

# Set List Creating Guide

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A set list is a tool for managing **energy over time**. The goal isn't to play your best tracks back to back — it's to take a room on a journey and leave it higher than you found it. This guide covers the energy arc, openers and closers, reading the room, transitions (with notes for a DJ/electronic act like Snooko), and timing to curfew.

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## Think in an energy arc, not a track list

Map your set as a curve, not a queue. A reliable shape for most sets:

1. **Open** — establish identity and groove without spending your biggest moments.
2. **Build** — steadily lift energy; introduce momentum.
3. **First peak** — a real moment that tells the room “we’re here now.”
4. **Breather** — pull back deliberately. Contrast is what makes peaks feel big. A set that's all peak is a flat set.
5. **Build again** — climb higher than the first time.
6. **Main peak** — your biggest moment, placed near (not at) the end.
7. **Close** — land it intentionally (see closers).

You can run multiple smaller waves inside a long set, but the overall shape should still trend up.

**Dynamics — the rise and fall — are the point.** Ten “bangers” in a row exhausts a crowd and flattens the room.

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## Openers: earn attention, don't blow your load

- **Match where the room actually is.** Early/half-full room ≠ time for your biggest drop. Set the tone, get heads nodding, build trust.
  - **Establish your sound early** so people know whose set this is.
  - **Don't open with your single / signature track.** You'll have nowhere to go and the late arrivals will miss it.
  - For a support slot: respect the headliner. Warm the room, don't try to “win” it or out-peak the act people paid to see. A great warm-up set is a flex; a selfish one gets you uninvited.
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## Closers: land the plane

- **Pick the ending on purpose.** Two valid moves: end on your **biggest moment** (send them out buzzing) or a **signature/identity track** they'll remember as *yours*.
- **Don't overstay.** Leave them wanting one more, not relieved it's over.

- **Mind the encore math** (for live acts): if an encore is expected, keep one genuine highlight in reserve.
  - For a club DJ closing the night: bring it down with intention if you're the last record — don't slam the lights-up with a peak-time bomb mid-phrase.
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## Reading the room (the skill that beats any pre-plan)

A printed set list is a *plan*, not a contract. The best performers adjust live.

- **Watch the floor, not your gear.** Are they dancing, talking, phones up, drifting to the bar? The crowd tells you what's working in real time.
- **Test and respond.** If a track lifts the room, ride that energy. If it deflates, change course sooner than you think.
- **Factor the context:** time of night, who played before you, the crowd's age/vibe, the city, whether it's a festival crowd (broad, wants recognizable peaks) or a club's heads (want depth and a journey).
- **Have escape hatches.** Know 2–3 tracks you can drop in to rescue or relaunch a flagging room.

For a DJ, this is the whole game: **prepare more than you'll play.** Bring crates/playlists deep enough to go harder, deeper, more melodic, or more vocal than your plan — and pick in the moment.

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## Transitions (and DJ/electronic-specific craft)

Transitions are where energy is gained or lost. Clumsy gaps and jarring jumps break the spell.

**For bands / live acts:** - Plan the *connective tissue*: which songs flow attacca (no gap), where you talk, where you retune. - Keep banter tight and purposeful — momentum dies in long talking. - Group songs by key/tempo where possible so changes feel intentional, not random.

**For a DJ / electronic act (e.g., house/tech-house like Snooko):** - **Mix in key (harmonic mixing).** Compatible keys make blends feel seamless; clashing keys sound sour. Use Camelot/Open Key notation in Rekordbox/Serato to plan friendly neighbors. - **Beatmatch and phrase-match.** Bring tracks in on the phrase (typically 8/16/32-bar boundaries) so the groove never stumbles. - **Manage tempo deliberately.** Drift BPM up gradually to build; don't lurch. House/tech-house lives in a tight pocket — small moves, big effect. - **Use the long blend for groove tracks; the quick cut for impact.** Match the transition style to the moment. - **EQ the swap.** Roll bass out of the outgoing track as you bring the incoming bass in — two kicks/basslines fighting is mud. - **Layer tools intentionally:** loops, filters, acapellas, and FX to extend builds and create moments — but don't over-trick it. Taste > tricks. - **Plan anchor tracks, improvise the connectors.** Know your 4–6 “moment” records and the rough order; let the in-between flex with the room.

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## Timing to curfew

Curfews are hard walls — venues face real fines and license risk for going over. Blowing the curfew can cut your set, kill the encore, or burn the relationship with the promoter.

- **Confirm your set length and curfew in the advance**, in writing.
  - **Build the set to time** with a buffer (target ~5 minutes short of your slot to absorb intros, crowd moments, or a tech hiccup).
  - **Track the clock live**. Put a visible clock/phone where you can see it. Know your “if I’m here at this time, I skip to the closer” checkpoint.
  - **Have a flex section** you can cut or extend — usually a mid-set stretch — so you can hit the ending on time no matter what.
  - **For a DJ**: know how to get out cleanly if you’re called early or running long — have a planned exit blend rather than an awkward cut.
  - **Respect the next act / lights-up**. Ending tight and on time is professionalism that gets you re-booked.
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## Quick checklist

- ☐ Set mapped as an energy *arc*, not a flat list of bangers
- ☐ Opener fits the room and saves your big moments
- ☐ Deliberate breather(s) so peaks land
- ☐ Closer chosen on purpose (biggest moment or signature)
- ☐ Transitions planned (DJ: in-key, phrase-matched, EQ'd)
- ☐ Deeper/harder/softer rescue options prepared
- ☐ Built to time with a buffer; curfew confirmed in writing
- ☐ Clock visible; flex section + clean exit ready