# MIX PREPARATION

In this section we will take a look at how we can prepare the project, ready to start the mix-down process. Having a tidy mix allows us to focus on more important tasks, such as creativity, rather than trying to find a specific instrument or control.

A large portion of the mix-down is down to good preparation, the rest is inspiration, creativity and mixing skills. Preparation however, is not mixing. Think of it more as a preliminary organizational task, which is essential to mixing.

Mix preparation is where we draw the final line in the sand between the end of the production and compositional phase, and the start of the mixing phase. There should be no turning back at this point, unless we've made a monumental error that requires us to reload the entire project.

This phase gives us a chance to listen to the entire mix and check that there are no obvious mistakes that have been overlooked, as well as to get a grasp on the management, organization and navigation of our track.

The end result that we are after is the best possible mix-down that we can achieve. The best way to do this, is to start off with a mix that is well organized, and labelled. This will make navigation and workflow much easier, which means we will do a much better job of mixing the project.
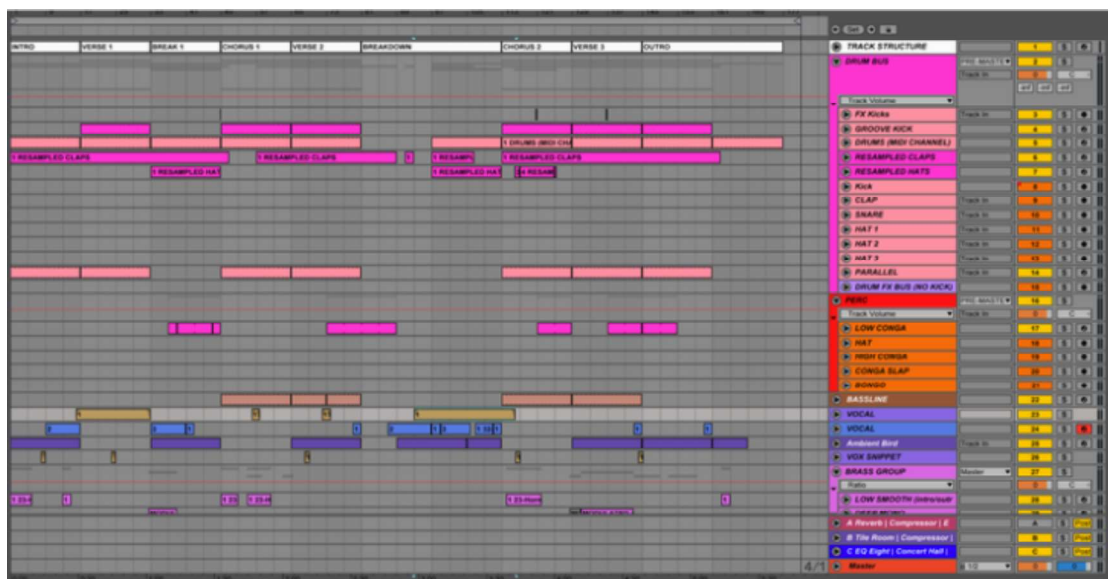

Colour coding, grouping and renaming tracks for ease of navigation

BITDEPTH & SAMPLE RATE

Firstly, make sure that when we get the files, that we are working in whatever bit-depth and sample rate the files are given to us in. typically, this will be 24Bit 44.1KHz or 48KHz, but may be higher or lower.

TRACK ARRANGEMENT MARKER MAPPING

Use the arrangement markers in arrangement view, to map out the different sections of our track, these can then be key-mapped, to allow for quick playback of different sections. These can then be placed at the intro, outro, verses, and chorus points of your track. (Bar 17, 33 etc.)
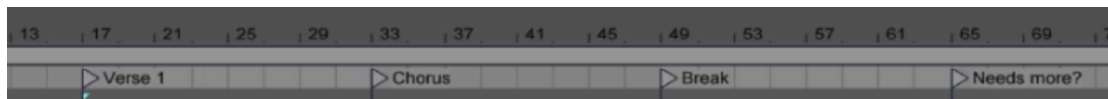
Using locators within the Ableton Live arrangement view

SIDECHAIN TRIGGER TRACKS

Set up a new track next to the arrangement-mapping track. Use a short sample or a midi sampler with a short sample loaded into it, which can easily be manipulated via an ADSR envelope.

This is going to be used as our side-chain trigger, so we don't have to mess around with our kick in the session.

We can now make a kick pattern that stems the entire length of the track arrangement, so that when we drop a track into the project, We can now use this as the side-chain trigger source. We can also go in and edit the side-chain midi notes if we wish to remove side-chaining for the break sections etc.

RENAMING & COLOURING

Try to get into the habit of renaming from the production and composition phase. All of our tracks should be clearly labelled, and so should all of the clips within our tracks.

We should be using a colour coding system that we can apply across all of our projects. We suggest:

• Brown for bass
• Orange for drums
• Red for synths
• Green for vocals
• Purple for strings & pads
• Blue for FX

it may help to use different colours for other elements, such as low and high-end sub-mixes. This also includes renaming any auxiliary's and busses, so we can see at a glance where each of them are routed, and what they are doing.

REMOVE LOW-END RUMBLE

This can be done in either the production, or preparation phase. It is good practice to ensure we have EQ's set up on all of our tracks that roll off any frequencies that shouldn't be there below around 20-40Hz.

Some producers prefer to get all of the mundane jobs such as this done right at the very start, before mixing. This allows them to make the most of their creative flow.

TRACK COUNT REDUCTION

We may have two mono claps, panned slightly away from each other to add width to a snare. Instead of having to group them together or process them separately, bounce the two claps to a single stereo file.

Try not to do this together with snare samples as well, as we may want to change the tonal characteristics, EQ, or dynamics, relative to the claps, which will be very hard to control if they are rendered together.

Another reason that we do this is because as soon as we start mixing, time is completely stacked against us. The longer we spend listening to a track, the more we will become emotionally connected to it and lose that objective way of thinking that helps us to stay focused and unbiased towards the mix.

GROUPING & SUBMIXING TRACKS

Group the different tracks into stem categories such as drums, percussion, bass, vocals, pads, synths, low-end, high-end, etc. This will give us greater control over automating groups of instruments, as well as making tweaks and adjustments.

Grouping and Bussing is also useful for when we want to apply effects to an entire group of sounds. An example of this is when using room reverb, or glue compression on a drum rack to make it gel and sound like it is coming from the same space.

DOUBLE CHECK TUNING AND TIMING OF PARTS

This goes without saying. At this point, everything production and composition wise should be spot on so we don't have to waste time trying to make further timing or tuning corrections later on.

Also at this point, set up any send/return busses that we may wish to use with the appropriate plugins applied. Keep the device activator switches turned off until needed, this will save CPU if we are working on a large project.

Turning these effects on, only when they are needed will keep from eating up our valuable processing power and slowing down the computer.

If we have received the track in the form of stems, then we'll usually find that we have a whole bunch of 1-clip tracks, each stemming from 1.1.1. Right through to the end of the track, with big blocks of silence in between.

In Logic there is a feature where we can quickly remove the silence. In Ableton however, we will have to divide the clips up and remove the silence manually. Ensure to add crossfades to the start and end of all our clips just in case there are any pops or clips that need to be removed.

BOUNCE TO AUDIO

Once our track is ready for mix-down. Make sure to commit to the mix-down phase by rendering our tracks down to audio.

This will prevent us from spending days going back in to make adjustments and tweaks that will just take us round in circles and waste precious time.