5
Using the Playlist

In this chapter, we will cover the following topics:

- Using patterns to build a song
- Comparing patterns and audio
- Using markers and snap
- Viewing the playlist

Introduction

By pasting patterns in FL Studio, you can arrange the many pieces and parts of your production. You may also paint automation curves and record external audio in the playlist. Automation will be covered in *Chapter 10*, *Recording Automation* and in the *Recording external audio –keyboards, vocals, guitars, turntables, and devic*s recipe in *Chapter 6*, *Using the FL Studio Mixer and Recording Audio*. The playlist is where you can specify which patterns are played (or not played) at which point in time. As discussed previously, you can actually make a full-length song with one pattern by using the Piano roll and by continually adding more beats and bars with data. Thus, beats per bars is the area where you can distinguish between an intro, verse, chorus, bridge, outro, or any type of section of your song. It is all up to the individual artist using FL Studio to decide their particular musical arrangement. This is shown in the first recipe *Using patterns to build a song*.

You must use patterns that were made in the FL Studio step sequencer in order to build an original musical production from scratch. In this way, you build, overdub, and continually layer in order to come up with an original work. You may also insert full-length WAV or MP3 files and function exclusively as a recording studio, where you would then record vocals on top of the completed instrumental. You can chop any type of material (patterns or audio) in the playlist. So, in the end it may be a true fusion, mixture, and mash up of digital music. All files exist as channels, as reviewed in *Chapter 3*, *Working with the Step Sequencer and Channels*.

Using patterns to build a song

If you were a writer who is writing a novel, you would start with a blank document and build your story with words and paragraphs. If you were a painter, you would start with a blank canvas and use markers or a paintbrush to build your creative vision. When working with FL Studio, you will be pasting your various patterns in the step sequencer in the FL Studio playlist.

Getting ready...

In order to start using the playlist, you need to have some data entered in your *steps* within channels and patterns on the step sequencer. You can press *F5* or use the **VIEW** menu to bring up the playlist. Press *Tab* to toggle between the various windows that are open in FL Studio.

How to do it...

Let's look at two quick start methods to paste/paint patterns into the playlist:

- **Quick start**: Hover your mouse over the **PAT** box and drag it up/down to select a pattern number. Click on the playlist (*F5*) to paint it in. In *Fig 5.1*, the **PAT** box is shown to the right of the **TEMPO** button, with a value of `162.000`.
- **Alternative method**: You may also click where it says **Kick**, next to the word **Playlist** in *Fig 5.1*. Not only will it bring up a list of patterns, but also show a list of all the automation clips and audio files created in the current project. Right-click on the same area to open up a really cool **PROJECT PICKER** window, where you can select your patterns or channels laid out in an awesome interface.

Let's take a look at the multiple patterns being arranged using the following steps:

1. Select a pattern in the step sequencer.
2. Make sure you select the **SONG** mode, next to the transport controls in *Fig 5.1*. This will make your music project enter the **SONG** mode, and **Play Position Marker** (a small, orange-colored triangle) will be engaged when you press the Space bar to stop or play your project.
3. Click with the **Paint** tool in the desired area in order to paste the pattern you have selected. You may also click-and-drag to the right with the **Paint** tool in order to smoothly paste the same pattern over and over again.
4. Use the right-click button to erase patterns.

5. The following screenshot shows that anything pasted in the **Playlist** section is like a small graphic of any given pattern in the step sequencer and the information inside it. You can see that the **Hat** and **303ish 2** patterns come in at bar **5**. The **303ish 2** pattern shows Piano roll data because we have entered Piano roll data using a virtual instrument on that particular pattern. When you enter notes in the Piano roll on a given channel or pattern, the **Playlist** window will reflect this in order to help you see and organize your arrangement. The following screenshot shows the **Playlist** window:

Fig 5.1

6. Click on the small square button next to the name of your pattern and then select the source pattern to populate and choose available patterns as per Fig 5.2. Once your patterns are pasted into the **Playlist** window, you will have the option to toggle between your patterns present in the list, as shown in the following screenshot:

Fig 5.2

7. In the following screenshot, we have opened the pattern selector under the step sequencer by hovering our mouse on **Kick**. Your cursor will turn into a hand when you hover over **Kick** or any generic pattern name, indicating that the drop-down menu will get populated.

Fig 5.3

How it works...

By pasting your patterns (which have your channel steps or notes) in the playlist, you can form a full music production project. This happens when you click on the **SONG** mode, and the small play-position marker is engaged at the very start of the playlist on bar **1**. Now, when you press the Space bar key, any pattern you paste into the playlist will be in time from left-to-right, and you can see the position pointer move along while highlighting the grid in time. A regular pattern when operating in the **PAT** mode will simply play your data and loop back to the beginning. You can stretch patterns to extremely long lengths by using the Piano roll, but you still have to paint your given pattern into the playlist. The area where you paste your patterns in the playlist will also be the area that is used to export your project into the rendered audio, which we will review in *Chapter 8*, *Exporting and Rendering Your Project*.

There's more...

You may also use the **Slice** tool directly (hover your mouse on the various tools at the upper left-hand corner of the playlist and look at the hint bar) in order to slice particular patterns and then edit or move them. Slicing is also exceedingly useful in the FL Studio Piano roll. If you select the **Make unique** option (shown in *Fig 5.2*), it will automatically create a new, unique pattern in the step sequencer. This can be handy if you want to tweak a pattern without navigating back to the step sequencer. This is also a great tool to remove part of your drums or incorporate a short silence to bring variety to your arrangement. Many times, you may want to slice off a certain part and then make it unique so that it becomes its own separate entity that you can mix later on. You can do this by pressing the Pattern clip drop-down box in *Fig 5.2*. This can prove handy because your song arrangement is affected and changed immediately. This method is used on any type of audio or samples. When working with vocals, you may want to make some of your pieces unique in order to change the volume of a specific word or add a different effect in the mixer.

You may also paste any pattern you want, even if it has no steps or notes yet. This means that you can paste a blank pattern in the playlist; you can go to this pattern while your arrangement is playing and add your notes later. The longer you stretch your notes in a channel/pattern, the longer will your pattern automatically stretch in the playlist. If your pattern is currently playing or being triggered in the playlist, you will clearly see the LEDs of the playing step (orange slits) at the bottom of your step sequencer.

A tremendous option when working with your arrangement is to double-click and drag your pattern where you see the numbers that represent the measures in your playlist and where the play position marker is located. When you do this, your selection will become in red color, and you can highlight the measure/sections that will be played and looped back around. This is handy to specify a particular area that you want to play back, which can then be edited and fine-tuned without listening to the whole song. If you only want to edit the intro, you can click-and-drag your mouse to highlight this area only. This feature allows you to specify which part of your song will play back and is helpful when adding/changing/revising/experimenting with pieces and parts, recording vocals, and drawing automation curves.

See also...

- The *Using markers and snap* recipe
- The *Comparing pattern and song mode* recipe in *Chapter 4*, *Building Your Song*
- The *Recording external audio – keyboards, vocals, guitar, and devices* recipe in *Chapter 6*, *Using the FL Studio Mixer and Recording Audio*
- The *Exporting an MP3 or WAV file* recipe in *Chapter 8*, *Exporting and Rendering Your Project*
- The *Using automation on virtual instruments and effects* recipe in *Chapter 10*, *Recording Automation*

Comparing patterns and audio

The patterns that you paste into the FL Studio playlist reflect how you manage/arrange your project and decide which parts will play or not play during your song. This is easy to see on the FL Studio Playlist, where you will have a graphical readout of your patterns, audio, and automation clips. Audio clips will be shown on the playlist in a waveform readout, as will any type of MP3 or WAV file. As discussed earlier, patterns in the playlist can stretch very far if your Piano roll is extended.

Getting ready...

In order start using the **Playlist** section and patterns, you need to have some data entered in your *steps* within the channels and patterns on the step sequencer. You may press *F5* or use the **VIEW** menu to bring up the playlist. We will be working with a recorded vocal file. Recording an external audio will be covered in *Chapter 6*, *Using the FL Studio Mixer and Recording Audio*, because, in some cases, your recording can show up directly on the FL Studio Playlist.

How to do it...

We will review the different types of patterns that are seen as specific images on the playlist using the following steps:

1. Press the space bar key or click on play with your mouse on the FL Studio transport controls while in the **SONG** mode.
2. Paste your patterns as discussed in the previous recipe of this chapter, *Using patterns to build your song*.
3. If you have data in your steps and have not used the Piano roll on that channel, the data will be read out like the **Hat** pattern shown in *Fig 5.4*.
4. If you have a channel/pattern that used a Piano roll, it will be similar to the **303ish 2** pattern in *Fig 5.4*.

5. If you have vocals, an MP3 file, or a WAV file, it will show the audio data, as shown in *Fig 5.4*, next to **Track 5** titled **Vocals track 1** in the header.
6. When working with automation clips, you will see automation curves and shapes as seen in the example in *Fig 5.4*. The topic of automation will be covered in *Chapter 10*, *Recording Automation*.

Fig 5.4

How it works...

The readouts on various channels, patterns, audio data, and automation curves are a friendly way to keep your project organized and see exactly what is happening at specific moments (bars and beats) in time. You can use all of the features described in the previous recipe of this chapter, *Using patterns to build your song*. If you need to paste the same pattern multiple times in a row, you can use the paint tool and click-and-drag the pattern to the right. You can also use the **Maximize / restore** button to drag FL Studio's main window and drag audio files directly into the playlist. This restore button is shown in the following screenshot, directly to the left of the exit icon. You may click-and-drag an audio file from your desktop (or anywhere on your computer) into the FL Studio Playlist. The following screenshot shows the **Maximize / restore** button:

Fig 5.5

See also...

- The *Using patterns to build your song* recipe
- The *Viewing the playlist* recipe
- The *Recording external audio – keyboards, vocals, guitar, and devices* recipe in *Chapter 6*, *Using the FL Studio Mixer and Recording Audio*
- The *Using automation on virtual instruments and effects* recipe in *Chapter 10*, *Recording Automation*

Using markers and snap

Using markers in your FL Studio Playlist is a great way to organize your pieces and parts and to label what is happening in certain sections. The basic idea is to label these with intro, verse, chorus, bridge, outro, or whatever you want depending on your workflow. It helps to have these markers because they remind you of what is going on with your song and also help when you are selecting areas in the playlist. Snap is the setting that dictates how your patterns can be moved around and locked to the playlist timeline. These can be adjusted to certain beats, bars, and fractions of time.

Getting ready...

To start using markers, you need to have the FL Studio playlist open. You do not need to have any patterns pasted in the playlist to add markers. When you have patterns in your song, the markers can be added, moved, renamed, or deleted; so the modification of the markers depends on your own organizational habits.

How to do it...

The following steps you show how to use markers and snap, and *Fig 5.6* shows the basic view of the playlist:

1. Press *Alt* + *T* when viewing your playlist and a marker will be created. You can then name your marker and press *Enter*. The following screenshot shows the markers, titled **Intro** and **Verse 1**, that have been added to the playlist:

Fig 5.6

2. Alternatively, you can add a marker by using the **Playlist** option's drop-down box (triangle at the upper-left corner), which is shown in *Fig 5.7*. Your markers, options are populated once you scroll down to the **Time markers** option.

Fig 5.7

3. Once you have a marker in the playlist, you can right-click on the marker in order to add another one, delete it, or rename it. This is shown in *Fig 5.8*.
4. To move or slide markers to different sections of your song, hover your mouse over to the beginning (left-hand side) of your marker. A horizontal slide cursor will appear.

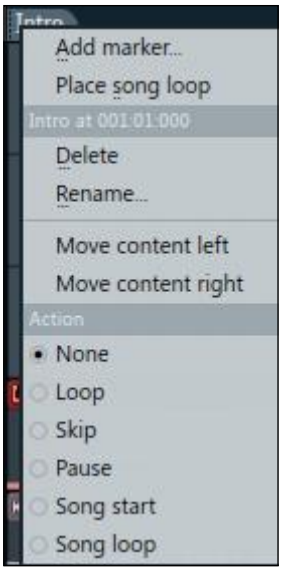

Fig 5.8

How it works...

The use of markers is up each individual user and depends on how your current music project is organized. You can add markers wherever you desire; you can move, delete, and even rename them. Even though you can see what is happening in the playlist with your patterns, markers are a great function that help with organization. Label them as you wish so that you are reminded of the parts that are currently triggered.

There's more...

The **Snap to grid** settings in your playlist are directly correlated with your ability to slide your markers, patterns, audio, and automation clips (shown in *Fig 5.9*). You will also find the **Snap to grid** button in the **Piano roll** and **Event editor** sections. If your grid is set to **Cell**, your markers and patterns will be locked in time with the cells on the playlist when clicking, dragging, and inserting. If your grid is set to **(none)**, you can freely slide your marker without any grid constraints. The grid can be toggled on and off by pressing *Alt* when dragging . When you have audio on your playlist, the grid setting allows you to chop, slice, or edit your audio in fine, exact increments. The same rules apply to automation clips and patterns. The following screenshot shows options in the **Snap to grid** button:

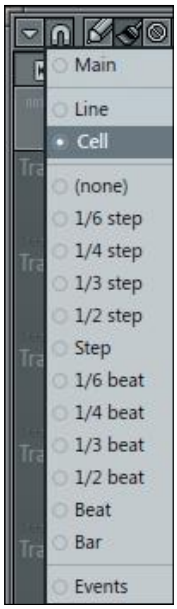

Fig 5.9

Your **Snap to grid** setting is the governor of the time values that your patterns are locked to. As mentioned earlier, you can momentarily ignore the grid by pressing the *Alt* key while dragging.

Selecting **Main** in any of the **Snap to grid** settings will make all the applicable windows (**Piano roll**, **Playlist**, and **Event editor**) use the default **Main** value. You can set the default value by clicking on **Line** (above the magnetic snap symbol in *Fig 5.10*) or the value currently displayed, generally located at the top in the main window of FL Studio. This **Main** value will govern the **Main snap**, **quantization**, and **step edit** steps. **Snap to grid** simply shows how your parts of music are magnetized to the grid.

Fig 5.10

See also...

- The *Using patterns to build your song* recipe
- The *Comparing patterns and audio* recipe
- The *Recording external audio – keyboards, vocals, guitar, and devices* recipe in *Chapter 6*, *Using the FL Studio Mixer and Recording Audio*
- The *Exporting an MP3 or WAV file* recipe in *Chapter 8*, *Exporting and Rendering Your Project*

Viewing the playlist

Viewing the playlist is an organization tool that helps you to work on certain sections of your song. Generally, the more pieces and parts you have, the more often you will be resizing your playlist.

Getting ready...

To start viewing the playlist and to change the vertical and horizontal zoom parameters, you simply need to have the playlist open with patterns inserted inside it. An easy way to bring up the playlist is to press the *F5* key.

How to do it...

Let's look at how to zoom in and out of the playlist while looking from left to right:

1. Using the horizontal scroll bar directly correlates with the amount of patterns that you can view from left to right. *Fig 5.11* and *Fig 5.12* show the same playlist window zoomed out and in, respectively.

Fig 5.11

2. To zoom in or out horizontally, hover your mouse over the left or right edge of the horizontal zoom bar. This zoom bar is directly above the bar count area. In *Fig 5.12*, you can see that you can hover your mouse over the area above bar **27**. This is the right-most side of the zoom bar. Once you see the cursor change to an arrow, you will click-and-drag your mouse to change the zoom.

Fig 5.12

3. Alternatively, you can zoom in or out using a scroll wheel on your mouse. You can do this by hovering your mouse in the black area with the numbers (bar count), scroll up to zoom out, and scroll down to zoom in. This is shown in the following screenshot. You may use this functionality once you have hovered your mouse over the bar numbers in the black area, and it will work when your cursor turns into a hand. The following screenshot shows the bars in the **Playlist** window:

Fig 5.13

A handy tip is to press *Ctrl* + *Shift*, click directly on the scroll bar, and then click-and-drag to the right or left. Also, try pressing *Ctrl* + *Alt* while clicking-and-dragging up and down directly on the scroll bar. The *Alt* method allows us to zoom the grid in when scrolling up and out when scrolling down.

Let's take a look at the vertical view of the patterns in the playlist using the following steps:

1. To change the view of your playlist to vertical view, hover your mouse over the upper right-hand portion of the playlist, directly underneath the exit button.
2. In *Fig 5.14*, we clicked-and-dragged the **Change clip size** functionality up, which makes each track and correlating pattern stretch vertically on a global level. We did this using the **Change clip size** functionality, which will be shown in the FL Studio hint bar. Also, in *Fig 5.14*, notice that the box (directly underneath the exit button) looks like a square now. To do this, we clicked-and-dragged the **Change clip size** functionality up. We can see up to **Track 2** and a little portion of **Track 3**.

Fig 5.14

3. In *Fig 5.15*, we did the exact same thing. However, we dragged the **Change clip size** box down this time. Now, in *Fig 5.15*, we can see up to **Track 23** and all of our correlating patterns are vertically squashed. This allows you to see more patterns and increases the screen real estate of the playlist window. Notice that the **Change clip size** box now resembles a very thin line.

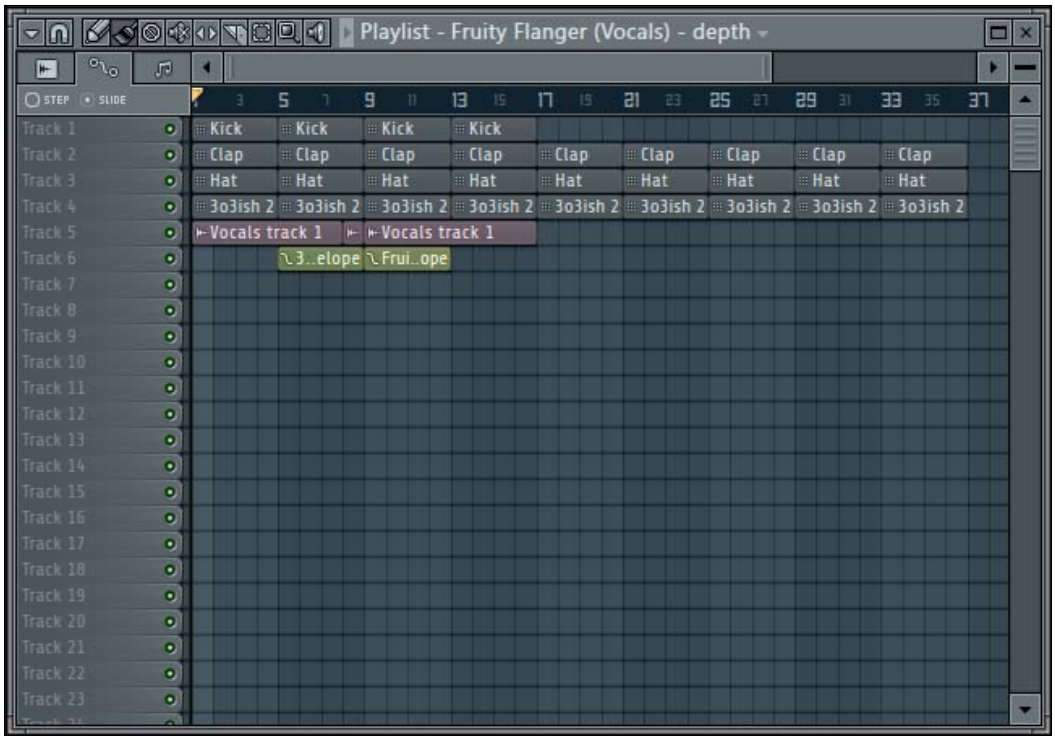

Fig 5.15

4. When using the vertical zoom function, you can also look at the FL Studio hint bar. The numbers will change from **Zoom level 0** to **Zoom level 134**. *Fig 5.15* is actually at **Zoom level 0**. The following screenshot shows how the hint bar will look:

Fig 5.16

5. Hover your mouse over any line that separates the track names on the left-hand side of the playlist. Your mouse will then turn into an up/down arrow selector, where you can adjust individual track sizes to your liking. The global box reviewed above will maintain your adjustments when stretching tracks up and down.

How it works...

In *Fig 5.11*, we dragged the horizontal scroll bar to the left. Notice that the scroll bar in *Fig 5.11* is smaller because we zoomed in. You can also see up to the bar **10**. In *Fig 5.12*, we clicked-and-dragged the scroll bar to the right. We can now see more patterns and up to bar **37**. The actual playlist window has not been adjusted or resized. We have simply used the horizontal zoom in (drag to the left) or zoom out (drag to the right) functionality. Pressing *Ctrl + Shift* or *Ctrl + Alt* is quick and super handy when dragging the scroll bar.

The examples that we just discussed show you how to use the horizontal and vertical zoom functionality. You can also highlight certain sections of your playlist by highlighting and dragging a selection on the bar count area. This selection will show up in red color, and you can now zoom in or out accordingly. Sometimes, you will be dealing with small parts of your song and focusing on one particular area. Other times, you will want to zoom out and get a feel of how things look for the entire arrangement. Like any window in FL Studio, you can also maximize the window or resize it by hovering your mouse over the top, bottom, on the left, right, or corners of the playlist window until you see your cursor change to an arrow.

There's more...

As noted above in a tip, you can also change the vertical dimensions of individual tracks by hovering your mouse between each track on the left-hand side of the playlist. For example, if you hover your mouse between **Track 2** and **Track 3**, your mouse will turn into an arrow and you can then resize **Track 2** exclusively.

You may also mute certain tracks directly in the playlist by clicking on the small green circle next to each track name. Next, right-click on the green circle to solo the track. Right-click on a track name and select the **Set** icon to choose from a handy list of music-related symbols, which automatically label and rename your track.

Use the **Playlist options** drop-down box (upper left-hand corner), select **Detached**, and then drag your playlist to a separate computer monitor. This can help with organization and can give you a clear view of your playlist instead of the need to open and close the many parameters and windows of FL Studio. Detaching is also used with the FL Studio Mixer, reviewed in *Chapter 6*, *Using the FL Studio Mixer and Recording Audio*.

See also...

- The *Using patterns to build your song* recipe
- The *Recording external audio – keyboards, vocals, guitar, and devices* recipe in *Chapter 6*, *Using the FL Studio Mixer and Recording Audio*
- The *Exporting an MP3 or WAV file* recipe in *Chapter 8*, *Exporting and Rendering Your Project*