

Using Compression in REAPER

Recording, Engineering, and Mixing

Compression is one of the most critical tools a mixing engineer uses. In most modern music, compression is used on **EVERY** track.

Compression is used to accomplish three main goals:

1. To limit the maximum volume of a track
2. To raise the overall (average) volume of a track
3. As a special effect

Using the Captain files, we will focus on the first two uses of compression.

To use a compressor on a Reaper track, first adjust the volume of the track so that it is hitting a maximum of between negative 6 to 12 on the decibel meter. Then, click on the “fx” button for that track. Chose “VST: ReaComp” from the list. Then, you need to make three adjustments

WHILE THE TRACK IS PLAYING:

1. Slide the “Ratio” slider (about halfway down the ReaComp window) over. You will learn more later about how to choose an appropriate ratio – for now, pick a number somewhere between 2 and 4.
2. Slide the “Threshold” slider (all the way on the left of the ReaComp window) until the moving threshold green bars are over the top of the slider most of the time (see image 1) and the values in the red bar that is just to the left of the Output Mix meter are around negative 3 to 5 at the **MOST**.
3. Slide the Wet slider in the Output Mix section so that the colored bars hit somewhere between negative 6 to 12 at the **MOST** (see image 3)



Image 1

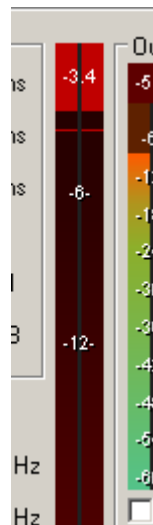


Image 2

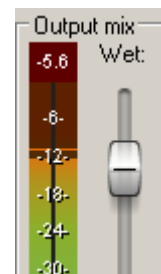


Image 3

Adjusting the compression in this way will make the loudest parts of each track a little bit quieter and make the quietest parts of each track a little bit louder. This makes it much easier to get good volume levels as you mix the entire song.

Often, it is difficult to hear the difference between the compressed and uncompressed sound of one track. In order to really take advantage of compression, you need to apply compression to all of the tracks in a song. Then, when they are mixed together, it is much easier to get a good sound and overall volume levels. So don't be concerned if you don't hear much of a difference – compression is critical, but subtle. It takes a while to train your ears to recognize compression. That's why we're starting now – the sooner you get started using compression, the sooner you'll be able to hear how it improves the sound of your mixes.

A great website that explains compression is located at this address:

http://www.humanbeatbox.com/recording/p2_articleid/32. This article has lots of audio clips to listen to – it's worth your while to listen to these to get in your head what the difference is between a compressed and uncompressed sound.