kick drum (and other low-end instruments) can be filtered up to 100 Hz. To find a good cut-off frequency for your filters you should move the filter up in the context of the mix (not in solo) until you can hear the instruments getting weaker. Then back off a little bit so you don't take away too much low-end or low-mids. You don't want to be that worried about muddiness that you end up on the other extreme without any lows.



## 4. If You Can't Filter, EQ Correctly

If you've tried filtering and it doesn't quite cut it (no pun intended), you have to resort to some corrective EQ. Low end thickness is often caused by a bump in the 120Hz range and a boomy mid-range character can be caused by too much 200-250Hz.

So by cutting a little bit in those frequency areas you can clean up an instrument quite nicely. Set your EQ to a narrow Q and see if you can't sweep any of those annoying frequencies off the table.

Sweep your narrow Q boost around the areas from 100 - 250 Hz until you hear the unbearable low-mid build-up increase.

**Tip:** *Don't do this at a loud volume. Your speakers will thank you for it.*

## 5. An Analyzer Over the Stereo Bus

If you can't hear where the low end is and you can't seem to be able to pinpoint it with EQ, use a spectrum analyzer on the stereo bus to see where the frequency build-up is.

Frequency analyzers can come in handy when you want to see if you are representing each frequency range clearly. By using it to see your boomy build-up, you can take corrective steps to better your music mixing.

You can also repeat the exercise from step #1 with the analyzer on the master bus so you can see how each instrument adds to the frequency response. It'll help you see which instruments add more or less to certain low-mid areas.

The reason I recommend doing it last is because it's better to train your ears to hear the frequency build-up instead of relying on visuals. It's kind of like training wheels. If you need them put them on, but given enough practice you won't.



## 6. Cut the Boominess From the Master Bus

If you have gone back to every instrument and tried EQ'ing and filtering without avail there is one more solution. You can slap a stereo EQ over the master bus and clean up the boominess of the whole mix.

But be careful, those boomy frequencies are also the ones that keep the mix thick. Cutting too much can result in a thin mix, so you have to be subtle in your master bus cutting.

## Conclusion

So there you have it. Boomy and muddy music mixing is definitely a problem for many.

You want all your tracks to sound full and thick but when you end up putting them all together, what you get is a pile of unclear muddiness.

So use these tips the next time your lower mids need some tweaking. You might end up with pristine clarity instead of unclear boominess.

## Discover How to Create Separation in Your Instruments and Balance in Your Mixes

Now that you've got your low-mids under control you can focus on EQ'ing the rest of your mix.

If you need help with that, guess what? I've got just the thing.

It's called [EQ Strategies - The Ultimate Guide to EQ](http://www.EQStrategies.net). It's an eBook and video tutorial series filled with great practical tips on making the best EQ decisions for your mix.

Here's what a couple engineers had to say about it recently:

*"Everything was helpful. I used to fiddle with knobs until it sounded right. Now I can just go directly to the frequencies I need to boost or cut. I also learned more about how to use compression. I am enjoying learning and understanding more about mixing. I play out frequently and have a very good live drum sound. Your EQ Strategies has already helped me improve the sound by helping me understand compression better and how to use it on drums." - Jean F Peters*

*"The book is full of tips that are immediately useful. Like anything you are learning, it takes 'doing' and more 'doing' before you can start to polish your work. But the initial results are immediate and impressive....thanks. The format helped me solidify the basics very quickly. I sampled a few sessions with the concepts and found an immediate and pronounced improvement." -Dave Michaels*

Check out more testimonials from happy engineers right here:

[www.EQStrategies.net](http://www.EQStrategies.net)



## About Audio Issues

Audio Issues gives you a solid understanding of the various aspects of producing music. You'll get easy to use, practical production tips about music production and audio recording.

Audio Issues gives you everything you need to know when it comes to producing your own music in your home recording studio.



## About the Author

Hi, my name is Björgvin Benediktsson. I help musicians and producers make a greater impact with their music by teaching them how to produce and engineer themselves at Audio Issues.

I've worked in live sound doing huge concerts back home in my native Iceland (that's where the name is from), recorded bands in Madrid, Spain (where I went to audio engineering school) and now [I produce, record and mix local bands in Tucson, Arizona](#) (I get around a lot...).

Through these diverse experiences I've grown to learn one thing:



## **I love teaching you how to make an impact with your music and audio production.**

I've taken my musical knowledge from playing in bands, my grunt work in live sound and my education in audio engineering and packaged it all here for you to enjoy and improve your skills in audio.

I've taught thousands of up and coming home studio producers such as yourself how to make an impact with their music through Audio Issues since 2011.

If I can help somebody improve the sound of their music and that helps them get extra fans and exposure I think I've done a great job.

I believe in sharing my knowledge with everyone and through Audio Issues I've been able to do that. I might not have won any Grammys but I enjoy being the person that inspires others to make great music while aspiring to learn as much as there is to know (and pay forward!).

That's what I'm all about. I've learned a lot from working in the industry since 2006 and I hope my knowledge can become your shortcut to taking your mixes to the next level.

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