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r/audioengineering • 1 yr. ago
KaptainTZ



Is there anything an XLR microphone setup does that a USB mic can't do in post?

Microphones

I'm currently looking to upgrade from a Blue Yeti I've used for many years. I've also decided that a dynamic mic will work better for what I want. So I've only ever worked with a USB mic, but I edit my audio a lot in post. I do things like compression, Equalization, and I play with a bunch of other fun effects to get interesting sounds.

Everybody always talks about XLR mics being better than USB because of the control you have over the recording of the audio. I've done a lot of research over the years, but it seems like all the things people talk about XLR mics doing are effects that can just be added in post. So is this the case? if you're going to edit/mix audio after recording anyways, is there really an advantage to XLR setups?

I've been looking forever but I can't seem to find an answer to this question.

To me it seems like XLR is more necessary for live events than it is recordings. It honestly just seems like an unnecessary expense that makes editing after recording worse, because you've already applied effects that can't

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nextguitar • 1y ago

XLR gives you a much wider variety of mics to choose from—various patterns, frequency responses, stereo techniques, etc. You can also do longer cable runs. But if your USB mic suits all your recording situations, it's fine.

[Skip to main content](#)[Log In](#)**Walnut_Uprising** • 1y ago •

You definitely don't need to have a hardware effects setup to get the benefits of recording with XLR. Plugging a mic with an XLR cable into a USB interface is effectively doing the same job as a USB mic in terms of what you record - a USB mic is really just a combination mic and interface in a nice form factor.

There are a few advantages to using a standalone interface and a standard mic, compared to a combination USB mic, even just at the entry level. Mainly, there's a ceiling to the quality of a USB mic - once you get up to a few hundred bucks, companies stop making USB mics and just make standard XLR compatible versions. Add to that that the AD converters aren't the best, and you're kind of capped out after a certain point.

Aside from that there are a few advantages to having an interface-based setup in general:

- You really don't want to record multiple digital sources at the same time, computers really don't like doing it. If all you're ever going to need is one mic, then USB might cut it, but once you need multiple microphones, a single interface can record multiple channels, where a USB mic you're pretty much stuck with just one. If you ever want to record two people talking onto separate channels, or mic a guitar in stereo, or anything like that, you're out of luck.
- An interface might have other features, like MIDI inputs, 1/4" inputs for other instruments like DI guitar or hardware synths, separate headphone and monitor volume levels, cleaner outputs than an on-board soundcard, that might be useful for a broader setup. USB mic won't have that.
- If you have an interface you're happy with, you're not stuck with just one type of mic. You can have a dynamic set up on your desk for most stuff, and switch it out for a condenser if you need, without having to get the USB versions of each mic (which might not exist).

Basically, if you think of your setup as being components, having them separated just gives you a lot of flexibility.

In terms of interface, sky's the limit, but even a Behringer will do the job. Lots of folks start out with the Focusrite Scarlet series, they're reasonably priced (I like mine), but there's other brands out there trying to compete now, so it's a great time to buy it. I wouldn't go super cheap like a no-name Amazon, but you don't need to spend a fortune either.

↑ 13 ↓ ...

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**KS2Problema** • 1y ago • Edited 1y ago •

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applied effects that can't be taken off.

It appears you have some misconceptions about the difference between such mics.

A typical mic that uses XLR connectors is likely to be low impedance, either a condenser mic that likely will require phantom power, or a dynamic mic, that likely has somewhat lower sensitivity than a condenser mic and so may require more gain from a preamp or the use of an intermediary signal boost like the Cloudlifter.

Such mics do not come with built-in effects (although you may find some USB mics with some basic digital effects built in, it's within the realm of possibility).

On those occasions when people commit to effects while tracking (something I almost never do unless the effect is a performance effect like a dub echo that must be manipulated in time with the music), those effects are typically patched in through send and returns on the mixing board.

A USB mic is likely to be a condenser mic (but could be a dynamic) that uses the USB system of the host to draw power for its internal circuits and to send signal into. Many USB mics are purpose designed for the low end / podcaster market. But you may find conventional, XLR connector versions of the same mic in some cases, as well.

↑ 8 ↓ ...



KnzznK • 1y ago • Edited 1y ago •

To record something into a computer you need: microphone -> cable -> microphone preamp -> analog-to-digital converter -> and some sort of device which provides a link between your microphone signal and a computer (i.e. an "interface"). All these are mandatory, in one form or another.

In an USB microphone *all* of the above is put into one device. This also means that USB microphones tend to be not so great (yes, Blue Yeti is kinda bad when compared against "real" microphones). Note that this doesn't mean USB mics aren't usable! They're completely fine for recording a voice that is clear enough and comprehensible. USB mics are also great for the price. I mean you get all that for what? 150\$? Albeit none of it is of great quality.

In practice if you want to use a XLR microphone you'll need the microphone, a cable, and an interface. All are mandatory. Interface contains (usually) 1 or 2 mic preamps, AD/DA converters, and a way for your signal to reach your computer so that a software can access it.

But can XLR microphone do something that USB mic can't, no? I'm a bit puzzled about this question. I mean microphone doesn't *do* anything? It can be used to capture a sound. Both XLR mics and USB mics can be used to record, and that's it, that's what a microphone does. Yes, the quality of that recording can be *much* better with a proper setup, and in that sense this is something that a cheap USB setup can't "do", I guess?

↑ 5 ↓ ...



reedzkee • 1y ago •

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we can use microphones made in the 50's with an XLR mic. USB is locked in to an aging digital format. similar principal as to why enthusiasts like unitasker power amplifiers as opposed to an AV receiver.

but for folks that have no interest in the audio engineering craft, only record one thing at a time, and are satisfied by "passable" audio, USB mics are a fabulous choice.

in your case, i do not think you would benefit from an XLR microphone.

↑ 3 ↓ ...



[deleted] • 1y ago •

The difference has nothing to do with applying effects or mixing. A USB mic is a practical budget option that lets you record something for cheap. It does the preamplification and conversion with built in cheap components. A XLR mic can be plugged into any preamp and converter or interface which makes it the professional option.

↑ 5 ↓ ...



ozorfis • 1y ago •

XLR microphones typically can be of much higher quality. A USB mic combines all functions mic, amp and interface in one product.

At higher price points it makes sense to separate those functions so one can use different mics with the same amp or digital interface.

↑ 4 ↓ ...



dostunis • 1y ago • Edited 1y ago •

There's a lot of good information in here but I don't think anyone's asked the real important question- what *exactly* are you using the microphone for? The needs of someone making a 1 person podcast are going to be very different than someone wanting to do professional VO work, or record music, or just doing youtube react videos. It's entirely possible that there's absolutely no reason to double your costs and ditch the usb mic if it's already a fine tool for the job.

↑ 2 ↓ ...

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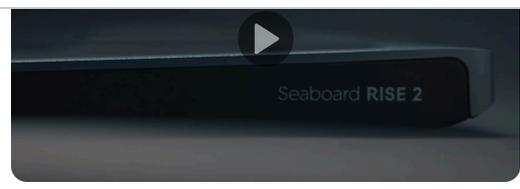
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SleeplessInMidtown • 1y ago •

So if you're looking to upgrade, are you looking to upgrade to another USB mic? Really there aren't any high-end USB mics. Or maybe there are and I just don't know. It's the same in almost every industry with almost every piece of gear. You have the all-in-one solution that puts everything together in a nice little box for a cheap price, and that's good enough to start with. When you get past that, you start buying higher-end separates.

2

8 more replies



i_am_blacklite • 1y ago •

One is a microphone with Preamp and ADC in one case. The other has them separated. The term "XLR mic" is defining a microphone by connector type... there are plenty of microphones without inbuilt pre's and converters that use a different connector type.

It's like an all in one stereo system versus individual components. The all in one is targeted for a different market than the individual component systems. Do they do the same job? Yes. Can you get better results by choosing the components carefully for your use case? Also yes. Is there more flexibility with individual components? Yes. Can you change one part and keep the others the same with individual components. Yes.

2



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11 comments



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5 upvotes · 4 comments

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