

Tape Saturation Plugin – Make Your Digital Mixes Sound Like Analog

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What Tape Saturation Is

The tape Saturation plugin has its roots in the old analog consoles. In the digital mixing world we have saturation [VSTs](#).

We “create” the Saturation effect when we own an analog console and “push the signal to its limits” during mixing.

We use Saturation for 3 main reasons:

- The signal hits “red” and this way we produce some kind of [Compression/Limiting](#), which is one of the most natural and greatest **compression** that we can get.
- Furthermore, by pushing the signal to its limits we “make it hot” so it can give a **certain color to the sound** and precisely to the harmonics of the sound, making the sound more “alive” and sweet.
- And we also use it for experiments and **strange effects**. Ultra “angry” vocals, a snare with a “biting” sound etc.



We can say that Saturation is the **lighter version of the Distortion** – the famous huge dose of Gain that we can also find on the amps of our electric guitars.

Analog VS Digital

The main difference between the analog mixing world and the digital mixing world using software like Cubase, Pro Tools, Reason and FL Studio, is that the digital mixing world **does not forgive**.

As we all know if the signal goes above 0db then we have **clipping**, the infamous for all of us weird scratchy sound that our program produces and it forces us to reduce the volume below 0db.

But in the analog world we have **soft clipping** and not **hard clipping**, which is not as destructive as hard clipping.

On the contrary, this **gentle** analog clipping is not destructive at all, but it improves our sound, compression wise and “color” wise as I mentioned above.



Which Saturation Plugins I Recommend

[Fabfilter Saturn](#)

[PSP VintageWarmer2](#)

These are the top 2 Saturation Plugins for me and I use them on every single digital mix of mine.

Just because I love these 2 doesn't mean the others suck, but I've tried many VSTs of this kind cause I think that there are necessary for digital mixing.

After some months testing, I came across VintageWarmer and I loved it – it was the 1st in my list for saturation plugins!

While I still use it I came across the Saturn plugin from the Fabfilter company. Now I use this **a lot** cause of its great sound and its easy intuitive interface .

I haven't stopped using VintageWarmer of course, cause there are some exclusive sounds that I can get out of it and this makes it a necessary tool to have.

No matter what tape saturation plugin you are going to choose... Both of them are fantastic tools so you can't go wrong either way.

Where Can I Use Saturn During Mixing?

In fact, **everywhere**.

But where I really have some “omg moments” when I use this plugin is at the **Drum Group** and at the **bass guitar**. The way it “glues” each drum kit together and the limiting it applies to the bass guitar are so great sounding that it’s a must have for each mix.

During the last months I find myself using this plugin on the **Master Channel** too.

It glues the whole mix together, you feel that the instruments “are connected to each other” easier and it gives an analog feeling to the compression that can trick the listener in thinking that the you recorded and mixed the song using real analog gear.

You can also use it **on each individual track you don’t have to use it on sub-groups only**.

Rules are simple: Your aim is to make the track sound better! If you feel that Saturation makes the sound worse just remove it. You don’t have to use saturation on each track, there are no rules, just aim to improve the sound.

Saturation may confuse you at first but it’s a lot easier than you think. Just be careful not to overdo it though and cause weird effects... unless that’s what you’re aiming for!

1

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