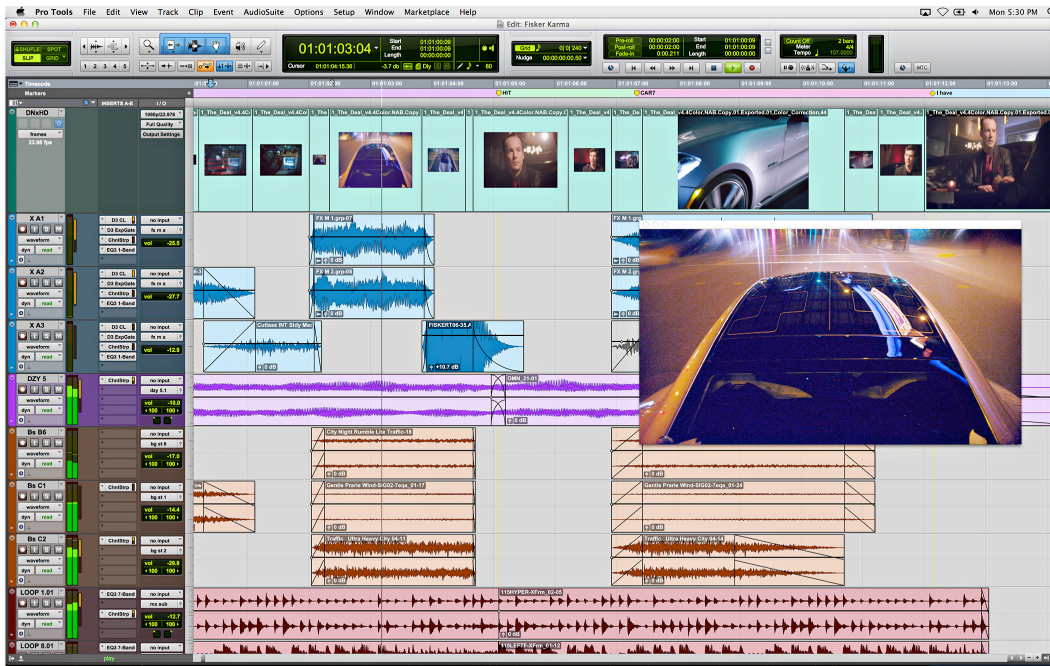# Pro Tools Starter Guide

Introduction:

Pro Tools has been around since the early 1990's and is considered an industry standard for recording, editing and mixing audio in North America. Almost all professional studios have a version of Pro Tools. Pro Tools began life as an audio program and added MIDI and virtual instruments later. By contrast, Logic and Cubase began as MIDI sequencers and added audio functions later. As a vast generalization, Pro Tools can be seen as more of a virtual recording studio whereas Logic and Cubase are music creation tools. The difference between functions and software abilities on the different software platforms is quickly diminishing and is largely more a matter of personal preference.

Pro Tools' strength is speed. It is a lean mean dragster that is designed to get to the end of the track in record time. It's a bumpy drive with little comforts like air conditioning. By comparison, other DAWs are feature rich and sometimes convoluted monsters to navigate that give the user an impressive amount of control and power at the expense of speed and general functionality. Logic and Cubase are like driving a Lexus or Mercedes. Pro Tools keeps things really simple with two primary windows: the Mix and Edit pages.

Pro Tools Version History:

Pro Tools 2018 allows users to choose iLok Cloud instead of a physical USB dongle. Subscriptions are available as well as outright purchase. Handy additions include plug search, faster menu item selection, cut and paste to groove, track

presets, better MIDI control, playlist comping from the waveform view, mixer EQ curve view, cloud-based collaboration and more.

Pro Tools 12 includes a free 8-channel version, which is great for student use and small projects. It has a new reverb plugin and some smaller changes.

Pro Tools 11 adds some new features and some long awaited features. The main features are 64 bit processing which also forces customers to use 64 bit AAX plugs instead of 32 bit TDM and RTAS plugs. 64 bit is the trend in computing and makes the most sense going forward. It is a shame though, no fault of Avid's, the maker of Pro Tools, that there is little legacy support for 32 bit plugs. Pro Tools 11 adds back in (from version 3 days) offline bounce. Every other DAW has had this for over a decade. 64 bit has also brought in more performance enhancements to the software.

Pro Tools 10 is a major upgrade from Pro Tools 9 that adds many features and removes many restrictions, such as the need for an AVID Digidesign audio interface. Pro Tools 10 also changes Regions (PT9) to Clips. Clips can now have their own volume separate from the track volume. This is a feature that Logic and Cubase have had for years. Pro Tools 10 now can record and edit 32 bit audio. This, again, is a feature that Logic and Cubase have had for years.

Pro Tools HD is the professional level Pro Tools designed for pro users. HD combines high-quality audio interfaces with hardware PCIe acceleration cards. The acceleration cards are both designed to take the processing load off the host computer and to give a zero latency recording with plug-ins enabled. Pro Tools TDM and AAX plugs are the only plug-in types that can run on an HD Accel card, however. These plugs are usually overpriced compared to their RTAS, VST, AU or equivalent. The HD stands for high definition. High Definition in the audio word is usually any system that samples at 96kHz or above.

Pro Tools HD Native is just like Pro Tools HD except that the processing is done within the computer's CPU instead of on dedicated expensive PCIe expansion cards.

All levels of Pro Tools are almost identical in editing and function on the software. It is primarily just the number of tracks, buses and latency times that are different between Pro Tools levels.

Getting Started
Pro Tools calls its work a **SESSION**. When using PT, you will be opening, editing, recording, and saving sessions.
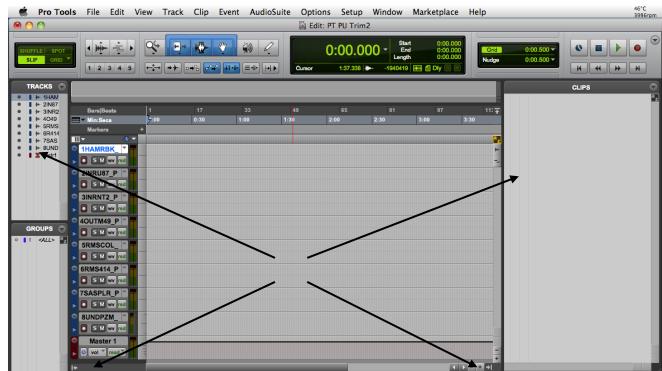

Pro Tools Edit Page

There are two main pages in Pro Tools (PT): **EDIT** and **MIX**. You can toggle between the edit and mix pages with: ⌘=

TRACK and GROUPS are viewed on the left. The Tracks and Groups can be viewed or hidden by clicking on the symbol in the lower left-hand corner of the Edit page.

CLIPS contains all audio used in the Session. The Clip Bin can be viewed or hidden by clicking on the symbol in the lower right-hand corner of the Edit page.
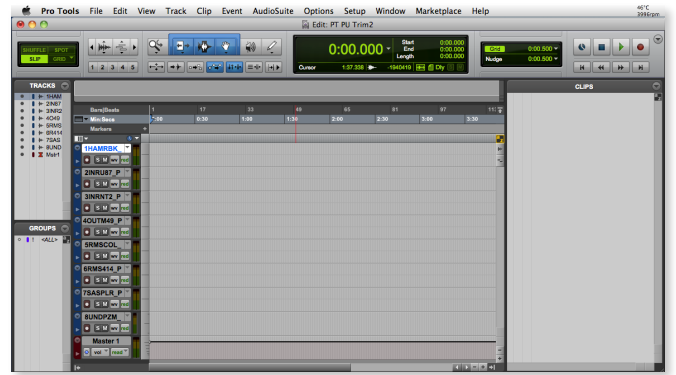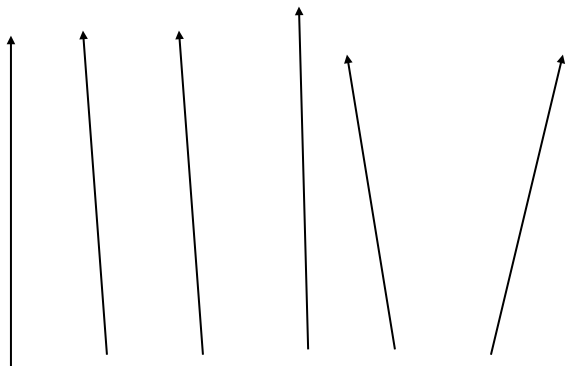
1.   2.   3.   4.   5.   6.

1. **EDIT MODES**
2. **ZOOM**
3. **TOOLS**
4. **SESSION** name that you are working
5. **LOCATOR**
6. **TRANSPORT** functions for PLAY, STOP, RECORD, SYNC, etc… are found here: Or a floating transport can be viewed by pressing: ⌘ PAD 1

EDIT MODES:
Pro Tools has four main edit modes. They are:

Shuffle (OPTION 1) – Edits that are removed cause audio to the right to fill in the gap.

Slip (OPTION 2) – Removing or deleting edits on the edit page does not affect the other regions.

Spot (OPTION 3) – When a region is selected, a window appears that allows the region to be spotted or placed anywhere on the timeline.

Grid (OPTION 4) – Forces edits to happen on a user selectable grid (bars, beats, seconds, frames etc.)

Creating a New Session

A New Session can be created by selecting New Session under the file menu or by using the quicker (more professional) ⌘ N.
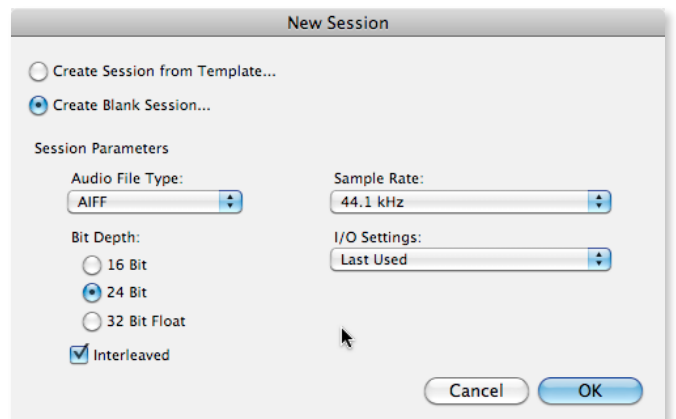

New Session window

Pro Tools will only let you work off of local drives. This means that you cannot create a session on the server.

The standard settings for the session will almost always be: BWF, 44.1kHz, and 24 BIT.

I/O Settings refer to your Inputs and Outputs. PT has several different interfaces that it could use including 002, 003, Mbox2, Mbox mini, HD and many more. The I/O settings will determine how sound is routed when recording and how it is routed on playback. Most editing only requires stereo output.
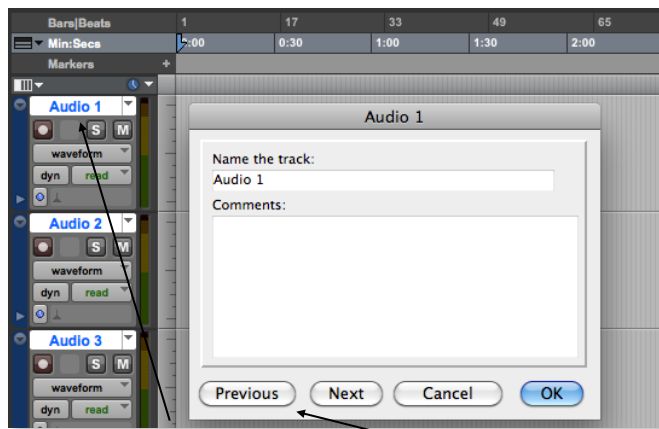
CREATING NEW TRACKS

New tracks are created under the TRACK menu or by pressing the Key Command: SHIFT ⌘ N.
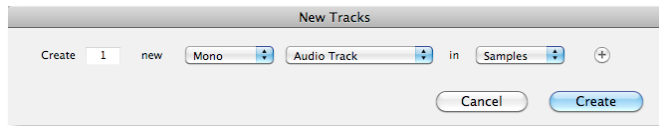
The *New Tracks* window can be navigated without a mouse using ⌘ right or left arrow for mono/stereo and ⌘ up and down arrow for track type. Pressing any number on the number pad will change the value of the number of tracks.

NAMING TRACKS

Double clicking the track name brings up the track-naming window. There is no need to click and name each track individually as once the naming window is open ⌘ right or left arrow will bring you to the next or previous track. TAB will put the cursor either in the Name field or the Comments field. ENTER or RETURN will close the name window.

IMPORTING AUDIO

Under the file menu you will find Import Audio or pressing the Key Command: SHIFT ⌘ I   will get you there way faster.
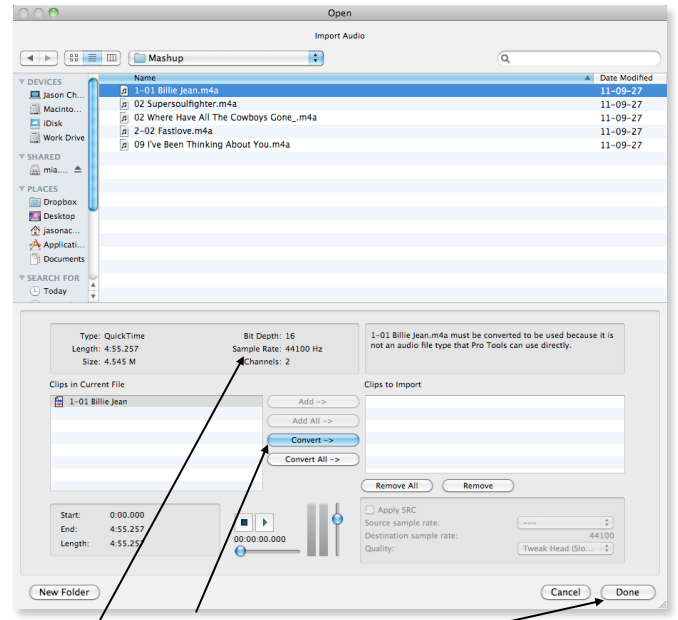
If the file that you are importing is not the same type or sample rate as the session, it will need to be converted. PT has an info area that lets you know what type of file you are importing.   You must press either ADD or CONVERT to import the audio to your session.

You can select multiple files to import at once. Press DONE when you are finished selecting files to import.
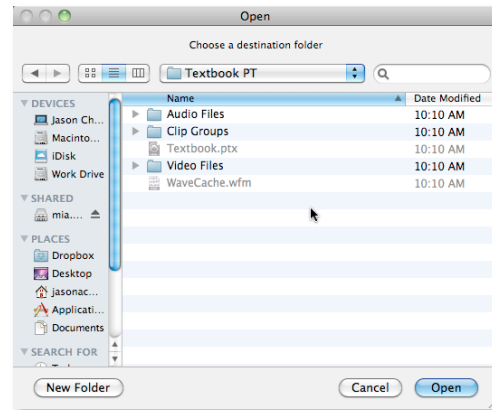
PT will ask you to choose a folder location to store your audio. The Audio Files folder for your session is probably the best place to keep your audio files all in one spot.
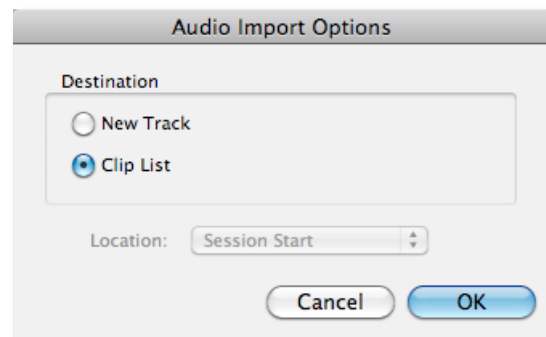
PT gives you the option of just importing into the Clip list or to a New track.

Key Commands: ⌘ T and ⌘ R will choose either track or region without having to click on the radial buttons.

Above is the EDIT page with the 3 tracks we created and the audio file imported in the CLIPS list.
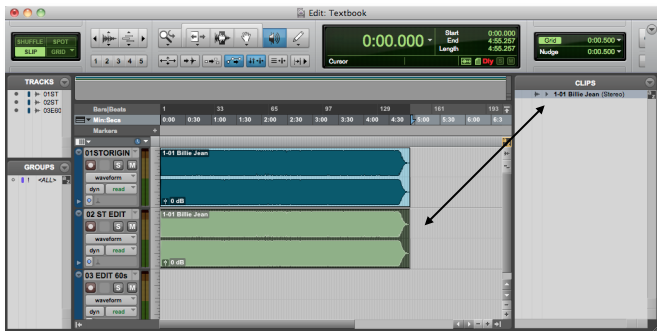
You can drag audio from the CLIPS list into a track.

Note that the original unedited imported file is in bold and is highlighted when the region is selected in the EDIT page. Selecting the clip on the edit page or in the clips list will highlight the other for the ease of finding your clip.

Track Heights
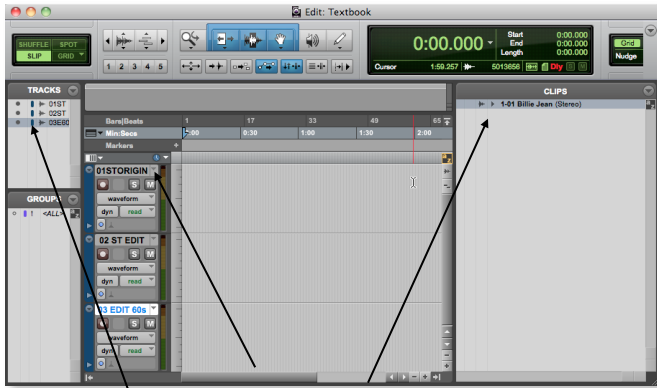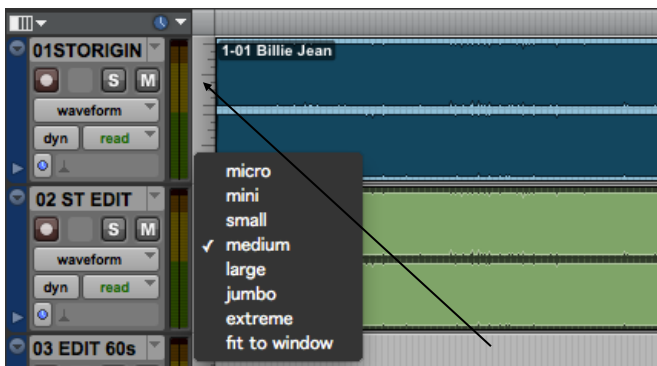

Track heights can be changed be clicking just to the right of the track. In the above screen shot, the track size window is open showing the different height options.

Holding OPTION while clicking on the height will make all the tracks the selected height.

Transport functions

The transport controls the function and placement of the Timeline Selection Point or playhead.

Stop   (Spacebar)

Play   (Spacebar)

Record   (NumPad 3)

Go to Beginning (Return)

Rewind   (NumPad 1)

Fast Forward   (NumPad 2)

Go to End

Tools

Zoomer Tool – Zooms with click and drag.

Trimmer Tool – shortens or lengthens beginning or endings of clips.

Selector Tool – Selects portions of clips or portions of the timeline.

Grabber Tool – Moves clips.

 Scrubber Tool – Auditions audio at varying speeds with click and drag. Also auditions clips in the clip list.

 Pencil Tool – Draws in automation or can redraw waveforms at the sample level.

 Smart Tool – One tool that combines trim, select, grab and fades into one! Trim occurs on the lower ends of a waveform. Fades on the top left and right of a waveform.

Smart Tool Trim works on the middle sides of clips.

Smart Tool Select and Grab work on the tops and bottoms of clips.

Smart Tool Fades work on the top left and right of clips.

Saving Sessions

Pro Tools sessions contain several files that can be located in different places. Save Copy In under the File menu is the best way to ensure that a saved Pro Tools session will contain all the files that are needed. Save Copy In is usually used at the end of each work period (i.e. end of the day or after a stage of a project is complete).
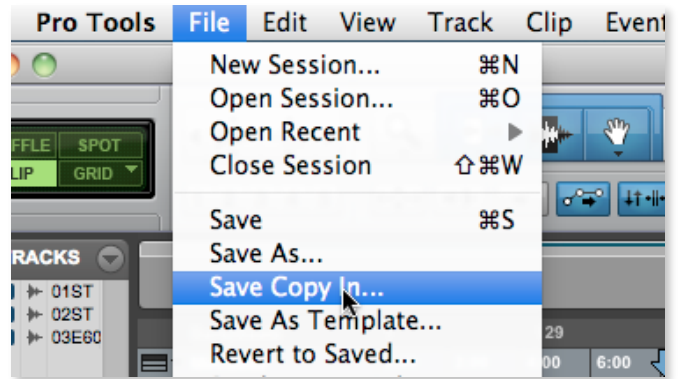
Save Copy In collects all Session content in one folder for archiving
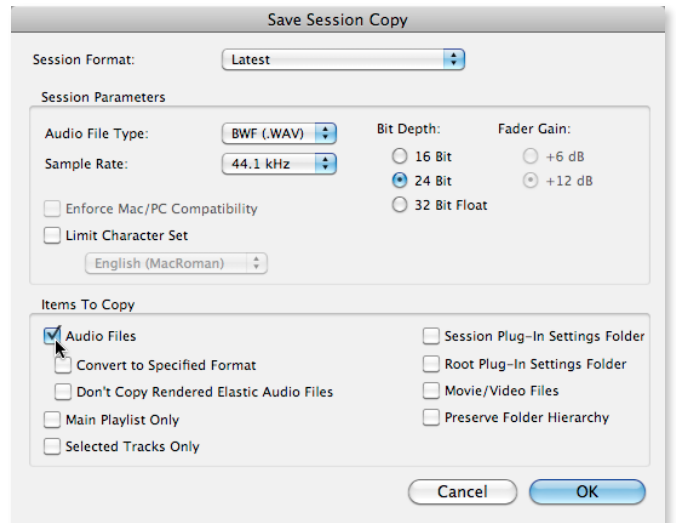
Selecting "Audio Files" in Items To Copy ensures the saved session is complete.

Many people have a love/hate relationship with Pro Tools. It is wonderfully fast and efficient, but can be unpredictable and unreliable at times. Pro Tools works on the principle that you have dedicated your computer to one task: using Pro Tools. It wants to be in charge of the audio interface and what hard drives are in use and so on. Try ejecting a drive from the Finder while Pro Tools is running to get an idea of what is being mentioned here.
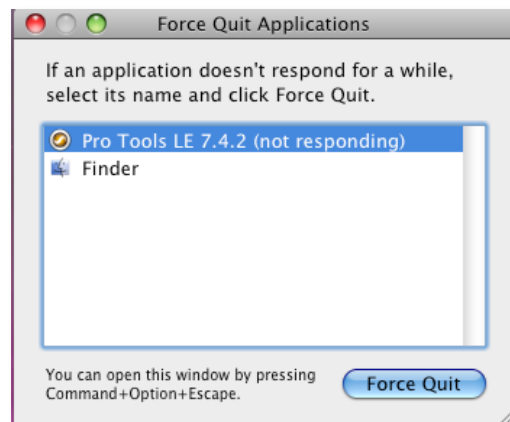
Pro Tools can behave erratically at times. Restart as necessary.

Setup Window Help

Hardware...
Playback Engine...
Disk Allocation...

Peripherals...
I/O...
Machine Track Arming Profiles...

Video Sync Offset...

Session ⌘2
Current Feet+Frames Position...
Current Time Code Position...
External Time Code Offset...

MIDI ▶

Click...
Preferences...

In Pro Tools, Select the I/O Setup from the SETUP menu.
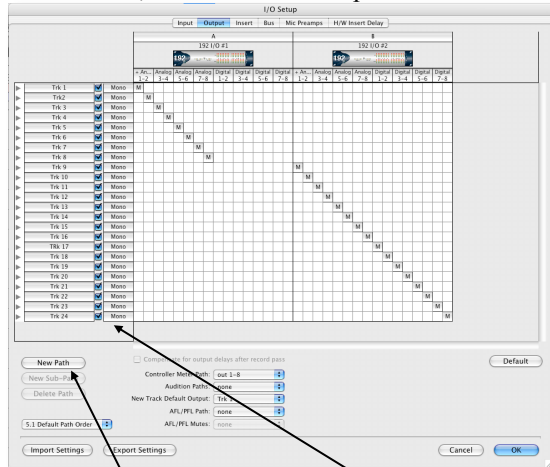
Select NEW PATH and choose STEREO.

Rename your path to say STEREO and confirm that the new path is Stereo.

Disable paths for outputs 1 & 2. Click within the grid under 1-2 to the right of STEREO to activate the new stereo path.

From the mixer page, hold OPTION plus COMMAND while selecting STEREO as the new path.

Now your session will play on your computer in stereo.

To convert back, from the I/O, deselect the Stereo path and reactivate Tracks 1 & 2. From the Mixer Page, hold OPTION plus COMMAND and select the output of track 1 to be TRK 1.

PRO TOOLS KEY COMMANDS

STARTING / BASICS:

New Session	⌘ N
Close Session	SHIFT ⌘ W
Open Recent	SHIFT ⌘ O
New Track(s)	SHIFT ⌘ N
Zoom	⌘ [or ⌘]
Zoom Waveform Height	OPTION ⌘ [or]
Make all Viewable Tracks fit	OPTION A or
	CTRL OPT ⌘ Down
Import Audio	SHIFT ⌘ I
Import MIDI	OPTION ⌘ I

WINDOWS:

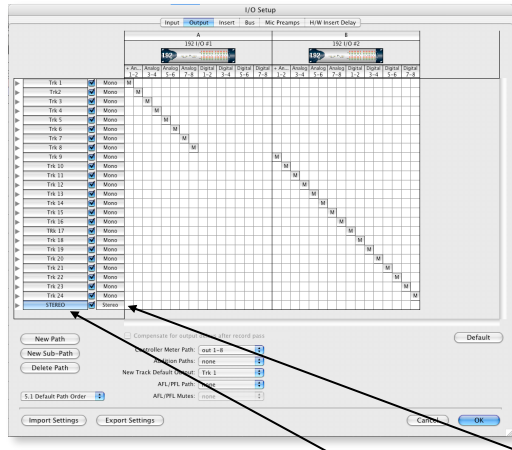|	
Toggle between Edit and Mix	⌘ =
Transport Window	⌘ PAD 1
Marker Window	⌘ PAD 5
View All	OPTION A
Cycle PT Windows	OPTION ~
Fit Selection to Window	CTRL OPT ⌘ Dwn Arrow
Fit All to Window	CTRL OPT ⌘ Up Arrow
Tab to Transient On/Off	OPTION ⌘ TAB

EDIT MODES:

Shuffle Mode	OPTION 1
Slip Mode	OPTION 2
Spot Mode	OPTION 3
Grid Mode	OPTION 4
Cycle Grid Modes	~

TOOL SELECTION:

Magnify	⌘ 1
Trim	⌘ 2
Selector	⌘ 3
Grabber	⌘ 4
Scrub/audition	⌘ 5
Pencil/draw	⌘ 6
Smart Tool	⌘ 7
Tab to Transient ON/OFF	OPTION ⌘ TAB
Tab to Transient	TAB
Tab to Transient reverse	OPTION TAB
Tab to Transient select	SHIFT TAB
Cycle Tools	ESC

ZOOM PRESETS:

Preset 1	CTRL 1
Preset 2	CTRL 2
Preset 3	CTRL 3
Preset 4	CTRL 4
Preset 5	CTRL 5

MEMORY LOCATIONS:

Create: Enter on the number pad
Recall: On the number pad: decimal (memory location number) decimal

EDITING:

Select All	⌘ A
Create Clip	⌘ R
Create Edit	⌘ E
Go to Left side of edit(front, top)	Left Arrow
Go to Right side of edit (end, tail)	Right Arrow
Create Fade	⌘ F
Heal Tracks	⌘ H
Split at Cursor	B
Export Selected Clips	SHIFT ⌘ K
Show all automation	CTRL OPT ⌘ Left or Right
New Playlist	⌘ \
Duplicate Playlist	CTRL ⌘ \
Bounce to Disk	OPTION ⌘ B

TRANSPORT:

Play/stop	Space bar
Loop Playback	SHIFT ⌘ L
Record	⌘ Space Bar / Pad 3
Rewind	1 on NumPad
Fast Forward	2 on NumPad
Pause	OPTION click Play or CTRL Space bar
Return to beginning	RETURN
Tap Tempo	T with conductor track off
Side Scroll	SHIFT Scroll
Waveform Height	OPT SHIFT Scroll

MIXER:

Group Tracks	⌘ G
Clear Overs	OPTION C
Temporarily Bypass Group	CONTROL click fader
Return to Unity	OPTION click fader/pan
Change all	OPTION plus function
Narrow Mix	OPTION ⌘M
Change Selected	OPTION SHIFT

CLIP LIST:

Select Unused	SHIFT ⌘ U
Remove/Delete Selected	SHIFT ⌘ B

PRO TOOLS INSTRUMENTS:

Boom – Drum Machine
DB-33 – Hammond Organ
Hybrid - Synth
Mini Grand – Piano
Strike – Drum sampler, player, programmer
Vacuum – Analog Subtractive Synthesizer
Velvet - Electric Piano
Xpand2 – Sample Playback synth

Dock
- ⌥⌘ D — Turn Hiding Off
- ⌥⌘ ⏏ — Force Quit...
- ⌥⇧⌘ ⏏ — Force Quit Pro Tools
- ⌥⌘ ▲ — Sleep
- ⌥⌘ Q — Log Out Jason Chapman...
- ⌥⇧⌘ Q — Log Out Jason Chapman

Services
- ⇧⌘ Y — Make New Sticky Note
- ⌘ ↺ — Get Current Selection (Do Not Cha...
- ⇧⌘ S — Scan with ClamXav
- ⌥⌘ L — Search With Google

Pro Tools
- ⌥⌘ H — Hide Others

Playback
- Start/Stop Playback
- Half-Speed Playback
- ⌃ ` — Pause (Pre-Prime Deck for Play/Rec)
- ⌘ \ — Transport Master Toggle

Record
- Stop Record
- ⌘ . — Stop Record & Discard
- ⇧⌘ — Half-Speed Record
- ⌘ — Enter/Exit Record in QuickPunch

NumPad Transport
- [0] Play/Stop
- [1] Rewind
- [2] Fast Forward
- [3] Record
- [4] Loop Playback
- [5] Loop Record
- [6] QuickPunch
- [7] Click
- [8] Countoff
- [9] MIDI Merge/Replace
- ⌘ — Create Memory Location
- [/] Cycle Trough Start, End and Length

Auditioning
- ⌥ ← — Play by Pre-Roll up to Sel. Start
- ⌥ → — Play by Pre-Roll up to Sel. End
- ⌃ ← — Play by Post-Roll up to Sel. Start
- ⌃ → — Play by Post-Roll up to Sel. End
- ⌘ ← — Cue Transp. to Sel. Start (MMC)
- ⌘ → — Cue Transp. to Sel. End (MMC)
- ⌥ ← — Cue Tr. w/ Roll to Sel. Start (MMC)
- ⌥ → — Cue Tr. w/ Roll to Sel. End (MMC)

Edit Modes and Tools
- ` — Cycle Through Edit Modes
- ⌥ 1 — Shuffle Mode
- ⌥ 2 — Slip Mode
- ⌥ 3 — Spot Mode
- ⌥ 4 — Grid Mode
- ⇧ F4 — Other Mode + Grid Mode
- ↺ — Cycle Through Edit Tools
- ⌘ 1 — Zoomer Tool
- ⌘ 2 — Trimmer Tool
- ⌘ 3 — Selector Tool
- ⌘ 4 — Grabber Tool
- ⌘ 5 — Scrubber Tool
- ⌘ 6 — Pencil Tool
- ⌘ 7 — Smart Tool

Edit Selection, Definition and Navigation
- ⌥⌘ → — Toggle Tab to Transients
- → — Cursor to Next Transient
- ← — Cursor to Previous Transient
- ⌥ → — Cursor to Next Region (TtoT Off)
- ⌥ ← — Cursor to Previous Region (TtoT Off)
- ⌃ → — Go to and Select Next Region
- ⌃⌥ ← — Go to and Select Previous Region
- ⌃⌥ ↺ — Go to Song Start
- ⌃⌥ ↺ — Extend Selection to Song Start
- ⇧ → — Extend Selection to Next Region
- ⌃⌥ ↑ — Extend Selection to Previous Region
- ⌃ ↑ — Extend Sel. to Include Next Region
- ⌃⌥ ↑ — Extend Sel. to Include Prev. Region
- ⌥ ↺ — Return to Start of Session
- ⌥ ↺ — Go to End of Session
- ⌃⌥ ↺ — Extend Sel. to Start of Session
- ⌃⌥ ↺ — Extend Sel. to End of Session
- ⇧ / — Link Timeline and Edit Selection
- ⇧ — Set Selection Start During Playback
- ⇧ — Set Selection End During Playback
- ⇧ — Sel. Start to Incoming TC (stopped)
- ⇧ — Sel. End to Incoming TC (stopped)
- ⌥⌘ L — Move Sel. Forward by Sel. Amount
- ⌃⌥⌘ L — Move Sel. Backward by Sel. Amount
- ⌃⌥⌘ L — Double Length of Edit Selection
- L — Halve Length of Edit Selection
- R — Rec Enable Tracks w/ Edit Selection
- ⇧ S — Solo Tracks w/ Edit Selection
- ⇧ M — Mute Tracks w/ Edit Selection
- ^ ↑ — Move Insertion to Beg. of Edit Sel.
- ^ ↓ — Move Insertion to End of Edit Sel.
- ^ ↑ — Increase Track Height
- ^ ↓ — Decrease Track Height
- ^ N — Toggle Insertion Follows Playback

Track Compositing (Playlists)
- ⇧ S — Solo Playlist with Cursor
- ^ P — Move Edit Cursor Up
- ^ ; — Move Edit Cursor Down
- ^⌥ V — Copy Selection to Main Playlist
- ^ \ — New Playlist for Selected Track
- ^⌥ \ — New Playlist for All Tracks
- ⌃⌥ \ — New Playlist for Selected Tracks
- ⌘ \ — Duplicate Main Playlist of Sel. Track
- ^⌥⌘ \ — Duplicate Main Playlist of All Tracks
- ⌃⌥⌘ \ — Duplicate Main Playlist of Sel. Tracks

Zoom
- ^⌥ ↑ — Fit All Tracks in Edit Window
- ⌘ [— Horizontal Zoom Out
- ⌘] — Horizontal Zoom In
- ^⌘ [— Horizontal Zoom to Fit Session
- ^⌘] — Horizontal Zoom on Selection
- ^⌥⌘ [— Vertical Zoom to Default Waveform
- ⇧⌘ [— Vertical MIDI Zoom Out
- ⇧⌘] — Vertical MIDI Zoom In
- ⇧⌘ [— Vertical Zoom Out on Waveform
- ⇧⌘] — Vertical Zoom In on Waveform
- ^⇧⌘ [— Vertical MIDI Zoom Show All Notes
- ⌥ A — Default View Entire Session
- ^ — Recall Zoom Preset 1

Automation
- ⌘ ↑ — Previous Track View (Selection)
- ^⌘ ↓ — Next Track View (Selection)
- ⌥⌘ ↑ — Previous Track View (All)
- ^⌥⌘ ↓ — Next Track View (All)

Editing, Nudging and Trimming
- ^⌥ [+] — Increase Grid Value
- ^⌥ [-] — Decrease Grid Value
- ⌥⌘ [+] — Increase Nudge Value
- ⌥⌘ [-] — Decrease Nudge Value
- [-] — Nudge Back
- [+] — Nudge Forward
- ⇧ [-] — Nudge Selection Back
- ⇧ [+] — Nudge Selection Forward
- ^ [-] — Nudge Data Back
- ^ [+] — Nudge Data Forward
- ^ [-] — Nudge Left Boundary Back
- ^⌥ [+] — Nudge Left Boundary Forward
- ⇧⌘ [-] — Nudge Right Boundary Back
- ⇧⌘ [+] — Nudge Right Boundary Forward
- ⌥ [-] — Trim Left Edge of Region Back
- ⌥ [+] — Trim Left Edge of Region Forward
- ⌘ [-] — Trim Right Edge of Region Back
- ⌘ [+] — Trim Right Edge of Region Forward

Fades
- ^⌥ F — Crossfade (Last Used Shape)

Regions List
- ⇧⌘ F — Find Region
- ⇧⌘ D — Clear Find
- ⇧⌘ [1] — Show/Hide Audio Regions
- ⇧⌘ [2] — Show/Hide MIDI Regions
- ⇧⌘ [3] — Show/Hide Groups
- ⌥⌘ K — Show/Hide Auto-Created Region
- ⇧⌘ A — Select All Regions
- ⌥⌘ U — Select Unused Regions
- ⇧⌘ R — Rename Selected Regions
- ⇧⌘ B — Clear Selected Regions
- ⇧⌘ M — Time Stamp Selected Regions
- ⌥⌘ Y — Export Region Definition
- ⇧⌘ K — Export Regions as Files

Mix Group List & Edit Group List
- ⌥⌘ G — Suspend All Groups

MIDI Event List
- ⌘ ↩ — Enter Start Time Field for Editing
- ⌘ F — Show Event Filter Dialog
- ⌘ G — Go To
- ⌘ H — Scroll to Edit Selection
- ⌘ M — Insert Another Event
- ⌘ N — Insert Note
- ⌘ P — Insert Program Change
- ⌘ L — Insert Controller
- ⌘ O — Insert Poly Pressure

Step Input
- [1] Whole Note
- [2] 1/2 Note
- [4] 1/4 Note
- [5] 1/8 Note
- [6] 1/16 Note
- [7] 1/32 Note
- [8] 1/64 Note
- [3] Toggle Tuplet
- ⌘ — Next Step
- [.] Dotted Note
- [0] Undo Step
- [+] Nudge Forward
- [-] Nudge Back
- [=] Select Main Location Indicator
- [/] Edit Selection Indicators

Global DigiBase
- ⌘ ← — Previous Browser
- ⌘ → — Next Browser
- ⌥ - — Audition from Head
- ⌥ - — Audition Loop from Head
- ⌥⌫ — Delete Locked Files in Browser
- ⌥⌫ — Delete Browser Item (No Dialog)
- ⌘ D — Duplicate Selected File

Keyboard Focus
- ⌥⌘ [1] — Edit Window Focus
- A — Trim to Start
- S — Trim to End
- D — Fade from Cursor to Region Start
- G — Fade from Cursor to Region End
- F — Fade/Crossfade
- P — Move Selection Track Above
- ; — Move Selection Track Bellow
- T — Zoom In
- R — Zoom Out
- Z — Undo
- X — Cut
- C — Copy
- V — Paste
- B — Separate Region
- N — Toggle Insertion Follows Playback
- E — Zoom Toggle
- ← — Nudge Selection Back
- → — Nudge Selection Forward
- i — Recall Zoom Preset 1
- ⌥⌘ [2] — Regions Focus
- ⌥⌘ [3] — Groups Focus

Spotlight
- ⌘ — Show Spotlight search field
- ⌥⌘ — Show Spotlight window

KeyCue
- ⌘ K — KeyCue Settings

⌘=command, ⌥=alt, ⇧=shift, ^=ctrl, ⎵=space, ↺=esc, ⌫=backspace, ▲=eject, [x]=keypad