

# 101 ABLETON TIPS FOR HOUSE & TECHNO PRODUCERS

Write better tracks, faster with these professional tips & techniques.



By Keith Mills

QUANTIZE  
[COURSES.COM](https://courses.quantize.com)



 **Ableton** Certified Trainer

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I have been fortunate enough to spend most of my life in and around the electronic music scene. I qualified as a sound engineer in London and since then have worked on everything from intimate acoustic recordings to electronic dance floor monsters. Whilst the technology changes and musical styles come and go, the one thing that stays constant is the desire and passion of artists to create great music.

The difficulty (and the area I am most fascinated with) is taking the enthusiasm and ideas in our heads and turning them into a finished product. Since founding Quantize Courses in 2009, I have taught more than 1,000 producers on a 1-2-1 basis and studied their musical challenges in great detail. This knowledge, combined with reading fanatically about the subject and examining my own daily creative challenges has helped me to understand the areas we most need to focus on to get results.

---

### NON-COPYWRITE NOTICE

The entirety of this eBook is original.

The author would like to state it's totally fine for individuals to share this eBook with others, either as a printed book or online. However, please do not alter the contents in anyway or use them as your own.

# INTRODUCTION



We live in very exciting times as music producers. We are spoiled with an abundance of quality software to create with and magazines, blogs and video tutorials to learn from.

Inevitably having so much information at our finger tips also leads to trouble...

It seems that for every useful piece of content there are 100's more irrelevant or just plain useless pieces ready to suck away our time!

With this in mind, I created this eBook inspired by the tips, tricks and videos we regularly post on social media but focussed in one key area: House & Techno Music. I have included the best tips

from our online posts along with tons of original content, video tutorials and my personal favourite tools and resources. All this is wrapped up in one professionally designed, kick-ass eBook!

The tips are divided into categories for you to easily dive into whilst writing a track. Hopefully they will provide you with some quick inspiration or a technical boost to get moving forward.

Whilst the information here is by no means comprehensive I do hope to have struck a nice balance between simplicity and depth.

If you have any questions regarding this eBook, some tips of your own or some music inspired by this content you'd like to share, please do get in touch - my details are at the back of this book.

Good luck with your music making :-)



Keith Mills

---

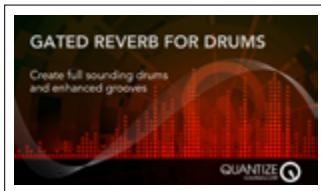
Ps.: Please note that some of the links in my favourite tools are affiliate links and at no additional cost to you. I will earn a small commission if you decide to make a purchase. I use all of the sample packs, VST's and companies and have recommended them because I think they are great and will be useful to you. Please do not spend any money on them unless you feel you need them or they will help you to achieve your goals.



**DRUMS &  
GROOVE**

Any track destined for the club needs a killer groove and drums that carry the same weight and power as other tracks in the genre. If your tracks can't tick these two boxes it's unlikely a DJ will play them. This is undoubtedly one of the key areas to focus on for any underground dance music producer, so let's dive in...

1. Add a gate after a reverb to sharply cut off the tail in time with the music. Tweak the release time and threshold for results that enhance your groove. This is particularly effective on sounds that play sparse patterns such as back beat snares and claps.



**WATCH VIDEO**

2. A great way to widen drum sounds and percussion is to find 2 similar samples and pan one left and the other right. Try this technique on anything from claps to bongos.
3. Use drum rack chokes to program more realistic hat patterns. Set both your open and closed hats to the same choke group

and whenever a new note is triggered it will cut off the last just like hats on a real drum kit.



4. A great way to build a cohesive drum kit is to find several drum loops that work together and then slice out the individual drums and add them to a drum rack.



**WATCH VIDEO**

5. When layering kicks be sure to carve out the characteristics you want from each kick using EQ and/or audio editing. Randomly stacking kicks on top of each other will most likely create a weaker sound than one on its own!



**WATCH VIDEO**

6. Create more punch at the start of kicks using warping. Set the warp mode to re-pitch, then create a warp marker at the end of the punchy section and drag it to the left. Job done!

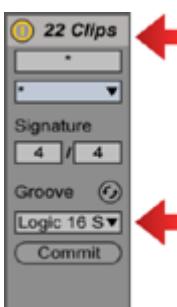


[WATCH VIDEO](#)

7. Create quick call and response patterns by drawing in a MIDI pattern for just one drum. Now move some of the notes in the pattern to play another drum. Try to make the drums sound like they are talking to one and other.



8. When applying a groove file try adding it to every sound in your track simultaneously. After all, a band would all play to the same groove. Imagine if Dave on bongo's was doing his own thing; he'd soon get kicked off stage!



9. Program more realistic drums by using a groove file to adjust the quantize of any clip in real time. This is perfect for finding a balance between human feel and tight drum programming.



[WATCH VIDEO](#)

10. Slightly randomise the timing of any MIDI or audio patterns by applying a groove file to the clip and dialling in a small amount of groove random (4% Max). This will add some slight timing adjustments like a human playing the pattern. This is far more engaging than listening to a robotic pattern with every note bang on the grid.



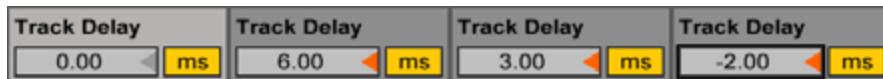
11. If you find a track with a groove you really want to replicate in your own music; import it into Live, right click and select "extract groove". The groove will now appear in the groove pool ready to drag onto any of your own clips. It's essential you warp the track correctly before extracting the groove though...

12. To create heavily swung, Deep House style hats, try programming using a 16th triplet grid.

**13.** Adding LFO movement to hats often helps to enhance the groove. Try linking an LFO to various parameters or using an effect like the Frequency Shifter with very subtle settings.

**14.** Nudge the start and loop points of clips to create rhythmic variations in your drums.

**15.** Pushing or pulling drums ahead/ behind the beat is a great way of quickly enhancing a groove. The track delays make this a super simple process.



**16.** Send pads in a drum rack to share the main effects returns in your track. Create a return chain in the drum rack and use the 'audio to' drop down to send audio to the main returns. Great for FX bursts or glueing the drums with other sounds in your track.



**WATCH VIDEO**

**17.** Create Techno style white noise hats by feeding normal hats into a vocoder with the carrier set to noise. Tweak the vocoder parameters to taste.

## MY FAVOURITE TOOLS

### No Dough

When it comes to drums I love a bit of character in my samples. No Dough just 'get it' when it comes to underground music.

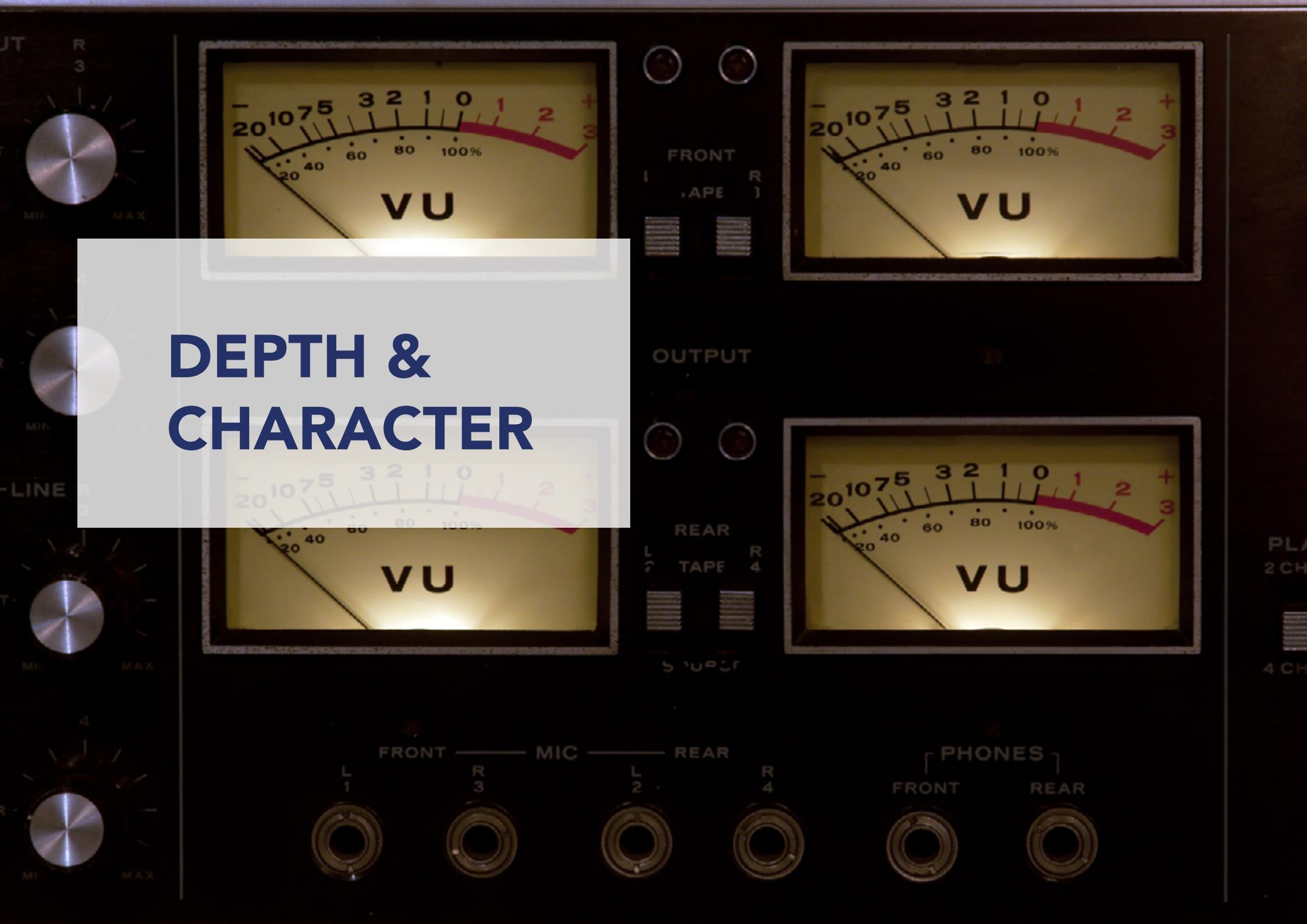
### Goldbaby's classic hardware samples:

These are as good as it gets.

### Roland TR-8

If you are into hardware this is a great sounding drum machine and very affordable. It's awesome fun and very intuitive for tweaking your drums on the fly.

# DEPTH & CHARACTER



We spent best part of a decade obsessing over producing clean sounding tracks in a computer, only to release the dirt, hum and noise from analogue machines added essential character and movement to our tracks! In this section we take a look at tips for adding that vibe back into your productions.

**18.** Adding low level background noise beds and atmospheres to tracks adds depth, movement and interest. Add a field recording or some tape hiss to your track, use an HP filter to remove low mid frequencies, sidechain to the kick and adjust the volume to taste.

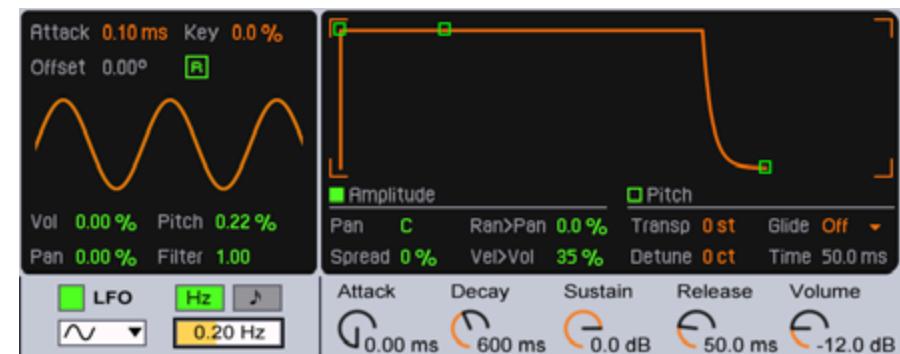
**19.** Adding to the last tip: some field recordings contain material with transients, for example foot steps. Find a nice loop in the recording and warp the transients to create an interesting background rhythm.



**20.** Heavily compressed breakbeat files are great frequency fillers for Tech House and Techno. Use them at a low level to complement your existing drums and bass.

**21.** Erosion can be used to add some lo-fi crunch to sounds, old hardware sampler style. Use the noise or wide noise setting and add a subtle amount that blends in with the track as a whole.

**22.** Analogue drum machines have a life of their own, never playing the exact same drum hit twice. To mimic this movement try routing pitch and filter to an LFO set to time, not sync. Very low amounts are the key, you shouldn't be able to clearly hear this in action but it works fantastically on a subconscious level.

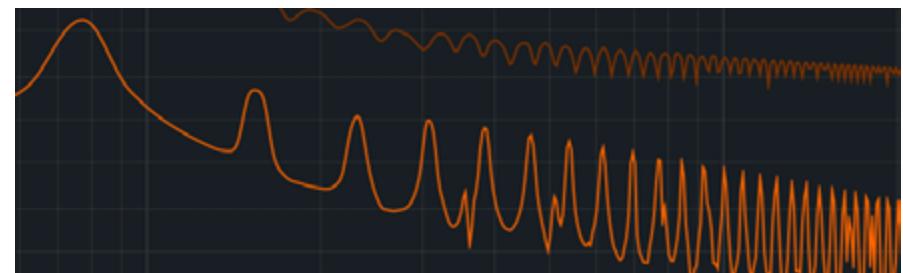


**23.** Some sample packs contain round robin samples. This means they have sampled the same drum hit multiple times to capture the nuances of the drum machine. To play these back drop them into a drum rack and draw in a pattern that plays the first pad only. Now add a random MIDI effect before the drum rack and use this to randomly fire off the different versions of the sample.

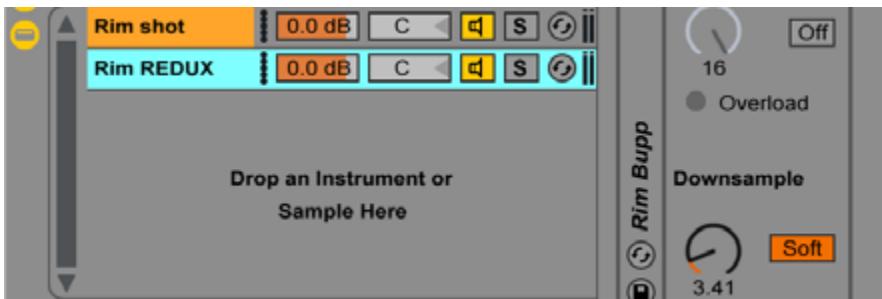
- 24.** Add warmth to your bass sounds by adding the Dynamic Tube effect set to algorithm 'C'.
- 25.** A quick way to emulate some old school flavour in your drum loops is to reduce the high frequencies with a gentle shelf EQ (somewhere above 10khz).
- 
- 26.** If your hi-hats are sounding a little too harsh and digital use a series of tight EQ dips to remove resonant frequencies. This is are the super thin high frequency spikes you can see using spectrum.
- 27.** Reverb responds well to the lo-fi treatment. Add a reverb to a return and follow it with a little distortion and some LP filtering.
- 28.** Add subtle movement to your delays by placing them on a return and following them with a frequency shifter. Use the LFO to add movement to the repeats.



- 29.** Create sharp percussion that cuts through the heavy reverb in a Techno track by feeding found sounds or percussive hits into Saturator. Select the 'waveshaper' algorithm and tweak.
- 30.** EQ3 adds analogue character to sounds simply by dropping the effect on a track. Right click the header to ensure 'flat response' is not ticked.
- 31.** Analog is designed to mimic a hardware synth and as such offers richer waveforms. If you want a thicker, denser sound this is the synth to go for. If you like simple sine waves for your sub bass give analog a shot.



- 
- 32.** Layer tape hiss or other noise based samples on top of sounds to give them more character and texture. I particularly like this on stabs and bass sounds.
- 
- 33.** Add some old school crunch to your drum sounds with a littler downsampling from redux. To maintain clarity try layering a down sampled version with the original.



## MY FAVOURITE TOOLS

### A Machine Soul

On the samples front, this pack from Ollie Furness contains some serious dirt and crunch. If you like those classic warehouse sounds (and I do!) check it out.

### Sonimus

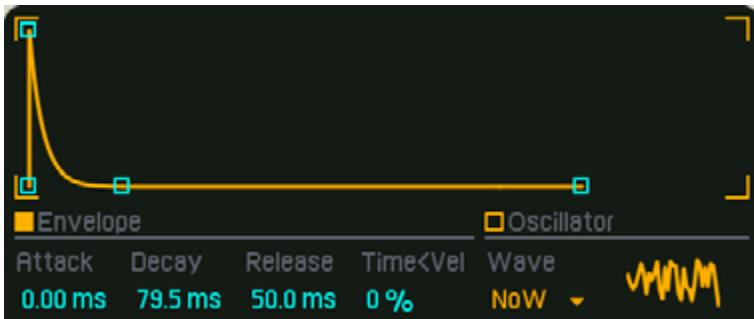
I like VST's that require as little work as possible to get good results. Just dropping these console emulations onto a track adds a ton of warmth, glue and character.



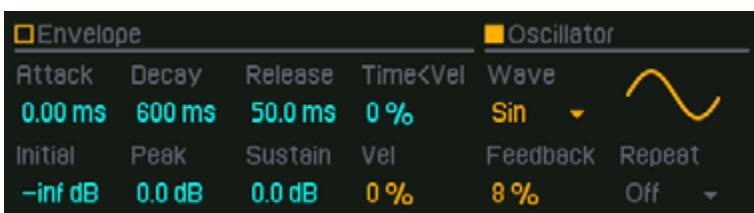
# SOUND DESIGN & EXPRESSION

It's vital to use high quality sounds in your tracks. No amount of mixdown genius can fix poorly selected or created sounds. The other side of this is how we use these sounds. The question I'm asked the most goes something like this: "My music lacks that something special I hear in my favourite tracks, what am I missing?". The answer is movement and expression. Here are a few tips to help with these areas.

- 34.** Try blending a white noise oscillator into the transient of your synth patches. This will help them cut through the mix.

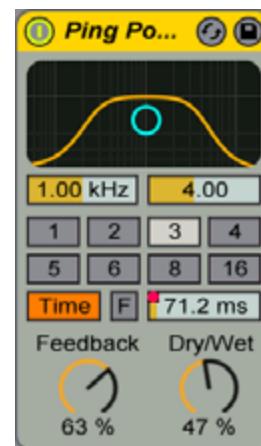


- 35.** Fatten up your Operator sub bass by adding a small % of oscillator feedback. The subtractive algorithm must be selected for this function to activate.

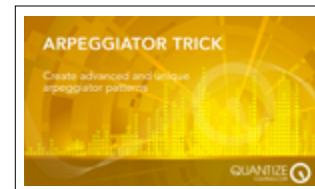


- 36.** It's best to audition presets with the pattern you want them to play already in place. This ensures the sound works well with the specific notes in the correct octave and sits well with existing elements in your track.

- 37.** Use high feedback and automated short delay times for glitchy Minimal Techno percussion effects. Right click the delay title bar and select re-pitch to add some pitched madness to the effect.



- 38.** Record the output of Arpeggiator to a new MIDI track and edit the resulting clip to make custom and varying arpeggios.



**WATCH VIDEO**

- 
- 39.** Amazing, evolving pad sounds can be created by recording a frozen reverb and dragging it into a sampler.



**WATCH VIDEO**

---

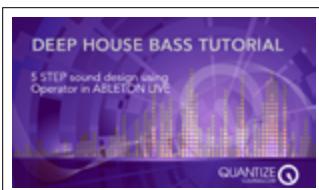
- 40.** Live's multiband compressor is perfect for splitting the frequency bands of tracks. Audio effects can then be applied to each band separately - for example keeping the sub in mono whilst widening the upper bass frequencies.



**WATCH VIDEO**

---

- 41.** If you think Operator sounds thin and lifeless, think again! It's capable of some great bass sounds like this one for Deep House:



**WATCH VIDEO**

---

- 42.** Techno & Tech House regularly feature basslines created by pitching down drum sounds such as toms and kicks. Try using a variety of samples for a more dynamic bass pattern.



**WATCH VIDEO**

---

- 43.** Try warping any sustained sound with extreme stretching whilst cycling through the warp modes and tweaking. This technique can create some amazing textures and atmospheres.

- 44.** Add a Tech style flavour to pads and stabs by adding the Resonators effect. I'm a big fan of the 'Berlin' preset for this technique.



- 45.** Create rhythmical pads by adding Autofilter with a percussion or hi hat sidechain input. Add variation with occasional ghost notes and fills.

**46.** Turn up the Hi Pass control on the Flanger and add it to a pad sound for a cool shimmering effect.

**47.** Modulated formant filters work amazingly on pad sounds.



**WATCH VIDEO**

**48.** Map various parameters to velocity to bring your sounds to life. This type of expression makes a huge difference and helps to keep tracks from sounding stale and boring.

**49.** Try mapping an Audio Rack's chain selector to a macro and then cross fading between effects. I like delay and reverb combinations of this technique.



**50.** Interesting chopped vocal effects can be created by loading a vocal loop into simpler and modulating the start time with clip automation.

## MY FAVOURITE TOOLS

### Stabs & Harmony Video Pack

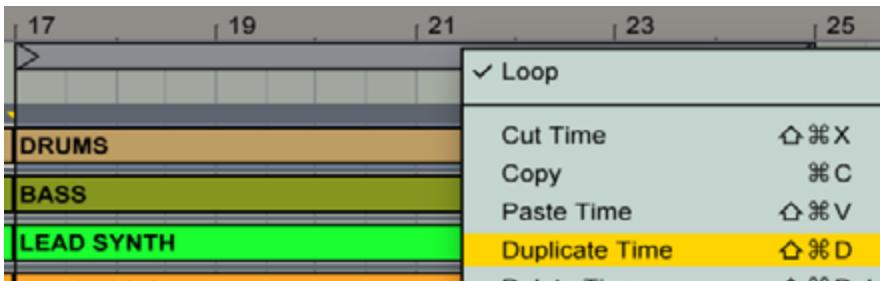
Even though I wrote this, it's got to be included! Creating the Stabs & Harmony Video Pack taught me a ton about music theory for dance music. The number of messages i receive from people, telling me how this pack is helping them to write better tracks is overwhelming. I couldn't be more pumped about this one.

# ARRANGEMENT & TRANSITIONS



Completing a full arrangement can be one of the trickiest parts of creating a track and it's often this daunting stage that leads to piles of abandoned loops. In this section we look at arrangement tips and techniques along with ideas for simplifying and speeding up the process.

- 
51. Right click the loop brace for the delete and insert time functions. These are great for removing or doubling parts of your track.



- 
52. Double click above the loop brace and Ableton will instantly zoom in to fill the screen with the loop.

- 
53. Assign a MIDI note range to an effects parameter for interesting jamming possibilities. Try loading Autofilter, clicking MIDI map and then mapping a key range to filter cut off. You can now jump the filter around by hitting any keys in the range you just selected.



- 
54. Highlight the padlock icon in the top right of the screen to lock automation in place. This is very handy for avoiding accidents when editing your arrangement.
- 
55. Be careful not to have any tracks record armed when recording in automation. It's very easy to overwrite parts of tracks and not have a clue you've done it. (trust me, I've been there!!)

- 
56. Create synth/ sampler pitch risers by modulating MIDI Ctrl - Pitch Bend in the clip view.



- 
57. CMD+ALT+O to show the arrangement overview. Navigate by clicking anywhere in the bar. Double clicking zooms out by 100%.

- 
- 58.** Speed up workflow when working on transitions in a track. Use markers and their key commands to jump around the sections you need to play back.



- 
- 59.** Jam in spot FX using return tracks to quickly add interest to stale sections of your track.

- 
- 60.** If you get stuck, dive in and have a listen to your music collection, writing down any ideas you have that might work for your track. Now look down the list; which idea will move you closest to finishing the arrangement the quickest? Try that one first.



- 
- 61.** When slowly bringing sounds in and out of a track try automating volume first. Often we think this is too simple and look for a more complicated solution when volume actually sounds best!

- 
- 62.** Create melodic fills or drum fills by using the MIDI inverse and reverse functions. A little editing might be required but this is often a great starting point for ideas.

- 
- 63.** Tech House fills can be created by importing a breaks loop, slicing out a small section and layering some of your existing drum sounds on top.



- 
- 64.** Stay organised: add an empty MIDI track at the top of your arrangement and add clips to this containing your notes and ideas for moving forward. This is much tidier than using tons of markers.



- 
- 65.** Bring up the energy in a section of your track by adding another tops loop. A fast hat pattern is a good example.

- 
- 66.** It's a common trick to suddenly filter out the lows of a kick drum in certain sections of a track. Rather than mess around with automation I prefer to duplicate the kick and have a filtered version I can drop in when required.



- 
- 67.** Find yourself always wanting to add new sounds to your track? Try layering or swapping out an existing sound instead (keep the same MIDI notes). This is a very effective technique and much easier than trying to ram another idea into your tune.

## MY FAVOURITE TOOLS

### UVI Relayer

I like to chuck some creative effects on long sections of an arrangement to add a bit of movement and life to proceedings. UVI Relayer is a multi-tap delay that's super intuitive and a lot of fun to work with.

### Waves H-Reverb

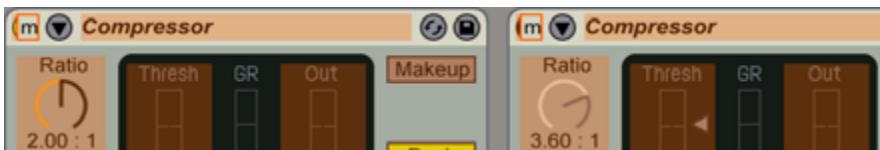
This is simple to use and ideal for one shot effects.

# MIXDOWN



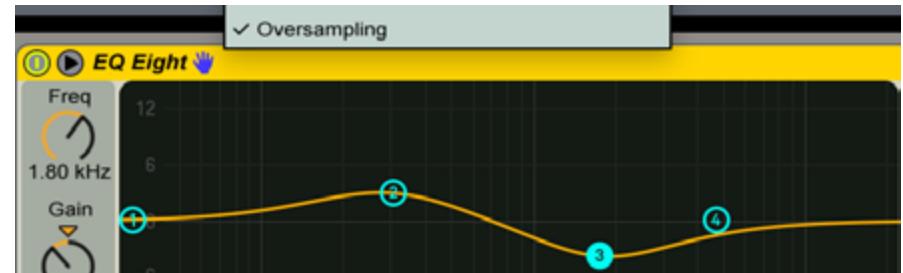
The final piece of the track writing process. It is the final piece for you right? I mean, you don't waste time tweaking compressors and EQ's right near the start before you've even got a finished track on your hands do you? No, thought not. You're in the business of finishing tracks and like a writer fine tuning their manuscript line by line you've waited until the end when you actually have something worth obsessing over. Here are some tips to help you get that polished sound quality we all know and love.

- 
- 68.** Compare effect settings by mapping the same key to the on/off button of both devices. It is now possible to toggle between them.



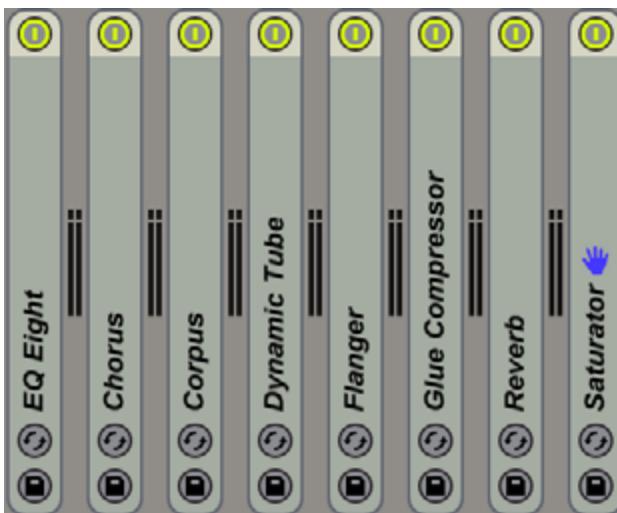
- 
- 69.** Select 'Ext. Out' in the 'Audio to' box of any reference tracks you are using in your mix down. This will bypass the master so any effects you have applied to your track won't also be applied to the reference.

- 
- 70.** Right click the EQ8 title bar and select oversampling for more transparent processing.



- 
- 71.** When cutting the low end from sounds to make room for the kick and bass, be aware that an EQ may alter the timbre of the sound being cut in an undesirable way. It's easy to fall into these habits without actually listening to what we are doing!
- 
- 72.** Remember to apply EQ to your return tracks. Excessive frequencies from effects like reverbs and delays can quickly clutter a mix.
- 
- 73.** Try using fades (CMD+ALT+F) to tighten up sounds with excessive tails. This is another great way to improve clarity in a mix down.
- 
- 
- 
- 74.** At the mix down phase try hot swapping your kick. It's very rare I can't improve a mix with this simple technique!

- 75.** Live 9's compressor clicks and pops with fast attack and release settings when sidechaining. Live 8's compressor set to model FF1, does not...
- 76.** All of the devices in this picture have a high quality mode of some description. Be sure to experiment!

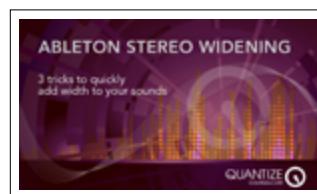


- 77.** To add extra punch to a kick drum; add a compressor and start with an attack of 40ms, leaving the initial transient of the kick uncompressed. Apply 2-3db of compression and tweak the attack and release to taste.
- 78.** Increase the block size and lower the refresh rate in spectrum for greater accuracy.
- 79.** Use an audio effects rack with one empty chain for volume

automation. This leaves the track faders free for mix down. Alternatively use Utility but be aware it only goes down to -35db.



- 80.** To parallel process using any effect create a rack with 2 chains. Leave one empty for the dry signal and add your effects to the other. The chain volumes can now be used to blend the signals.
- 81.** If you intend on doing extensive work to one sound during the mix down; duplicate the track and keep a copy of the original for A/B purposes. Often we make so many changes to a sound we loose track of whether we actually improved it or not!
- 82.** Widen sounds using the Frequency shifter. Turn on wide mode and nudge the spread a little - or more for special effects.



**WATCH VIDEO**

- 
- 83.** Create stereo widening tricks into a 0% width utility to ensure good mono compatibility. When it sounds good in mono, turn off utility and you're good to go.



- 84.** The dynamic range of MIDI parts can often be reduced without a compressor. Reduce volume level on the synth or sampler instead.

## MY FAVOURITE TOOLS

### Fabfilter

Without question, the Fabfilter range are my go-to mixing tools. I'm yet to hear a better limiter for dance music and all their VST's are so damn easy to use!

### Mixing Secrets For The Small Studio

This is an excellent book and covers all areas of mix down. The author not only knows his stuff but is great at explaining it too.

# WORKFLOW

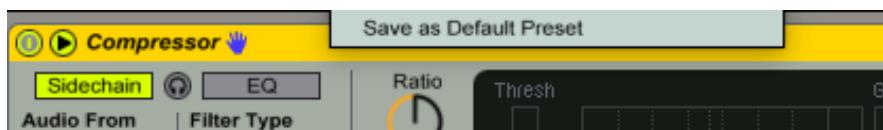


Creativity loves speed. Unfortunately we don't decide when a great creative idea will come to us and it doesn't usually hang around for long! Anything we can do to make the process of getting ideas into Ableton flow smoothly is a big help to capturing those ideas and making the most of them. This section features a selection of tips I use to quickly move around Live, stay organised and keep momentum flowing.

**85.** It's possible to rename and colour code multiple clips using the small clip box in the bottom left of the screen.

**86.** It's tempting to ram your default set with everything you might possibly need but it just slows down loading time and you'll end up deleting half of it anyway! Aim for the bare minimum so you can fly out the blocks and have space for your creative whims.

**87.** Default presets are a great way to speed up workflow. I mainly use the Ableton compressor for sidechaining so when I load a compressor the sidechain is already on, super fast attack set, look ahead at 10ms = super quick.



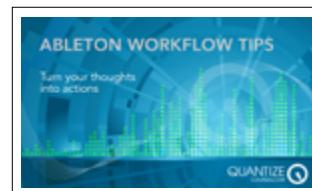
**88.** CMD+F to search the browser and then start typing. It only takes the first few first letters to locate a Live device and then doubling tapping enter will load it onto the current track.



**89.** CMD + 1 or 2 to narrow or widen the grid. The current grid resolution is shown in the bottom right of the screen.



**90.** Right click clips, tracks, devices and racks and select 'edit info text' to create notes.



**WATCH VIDEO**

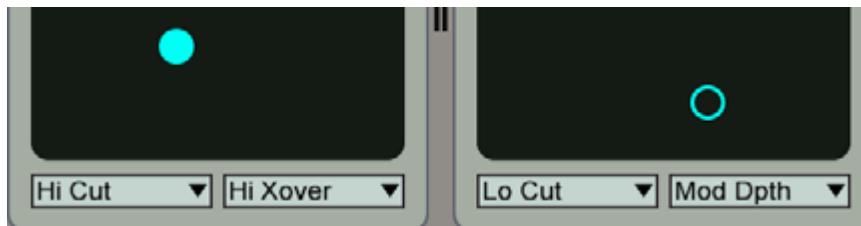
**91.** In session view use CMD+Shift+I to Capture All Scenes. This creates a new scene and populates it with all the currently playing clips. This is great for taking quick snap shots of ideas.

- 92.** Quickly create lots of automation takes in session view: unlink the clip envelope, set a long loop and record as many takes are you like. You can now move the automation loop brace around and select your favourite take.



- 93.** To move an entire section of your arrangement to session view for more flexible editing: set the loop brace around the section, right click the loop brace and select 'consolidate time to new scene'

- 94.** Using VST's in Live? Assign parameters to the x/y pad and use a track pad for a great controller.



- 95.** Save CPU when using Live's synths and samplers by reducing the number of voices to your minimum requirements.



- 96.** Reduce CPU load by increasing the buffer size in audio preferences. This is particularly useful during mix down which is very processor intensive and you are also least likely to need low latency for recording new parts.

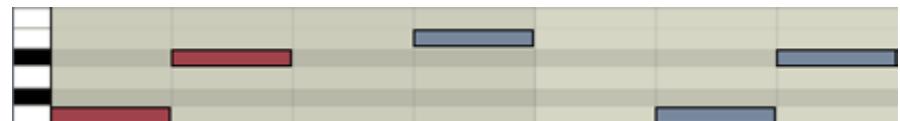
- 97.** The MIDI editor can be displayed as full screen by dragging its top divider to the top of the screen. To toggle back to the arrange or session view hit SHIFT+TAB.



**WATCH VIDEO**

- 98.** Click fold in the MIDI editor to display only keys that contain notes. Keeping tidy and organised helps speed up workflow.

- 99.** Use the 0 key to activate/ deactivate tracks, devices, clips and MIDI notes.



- 
- 100.** Bounce MIDI to audio as soon as possible - commit and move on with the next part of the track.



- 
- 101.** Pick a small selection of great samples to start a track with. You can dive into your monster library if it's vital but much better to try and stay focussed and work with what you have.



[WATCH VIDEO](#)

## MY FAVOURITE TOOLS

### Mind Node

When I get stuck during a track I find creating a quick mind map centred around what I want to achieve can kick start my creative ideas. Mind Node is my favourite app for this on the Mac. There is a demo version here that's plenty good enough.

### Xmind

If you are on a PC check out Xmind. I haven't used it but it has great reviews.

# THANK YOU

I sincerely hope you enjoyed reading this eBook and it serves as a constant source of ideas and reminders for you during your production process.

If this book has been helpful, please give me a shout on twitter (@quantizecourses) or just click here for an automatic tweet...



[CLICK HERE TO TWEET](#)

and thanks for sharing :-)

Please do get in touch if you have any tips you would like to share or have any suggestions for subjects you would like to see more tips on. I will add them to the next update of this eBook.

If you are driven to go in-depth and master specific areas of music production I think you'll love these [Quantize Video Packs](#).

Also please join me on [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#) where you'll find a constant source of tips and video tutorials about everything music production. If you would like to drop me an email please feel free: [keith@quantizecourses.com](mailto:keith@quantizecourses.com).