

# Music Metadata 101

*ISRC codes, UPC/EAN, ISWC, PRO registration — what they are, why they matter, and how to get them right from day one.*

2026 Edition · ~10 min read · Essential for Every Artist

## Why Metadata Matters More Than You Think

Metadata is the information that travels with your music — your artist name, song title, credits, rights information, and unique identifiers. It's invisible to casual listeners but absolutely critical to how your music is tracked, monetized, and attributed across every platform, collection society, and licensing system in the world.

Bad metadata is one of the most common — and costly — mistakes independent artists make. It causes uncollected royalties, misattributed credits, duplicate artist profiles, and can even prevent your music from being monetized at all in certain territories.

### THE COST OF GETTING IT WRONG

Errors in metadata submitted to streaming platforms can be very difficult to correct after release. Some changes (like artist name corrections) can cause platforms to treat your music as a new release, resetting stream counts. Get it right before you deliver.

## ISRC Codes

An ISRC (International Standard Recording Code) is a unique 12-character identifier assigned to a specific recording. Think of it as a fingerprint for your track — not for the song itself, but for that specific recording of it.

<b>What it is</b>	12-character alphanumeric code (e.g. USRC12345678)
<b>What it identifies</b>	A specific recording — not the song, the recording
<b>Who assigns it</b>	Your distributor (automatically) or you via USISRC.org
<b>How many per track</b>	One per unique recording (remix = new ISRC)
<b>Used for</b>	Tracking streams, collecting royalties, rights management globally

### SAVE YOUR ISRCs

Every ISRC your distributor generates belongs to you permanently. Save them in a spreadsheet — you'll need them if you ever switch distributors, register with SoundExchange, or license your music for sync.

### One Recording = One ISRC. Always.

- Original recording → unique ISRC

- Radio edit of same recording → new ISRC
- Remix → new ISRC
- Live version → new ISRC
- Re-release of the exact same recording → same ISRC (do not generate a new one)

## UPC / EAN Codes

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A UPC (Universal Product Code) — or EAN outside the US — is assigned to a release as a whole: a single, EP, or album. Where ISRC identifies individual tracks, UPC identifies the product (the release).

<b>What it is</b>	12–13 digit barcode number
<b>What it identifies</b>	The release product (single/EP/album) as a whole
<b>Who assigns it</b>	Your distributor (automatically) on release submission
<b>Used for</b>	Platform delivery, claiming your S4A profile, physical product barcodes

You'll need your UPC when claiming your Spotify for Artists profile and when registering your release with SoundExchange. Your distributor provides it — save it along with your ISRCs.

## ISWC Codes

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An ISWC (International Standard Musical Work Code) identifies the underlying musical composition — the song itself, regardless of how many times it's been recorded. It's the publishing equivalent of an ISRC.

<b>What it identifies</b>	The musical composition (melody + lyrics)
<b>Who assigns it</b>	Your PRO (ASCAP, BMI, SESAC) when you register the song
<b>Used for</b>	Collecting performance royalties, tracking songwriter shares globally

If you write original songs, registering with a PRO to get an ISWC is essential to collecting performance royalties. See our full guide on PRO registration in the Knowledge Base.

## Credits & Contributor Metadata

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Beyond codes, the text metadata you submit with your release is equally important. Here's what every release should include:

Metadata Field	What to Include	Why It Matters
Artist Name	Exact spelling, consistent across all releases	Drives all streaming profiles; errors fragment your catalog
Featured Artist	"Artist A feat. Artist B" — consistent format every time	Builds both artists' profiles; affects royalty routing

Track Title	Official title, no marketing additions ("feat." goes in separate field)	Affects search, playlist matching, and licensing databases
Songwriter(s)	Legal names of all songwriters, with split percentages	Required for PRO registration and mechanical royalty collection
Producer(s)	Full names of all producers and co-producers	Industry standard; increasingly displayed on Spotify, Apple Music
Genre / Subgenre	Primary + secondary genre	Affects algorithmic recommendations and editorial consideration
Language	Primary language of the lyrics	Affects international playlist placement and rights societies
Explicit	Mark accurately — "clean" or "explicit"	Required for platform compliance; affects playlist eligibility

## Common Metadata Mistakes

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- Inconsistent artist name spelling — "KajamBand" vs "Kajam Band" vs "kajamband" creates separate streaming profiles, fragmenting your audience
- Putting "feat." in the track title field — always use the dedicated featured artist field instead; putting it in the title creates duplicate entries in databases
- Missing songwriter credits — if a songwriter isn't credited in your metadata, they may not receive royalties from international collection societies
- Wrong genre selection — selecting "Pop" when your track is "Contemporary R&B" reduces your chances of algorithmic recommendation to the right audience
- Not marking explicit content — platforms may flag or remove unmarked explicit content; being wrong in either direction causes problems
- Generating new ISRCs for a re-release — using a different ISRC for the same recording fragments your streaming history across databases
- Putting website URLs in the artist or title fields — platforms will reject or flag releases with URLs in standard metadata fields

## Master Checklist

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### Before Every Release

- Artist name confirmed — exact spelling, consistent with all previous releases
- Featured artist credit formatted correctly in the dedicated field (not the title)
- Track title finalized — no extra text or marketing language
- All songwriter names included with correct split percentages
- All producer names credited

- Genre and subgenre selected accurately
- Language of lyrics specified
- Explicit content marked correctly
- ISRC confirmed — not a duplicate of a previously-used code
- UPC saved for your records after release submission

## Publishing & Rights

- Songs registered with your PRO (ASCAP, BMI, or SESAC)
- ISWC recorded for each composition
- Publishing admin service set up (Songtrust, TuneCore Publishing, or CD Baby Pro)
- Mechanical royalty collection active for all markets

### A **KajamBand™** Resource

Keeping Local Music Alive · Philadelphia, PA · [kajamband.com](http://kajamband.com) · [whatsup@kajamband.com](mailto:whatsup@kajamband.com)