

Music Technology: Terminology

Audio Interface – a device capable of converting audio signal from a microphone or guitar/synth into a digital signal so it can enter a computer. Audio interfaces usually connect to a computer via a USB cable.

Channel – refers to one individual microphone input on an interface/one vertical strip on a mixing desk, which corresponds to one microphone/one track of audio on a computer.

Condenser – a type of microphone which requires 48V/phantom power to operate

DAW – Digital audio workstation. A piece of music software such as Logic Pro, Pro Tools, or Ableton Live.

DI box – DI stands for Direct Injection. A DI box is used to convert a line level signal into a mic level signal (which essentially makes it much quieter, so there is no distortion). DI boxes are commonly used in live performances to plug instruments into mixing desks, as they often also serve to convert a jack input to an XLR output. These are not always required for recordings.

Dynamic – a type of microphone which does not require power to operate

Jack lead – another cable type commonly used to connect a guitar/keyboard to an amplifier/interface

Mastering – The final stages after mixing has been complete, the icing on the cake which makes tracks on a wider body of work sound uniform, and often also makes them louder.

Mic – Abbreviation of microphone

MIDI – Musical instrument digital interface. Uses data which is input, and can be interpreted as musical content by a computer.

Mixing – Applying processing and levelling audio recordings with the goal of making a balanced and listenable end product.

Mixing Desk – A unit which can control the routing and processing of audio signals. Some may have the functionality to connect to a computer, but not always. They are used commonly for live music or larger recording studio set ups.

Optical/ Lightpipe/ TOSLINK Cable – A cable used to connect an interface to some external preamps to increase the connectivity of an interface. The cable shines a light down it from one end to the other when plugged in.

Phantom power – 48V of power which is sent to condenser microphones to turn them on. Audio interfaces and mixing desks both commonly feature phantom power as an option on each channel.

Plug-in – A piece of software either included in a DAW or that can be loaded within a DAW and used for audio/MIDI processing.

Software instrument – a virtual instrument (usually opened within a DAW), which interprets MIDI data and outputs it as the sound of an instrument.

XLR – Cable that is commonly used to connect microphones to an audio interface/mixing desk