Album Design Prep & DIY Kit

By:

Obscenum.Art

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Introduction:

Designing a physical album release can be exciting—but also overwhelming.

This kit will help you:

- Organize everything you or your designer needs (if you're hiring someone)
- Walk through the process of DIY-ing your own layout
- Understand the different requirement between different formats

Let's make sure your release looks professional and avoids common mistakes.

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Section 1: Creative Brief

Fill in the details below so you or your designer can create artwork that truly fits your album.

Band Info required:

Band name: _____

Album title: _____

Release date (estimated): __ __ __

Print deadline: __ __ __

*(**Pro tip:** Your printing studio should have the files **at least 4 weeks ahead of release**.)*

Music info required:

Track list (name and length):	☐ **Ready**	☐ **Not ready**	☐ **Not needed**
Lyrics ready and checked: (only if you're printing with a booklet)	☐ **Ready**	☐ **Not ready**	☐ **Not needed**
Song writing credits:	☐ **Ready**	☐ **Not ready**	☐ **Not needed**
Recording credits:	☐ **Ready**	☐ **Not ready**	☐ **Not needed**
Thank you list:	☐ **Ready**	☐ **Not ready**	☐ **Not needed**
Band member list:	☐ **Ready**	☐ **Not ready**	☐ **Not needed**

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Graphical Assets to include:

Band logo:	☐ **Ready**	☐ **Don't have one yet**	
Band photos:	☐ **Ready**	☐ **Not ready**	☐ **Not needed**
Record label logo:	☐ **Ready**	☐ **Not ready**	☐ **Not needed**
EAN/UPC code:	☐ **Ready**	☐ **Not ready**	☐ **Not needed**

*(**Pro tip:** EAN/UPC codes are used to uniquely identify your album for distribution. You'll need one if you're selling your physical release in retail stores or through major distribution channels. If you're only selling directly through your Bandcamp, website, or at shows, it's typically okay to skip it—unless your label or distributor requires one. You can request an EAN code in Sweden via gs1.se, or internationally via gs1.org.)*

Artistic Direction:

Do you have artwork already? If so, skip to next page!

Do you have a clear idea or sketch, or concept for the illustration?

What themes or concepts do you want to convey? (Optional: list lyrics, ideas, moods)

Do you have any art references or examples? Like album covers, book covers, game art etc.

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Section 2: DIY Physical Release Guide

A step-by-step overview for bands planning to create the full artwork layout themselves.

NB! You will need a graphics app such as Photoshop and a computer for this!

STEP 1: Download Print Templates

Request templates from your CD/vinyl/cassette manufacturer. They usually have a ”downloads” section somewhere on the product page, or on the website in general. Look for ”templates”. Common formats: Jewel Case, Digipak, LP Gatefold, Cassette J-card.

STEP 2: Import Templates into Design Software

Recommended: Adobe Photoshop, InDesign, or Affinity

Add the template on a locked layer at the top (so you can switch it on and off). Add a white layer at the bottom. Put your graphics in new layers in between.

STEP 3: Get Your Cover Art Ready

Digital release: Minimum 3000x3000 px JPG (RGB)

Print release:
CD: 1425 x 1425 px (300 DPI, CMYK at about 10x10 cm).
Vinyl: 3600x3600 (300 DPI, CMYK at about 30x30 cm).
Casette: 1425 x 750 px (300 DPI, CMYK at about 10.2 cm × 6.35 cm).

NB! These measurements are generalized, and some templates are made wider than the height, so not a square.

Import it into the template file and make sure it covers the ”front face” area of the template.

Add the logo and album title if it hasn’t been added already, make sure it doesn’t enter the bleed area of the template.

STEP 4: Set the Correct Color Profile

Most printers use CMYK / ISO Coated v2 (Europe) or US Web Coated SWOP (US), Your correct color profile is usually clearly written in the template instructions. Ask your printer if unsure.

Avoid converting from RGB to CMYK at the last second—colors may shift!

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STEP 5: Add General Layout Elements

Include all required elements for the back cover and the inside.

- Band photo (if applicable)
- Song list with track numbers and track length
- Label logo and contact info
- EAN/UPC barcode (if available)
- Any copyright/distribution text or disclaimers

Ensure these are placed clearly and legibly, and double-check against your template's safe zones and bleed lines.

STEP 6: Understand Booklet Page Order

This is usually different between different printers, but just take your time, read the template instructions, and think through the page layout, draw it out on a piece of paper, and you'll usually be alright.

The most common page order I have seen are, for example for a 16 page booklet:

Starting with last page on the left + and first page on the right (16 + 1), and then subsequently in pairs: (2 + 15), (14 + 3), (4 + 13), (12 + 5), (6 + 11), (10 + 7), and lastly the center fold: (8 + 9).

This can be a bit tricky but take your time, map out the content, and have a friend or family member double check your layout thinking, just in case.

Sometimes you can submit the booklet page by page, which is a bit easier, or just a 1 to 16 page pdf with the correct size and bleed settings.

Add the content and design elements as you see fit. Note that in a CD jewelcase or clear casette case, the booklet page 1 is the cover. Otherwise the cover is not part of the booklet.

Pro tip:

Even if you don't have a release just yet, save this checklist for future reference — and share it with your bandmates or record label.

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STEP 7: Export files for Print

NB! These formats are general. Refer to your printers template, or the printers website, and double check the settings! Ask the printer to check your file settings if you are unsure.

- Format: PDF/X1a or flattened TIFF
- 300 DPI, CMYK, usually with 3mm bleed on all sides
- No template lines or guides visible
- Outline all fonts if using Illustrator or InDesign
- Export files directly from the template file without cropping or changing size / resolution.

STEP 8: Files for Digital Platforms

Cover art design with logo and album name - save as: JPG, RGB, 3000x3000 px, always a square.

Refer to the online streaming service of your choice for their size requirements.

DISCLAIMER!

Only attempt the DIY steps in this guide if you are comfortable working with graphic design software and understand basic layout principles. I am not accountable for any printing mishaps, formatting issues, or layout errors resulting from incorrect file preparation. When in doubt, consult your printer or hire a professional—it's always better to have files double-checked before sending them to print. Better safe than sorry!

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Need Help with the Design?



Hi, I’m William a.k.a. Obscenum Art – illustrator, metalhead, and album design nerd.

I’ve helped dozens of bands with:

Full album cover illustrations

CD, Vinyl, and cassette layouts

T-shirt & merch designs

Print-ready file preparation

If you want to focus on the music and leave the visuals to a pro,
I’d love to work with you!

In any case I hope this guide helps make your release smoother and more epic.
Cheers and good luck with the new album!

Contact:

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