

7 Steps To Making a Radio Ready Hit Song

A producers guide to writing a hit song

Hitmaker Academy

Step 1: Melodic and Percussive Elements

Melodic elements:

1. Start by writing melodies and chord progressions. Your goal here is to come up with enough melodic elements so that you can form an arrangement of a song.
2. For this step, it is important not to worry too much about what sounds you are using and concentrate solely on the notes you pick. All you need is simple instruments like a piano, synth, or guitar, and you can start forming the chords and melodies for your song. **Your goal in this step is to come up with the best melodies and chord progression that you could possibly come up with.**
3. If you are building around a vocal acapella, you will need an electronic lead like a vocal chop or synth lead for the drop. If you are **not** using a vocal you will need at least 1 to 3 leads that will carry your song through the verse, bridge, and drop of your song.
4. Next, we need a bass line. Use the bottom note of your chord progression to use as a bass line. Copy and paste those bottom notes of the chords onto their own instrument track and find a nice bass sound that would work well for your song.

Percussive elements:

1. Once we have our leads, chords, and bass, start writing a drum line to your chords and favorite lead option.
2. The drums should work perfectly with the chords and lead. If they don't, you must fix them.
3. Your drums should include a kick, snare, closed hihat, open hihat, and extra drum sounds to fill out the drum line.

What you should have by the end of this step:

- 1 to 3 electronic lead options (or your vocal and one electronic lead option)
- 1 chord progression
- A nice and full drum loop
- 1 bass line

Final notes about Step 1

Understand that sound design and sound selection are not a crucial part of this step, so do not get hung up on finding cool sounds yet. Focus deeply on good, vibey melody notes and nice, musical chords.

Step 2: Arrangement

Arrangement

1. Now that we have our melodic elements, it is time to piece them together into a full length song. Using only the melodic elements you've formed in step 1, attempt to arrange an entire, full length track.
2. If your melodic elements are insufficient, arrangement will be really difficult and you will need to keep adding elements until your song is interesting enough for your liking. If your melodic elements are good, your arrangement should be good enough to move on. Avicii loved writing his arrangements with really basic elements and sounds. Once he had a fully arranged song, he then focused on the sound design and sound selection.
3. Be sure to stretch your drums throughout the entire track. An example of this would be to use just the kick, snare, and open hihat in the verse, and use every drum in the drop.

What you should have before moving on to the next step:

You should have a fully arranged track that is as interesting as it can be using only the melodic elements you've created in step one. The lead or vocal should be interesting and fun throughout the duration of the song. The supporting elements like the chords, bass, and drums should be interesting and evolving throughout the duration of the song.

Step 3: Sound Design, Sound Selection and Automation

- **Sound Selection** - Sound selection means to search for and find unique presets to represent a melody or chord
- **Sound Design** - Sound design is the method of designing a unique sound from scratch to represent a melody or chord

Now it is time to take your melodic elements to the next level

Spend a good amount of time finding presets or designing your own unique sounds for the chords, leads, drums, and basses. Search preset banks in your favorite synths like Serum, Sylenth, and Omnisphere. You should be aiming for sounds that sound like the genre you are going for.

Spend extra time getting sounds that sound both unique and able to fit in the genre you are going for. Sound design and selection is what skilled artists are very good at and take very seriously. **Noisia, a wildly popular yet skilled EDM group, dedicates entire days to the sound selection step.**

Make sure you decide on sounds that would best work for your background elements as well. I like to use arpeggios and vocal pads in the background/atmosphere of my songs.

This step is the last chance you have at finding or designing cool, speaker pounding presets for your melody, chords, bass, and drums so make it count. A good way to challenge yourself would be to not move on from this step until you're absolutely satisfied with what you have.

Step 4: Adding FX

FX are impacts, risers, white noise sweeps, swooshes, and other misc transition sounds

1. Start at the beginning of your track and work through it from beginning to end adding lush FX on every transition. Add bigger, longer FX on bigger, more important transitions and add smaller, short duration FX on smaller, less important transitions.
2. Your FX should be consistent and full throughout the entire song. Every major transition, like the build up into the drop, should be rich in FX and fun to listen to.

Step 5: Last Minute Adjustments

1. Now it's time to sit back, listen to your song over and over, and take notes.
2. Take notes on things that need to be adjusted, removed, or added.
3. Take this time to do any final sound selection, and sound design.
4. Tweak anything in need of any last minute tweaks

Questions to ask yourself before moving onto the next step:

1. Is my arrangement interesting enough for both my standards and the standards of the industry?
2. Is there any part of my song that is too repetitive? If so, how can I change it?
3. Is my sound design and selection unique and up to the standards of the genre I am going for?
4. Are all my melodies and chords musically strong, fun to listen to, in key, vibey, and memorable? If not, why?

Step 6: Mixing

Mixing is a sophisticated skill. For an in depth guide on mixing a song from scratch, check out my “7 Step Mixing Blueprint Cheat Sheet” available on my website in the freebies section. I also built an entire course on how you can learn mixing from scratch. This is one of the final steps needed to make your music record label and Spotify ready. This course is available at AlexRomeSound.com as well.

Here are some bullet points to run through when mixing your track:

1. **Organization** - First organize, label, and color code your song. Group your instruments in to 5 groups; Leads, Chords/Bass, Drums, FX, Background/Atmos.
2. **Balance** your song first. Start with the drums and then balance every other instrument until your instruments are even and consistent. Nothing should be too loud or too quiet at this point. Your goal is to balance your song so that important instruments are in front, and less important instruments are further back in the mix.
3. **EQ** - Low-cut every instrument besides the bass, kick, and snare up to 120 - 150hz.
4. **Panning and spreading** - spread or pan instruments like chords, harmonies, hihats, FX, and background sounds.
5. **Compression** - Vocals, kick, and snare need a little bit of compression. Compress the vocals until they are consistent, even, and tight. Compress the kick and snare slightly until they become a bit punchier and tighter.

Step 7: Mastering

This is the final step of the song production process. Mastering tightens up your song and adds industry standard loudness to it. Mastering is also a very tough skill to learn. I'd advise you to join the Hitmaker Academy on my website so that you can properly learn how to master a song. **If your mastering chain isn't right, Spotify will not even allow you to post music on the platform.**

Beginner's guide to mastering a song:

1. Start with a simple **bus compressor** on the master fader of your track. Compress to 2 db of gain reduction. I like the SSL G-comp from waves.
2. Add a **saturation plugin** of your choice. I like multiband analog saturation plugins from waves or Fab Filter Saturn. Add a small bit of saturation to thicken up your mix.

Add a **limiter** to the master of your song. My favorite limiter is iZotope Maximizer or Fab Filter Pro L.