

CRITICAL LISTENING WORKSHEET

Listen first. Describe what you hear. Save the decisions for later.

TRACK		ARTIST	
ALBUM / VERSION		LISTENING SYSTEM	

PASS 01 - JUST LISTEN

How does the recording feel?

Play the whole track without trying to pick it apart. What grabs your attention? What immediately stands out?

PASS 02+ - LISTEN WITH INTENTION

One characteristic at a time.

Replay the track as many times as you need. Focus on one area, write down what you hear, then move to the next.

BALANCE & FOCUS

What is your attention doing?

What feels loudest or quietest? What seems to be the focal point? Does the focus change between sections?

LOW END

What is happening down low?

What carries the deepest information? How do kick and bass relate? Tight, loose, deep, punchy, sustained, controlled?

MIDRANGE & HIGH END

How would you describe the tonal character?

What dominates the mids? How do the upper mids and highs feel? Bright, dark, smooth, aggressive, soft, present, harsh?

DYNAMICS & TRANSIENTS

How does the recording move?

Punchy or controlled? Open or compressed? What has obvious attack? How does the energy change through the song?

Keep listening. Keep describing.

There is no score here. The point is to notice what the recording is actually doing.

STEREO IMAGE & DEPTH

Where does everything live?

What is centered, wide or narrow? What feels close? What feels far away? Does the image change between sections?

SPACE & EFFECTS

What kind of space surrounds the recording?

Dry or ambient? Obvious room sound, reverb, delay or modulation? Do different elements seem to live in different spaces?

INDIVIDUAL ELEMENTS

What do you notice when you follow one thing at a time?

DRUMS / PERCUSSION Attack, room, cymbals, kit balance, processing, character	
BASS Tone, weight, articulation, relationship with the kick	
VOCALS Placement, tone, dynamics, doubles, harmonies, effects	
GUITARS / KEYS Tone, width, layering, density, role in the arrangement	
OTHER Anything important that does not fit neatly above	

ARRANGEMENT & PRODUCTION

What changes as the song develops?

What happens when the song feels biggest or smallest? Layers, doubles, harmonies, drops, transitions, unusual production choices?

THE BIG QUESTION

What makes this recording sound like this recording?

Write down the character, choices or combination of details that seem most important to its identity.

THREE THINGS I NOTICED

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____