

PROTECT YOUR RELEASE.

The checklist for avoiding copyright claims and takedowns before they happen — what to save, what to register, and exactly what to do if YouTube or your distributor flags your song by mistake.

STEP 01 / BEFORE YOU RELEASE

BUILD YOUR PAPER TRAIL

☐ **Keep every session file.**

Your full DAW session (Pro Tools, FL, Ableton) with its original creation date is your strongest proof you made the record. Back it up to a cloud drive so the timestamps are preserved off your computer.

☐ **Archive dated drafts and bounces.**

Save rough mixes as you go — a folder of dated exports shows the song evolving in your hands. Email a draft to yourself for an extra third-party timestamp.

☐ **Save every beat license and receipt.**

Leased a beat? Bought a sample pack? Keep the license PDF, the receipt, and the email thread. This is the #1 document you'll need if a claim ever hits.

☐ **Get your splits in writing — before release.**

A one-page split sheet signed by every producer, writer, and feature. Percentages agreed on release day prevent 90% of ownership disputes later.

STEP 02 / REGISTER IT

MAKE IT OFFICIAL

☐ **Register with the U.S. Copyright Office.**

File at copyright.gov (standard fees run roughly \$45–\$65). An SR registration covers your sound recording and can cover the underlying song in one filing when you own both.

☐ **Join a PRO (BMI or ASCAP).**

Free-to-cheap signup that collects your performance royalties from radio, streaming, and venues. Register each song after signup.

☐ **Register with The MLC.**

The Mechanical Licensing Collective pays streaming mechanical royalties in the U.S. If you self-publish, this is money left on the table until you register.

☐ **Lock in clean metadata with your distributor.**

Exact same artist name every release, correct writer/producer credits, correct ISRC handling. Mismatched metadata is a top cause of false-match flags.

☐ **Only enroll in Content ID if you own 100%.**

Leased beats and uncleared samples usually can't be enrolled — putting a leased beat into Content ID is how artists accidentally claim each other's songs.

THE DISPUTE PLAYBOOK

☐ **Don't delete anything.**

Taking the song down looks like an admission and can kill your dispute options. Leave it up unless the platform forces removal.

☐ **Read the claim carefully.**

A Content ID "claim" (someone monetizes your video) is not a "strike" (a formal takedown). Claims are routine and often automated mistakes — strikes are serious and have deadlines.

☐ **Pull your evidence folder.**

Beat license, purchase receipt, session files, dated drafts, split sheet, copyright registration. Everything from Steps 1–2 — this is why you built the paper trail.

☐ **Dispute through the platform first.**

YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram all have built-in dispute flows. State plainly: "I am the copyright owner / I hold a valid license," attach proof, stay factual.

☐ **Open a ticket with your distributor.**

DistroKid, TuneCore, UnitedMasters, etc. can fight store-side flags for you — send them the same evidence packet. Reply fast; their tickets auto-close.

☐ **Leased beat? Contact the producer.**

Most false claims on leased beats come from the producer's own Content ID or another lessee. The producer can release the claim on their end — your license entitles you to ask.

☐ **Escalate if you truly own it.**

If a dispute is wrongly rejected and you own the work outright, a counter-notification is the formal next step — at that point it's worth a consult with a music attorney.

QUICK REFERENCE

THE 5-MINUTE VERSION

☐ **Every release:**

Session saved → drafts archived → licenses filed → split sheet signed → copyright registered → PRO + MLC → clean metadata → release.

☐ **Every flag:**

Don't delete → read the claim type → gather proof → dispute on-platform → ticket the distributor → producer releases claim → escalate only if you own 100%.

Heads up: This checklist is general information from an engineer who's been through it — it isn't legal advice, and platform policies and fees change. For disputes involving real money or repeated strikes, talk to a music attorney.