

TOP 7 BEGINNER DJ MISTAKES

(And How to Avoid Them)



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Contents

Introduction	3
1. Shopping for Bells and Whistles in the Equipment	4
2. Neglecting Beatmatching by Ear.....	5
3. Staying Home	5
4. Playing Only for Yourself	7
5. Trying Too Hard to Please the Crowd	7
6. Looking Down All the Time	8
7. Drinking to Calm Your Nerves	9
To Wrap It Up	10

Introduction

Learning to DJ can be hard. You lock yourself in your bedroom for months trying to get your head around beatmatching, mixing, EQing and whatnot while soaking in all the information on DJing that you can get your hands on. And there's no getting around that.

But you know what? When you play live, an occasional trainwreck or taking out the wrong tune won't ruin the party or your DJ career. You just smile and move on. On the other hand, working the crowd the wrong way or playing drunk easily can.

So in this ebook/report, I present you with the 7 beginner DJ blunders that you *really* have to watch out for... and that are so hard to anticipate when you're starting out. Some of those mistakes have to do with the decisions you make from the outset, such as when buying your DJ equipment, but others talk about getting out there and playing real gigs – because that's where most newbies fail.

Not to worry, though. A great truth about most DJ mishaps is that once understood, they can easily be avoided. And that's how I see my mission: Not just to show you what can go wrong with your DJing, but (first and foremost) how to prevent that from ever happening and do things the right way.

Onwards and upwards, and I hope you'll find these tips helpful!

1. Shopping for Bells and Whistles in the Equipment

When you're just starting out as a DJ, your budget is normally limited. It's therefore only natural to be looking to get the best bang for the buck, and so you start comparing the decks, mixers or controllers based primarily on the features (a.k.a. bells and whistles) they provide.

A controller that lets you mix music from your iPhone? Check! (Are you seriously going to use that?) DJ software that can instantly share your mixes on Facebook? Great! A CD deck with a reverse mode and a vinyl-style stop braking? I'll take that!

The truth is that you really don't need all those shiny extra features to DJ. You can beatmatch, mix and even do effects on pretty basic hardware, really. What you do need is quality equipment that will survive heavy use on your part, and won't frustrate you with random glitches such as the Play button working half of the time, or a bleeding mixer crossfader.

It's really simple: More features for the money = cutting corners on quality and reliability.

And there's actually more to it than just risking to end up with a crappy failing controller. Professional, quality DJ equipment bought at the same price typically has higher *resell value*, i.e. how much you'll be able to get for it if you decide to upgrade later on.

So here are a couple of pointers that will help you avoid the trap of forfeiting quality for extra features when buying DJ equipment:

- **Learn what the pros use.** Get familiar with what kind of DJ gear is used in clubs. That kind of equipment may be out of reach for you now, but what you look for is brands, not particular models.
- **It's OK to buy used if you buy quality.** I would go for a used basic Pioneer deck instead of a new feature-packed Numark for the same price any time of the day. I'm not taking sides here, but that's my personal experience. One word of caution: Learn what critical spots to check in used equipment beforehand.
- **How much will you be able to sell it for... if at all?** Check online to understand how much you can expect to get for those decks if you decide to sell them later. Is there demand for the brand? Would you be able to sell quickly? How much would you lose compared to the original price? Stay away if the answer is "a lot."

2. Neglecting Beatmatching by Ear

When you're just starting out, you want to quickly get to the fun stuff: mixing, EQing or other ways of showing your audience just how cool a DJ you are. Learning to beatmatch by ear, on the other hand, is boring, takes long time and is often frustrating. So you're tempted to skip it.

After all, DJ software and most modern CD decks can tell you the tempo of a tune automatically, and are even capable of synchronizing two tracks (oh, the magic Sync button!). And how about those waveforms in Traktor and Serato and make beatmatching so visual.

Don't take those shortcuts, for two simple reasons.

First, BPM counters are not 100% bulletproof. This is true even for tracks with a simple drum pattern, let alone more complicated styles such as drum'n'bass. Besides, some tracks vary in tempo and some are played by a live drummer, both of which can easily throw a BPM counter off. Good luck relying on your BPM counter trying to mix in that 70s disco track!

Second, different venues have different equipment. It's not impossible, especially in the beginning of your career, that you'll get to DJ with CD decks are so basic that they don't have BPM counters. It's not going to be a pleasant experience – for you and the audience – if you don't know how to beatmix by ear.

(To be fair, this is less of a problem now that most DJs are switching to digital and bring their own laptop to the party. But still!)

Remember that long-term, shortcuts will only hurt you. To truly consider yourself a DJ, you need to master beatmatching by ear. Yes, it can be hard and takes long hours of practice, but I make it as simple as humanly possible for you with my [Beatmatching Tutorial](#). Just stick to it, don't give up, and one day, it will just click!

3. Staying Home

This one just doesn't cease to amaze me. I talk to a lot of beginner DJs, both online and offline, and guess what: More than half of them never go to clubs or do it just a couple of times *a year*.

I know that the phrase "bedroom DJ" is there for a reason. You do need to pay your dues and learn the craft before you can DJ for public. And

locking yourself in the bedroom for a couple of months to learn that beatmatching stuff certainly helps.

But don't forget that DJing is as much about mixing, EQing and other technical skills as it is about making the crowd happy and creating that awesome party experience for them. You won't learn that skill by playing at home. Besides, you're doing yourself a huge disservice by missing out on the networking opportunities that might come up in the club.

Here are just a few reasons why you have to be out there, even if you're not ready to play for public yet:

- **Trainspotting other DJs.** You don't necessarily need to have access to the DJ booth for that, although that certainly helps. Observe how the DJ works the crowd, how they pace the night and build their set. Listen to how they mix and try to spot new tricks for yourself.
- **Making connections.** You'll eventually want to put yourself out there, and the time to start working on this is now. Network, network, and network some more. Make friends with promoters and other DJs (just remember to be polite and not annoy anyone). Get involved in the scene!
- **Studying the dynamics of the dancefloor.** Watching the night unfold from the beginning to the peak to the end will be a great help for you as a DJ. It will also save you from stupid mistakes in the future, like trying to make the crowd get on the dancefloor at 10 PM by shooting an array of current hit tunes at them.

4. Playing Only for Yourself

DJing is the best job in the world. You get to play music you like, have fun partying and get paid for it.

All too often, though, beginner DJs tend to think that *all* they have to do to get booked is play their favorite tunes and let the crowd observe them in all their glory behind the decks. So on the rare gigs they do manage to land, they basically spin for themselves, neglecting where they are playing, who they are playing for, and what the crowd expects from them.

Here is one simple truth: You as a DJ are in the arts/entertainment industry. You get hired to provide entertainment to the club guests and make them happy (and to help sell drinks in the bar, which is how the venue makes money).

That's not to say that you have to turn yourself into a human jukebox or an iPod shuffle. But you do have to find the right balance between pleasing the crowd, educating them and occasionally slipping in that obscure tune that you really like. And sorry to sound harsh, but oftentimes that means shoving your ego up your ass and just doing your job.

Don't overdo it, though: It shows when the DJ doesn't like the music they are spinning, just as it shows when you're really passionate about what you play. If you can't find that connection with the audience, ask yourself: Maybe it's just the wrong place and/or the crowd for you? If you're a techno DJ spinning for a bunch of rock fans, that's probably the case.

5. Trying Too Hard to Please the Crowd

Nobody wants to dance to an insecure DJ whose every action slavishly screams "Please like me!" Yes, your set is an exchange between you and the crowd, but don't try to please them at all costs. After all, you are in charge of the night, and your job is not only to let the people have fun, but also to educate and sometimes surprise them.

What you want is an image of a pro who knows exactly what they are doing, even when you do make mistakes. Watch for these warning signs in your behavior:

- **Caring too much about what they think.** By and large, people are there to have fun, not to judge your mixing skills. So when you

screw up (and even the most experienced DJs do!), chances are that no one will even notice. Put it behind yourself and carry on.

- **Frantically trying different tunes to make them dance.** You definitely want the crowd to respond to your music, but don't panic if the dancefloor isn't packed. Perhaps it's too early in the night, or some folks just need to have a drink or two. By all means try to hit that chord with them, but don't make it look like you're desperately searching for the record that will make them like you.
- **Playing every request.** It's OK to play a request from time to time, but you're getting paid to know better than whoever comes up to the DJ booth, aren't you? Besides, what you're being asked to play is not necessarily representative of what the majority wants to hear. By trying to win approval of one person and playing their request, you are risking taking your set in a totally wrong direction.
- **Letting them go through your records.** Your record collection is at the very core of your identity as a DJ, and so in my book, it's a very private thing. Why would you want to suffer the humiliation of a random person searching through your stuff? Also, letting them go through your tunes invites requests for which there's no standard "I left it at home" excuse.

6. Looking Down All the Time

"A good DJ is always looking at the crowd, seeing what they're like, seeing whether it's working; communicating with them. Smiling at them. And a bad DJ is always looking down at what they're doing all the time and just doing their thing that they practiced in their bedroom..." – Norman Cook (Fatboy Slim)

In DJing, your technical skills are important. Your mixing is important. But at its core, DJing is all about putting on great tunes to let the crowd have great time and make them scream for more. And to achieve that, you need to be making eye contact with them, smiling at them, watching them react to your tunes.

You want the folks on the dancefloor to see that you're playing *for them*, not taking some self-imposed exam on how perfect your mixing is.

It helps, of course, to get your skills to a level where you don't spend most of each tune beatmatching the next one to it. As it does to have a good knowledge of your records so you know exactly what to put on next without going through the tunes over and over.

But that's what practicing in your bedroom is for. Once you're out there, your job is to put on a show, and a show without communicating with the audience (not just through your music!) is always a poor one.

7. Drinking to Calm Your Nerves

They say that for most people, the fear of public speaking overweighs the fear of dying. DJing isn't that far off in how nerve-wrecking it can be, except that you play music instead of talking.

I mean, even after all these years, I still get butterflies in my stomach before stepping in behind the decks in a club. And I certainly remember how sort of throw-up, run away nervous I was before doing it for the first time!

I thought I really could have used a shot or two to calm down, but I'm glad I didn't.

You see, it's one thing to be a rookie, and a totally different one to be a drunk rookie trying to mix. While the alcohol might make you more relaxed, it will steal the precious sharpness from you. And you need lots and lots of it to beatmatch, mix, choose the next tune, all the while communicating with the dancefloor and watching how it's working for them.

You may not get a second chance with that promoter or venue, so don't ruin things for yourself by drinking.

And you know what the funny thing about the nerves is? After you put on your first tune, it all kind of fades away. You get too consumed by the crowd, the music and the fun that you're having. All the worrying that was happening before seems so pointless, and that's because it usually is.

Also, that excitement that you're feeling before a party is *good*. It actually means that you are going to perform well! I would get more concerned about a DJ who isn't getting those butterflies anymore because that probably means that they've just lost interest in what they're doing.

So take a deep breath, stop thinking about all the things that could go wrong, and step in to deliver that killer performance that I know you can!

To Wrap It Up

Mistakes are part of all learning. I cannot tell you how many I have made during my 15-year DJ career, and look, it all worked out just fine in the end! The important thing is to keep at it and not give up no matter what curveball life throws your way.

Keep on spinnin'!