FL STUDIO 21 GUIDE

TRAP BEAT

Turn the page to begin.

INTRO

In this guide, you will learn how to make trap beats in FL Studio. Some prerequisites are:

- FL Studio 21[1]
- Keyzone Classic (Windows only)
  - Use Spitfire Audio LABS on Mac, or any other piano plugin as Keyzone Classic will not work on most installations.
- Kontakt Player 7
- Sonatina Glockenspiel
- MAutoPitch
- Khs Ensemble
- Valhalla Supermassive
  - If you are willing to spend $50, I would recommend Valhalla Vintage Verb.
- RIP Speakers Magnetic Drum Kit
- RIP Speakers Earthquake Drum Kit
- (optional) Halftime by Cableguys

This guide can be applied, at some amount, to any DAW. I will be specifically covering FL Studio, but the music theory concepts can be used in other programs.

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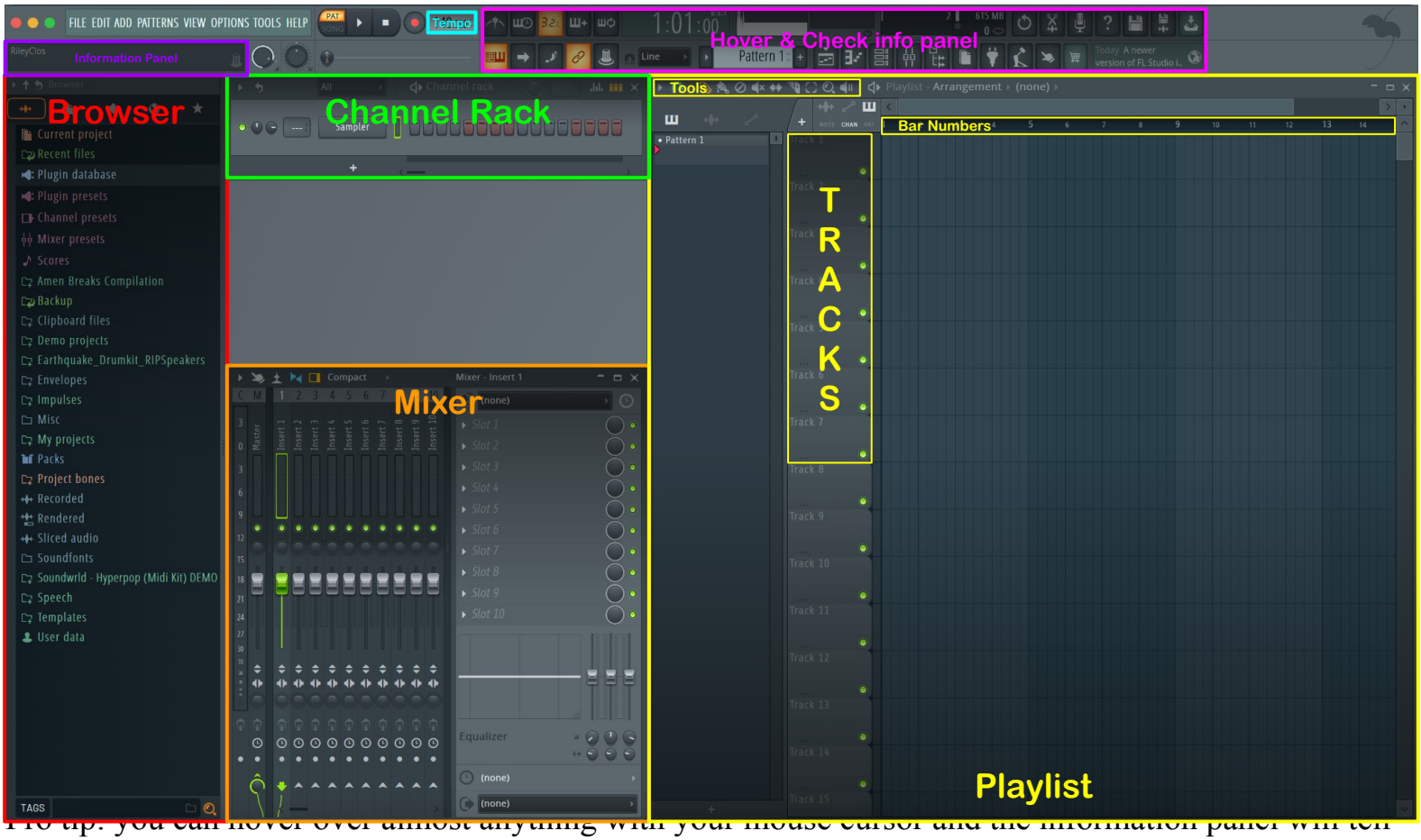
1: You may use the demo version, but know that you *cannot* post music that you make with it. Do not pirate FL Studio, or any plugins.

Mac users:
ALT = option
CTRL = command

FL STUDIO NAVIGATION

To begin making music, you must first know how to navigate your DAW. This tutorial covers FL Studio.



Pro tip: you can hover over almost anything with your mouse cursor and the information panel will tell you what it does.

How to use plugins (instruments)

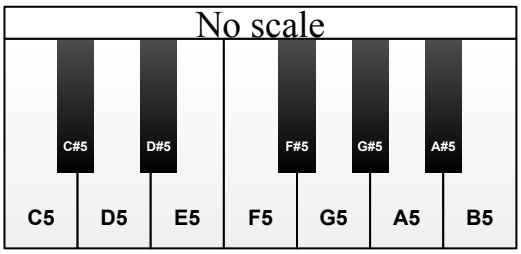
- Drag the plugin onto a track in the playlist
  - It will come up in the mixer and on the channel rack.
  - The plugin interface will come up, where you can interact with the plugin and (usually) play on a MIDI keyboard to hear how it sounds.
  - When you're ready, use the tool to place down the channel's pattern (*the place you put the notes*).
  - Double click the pattern you placed to access the Piano Roll, which is where you can place notes.
- Use the mixer channel to add effects.

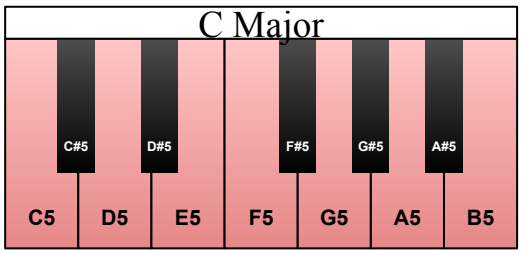
How to use plugins (effects)

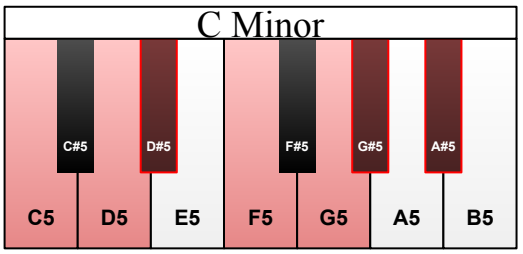
- Select the mixer channel you want.
- Click an empty slot and add an effect.
- Effects happen chronologically, so if you put *Fruity Reeverb 2* before *Fruity Delay 2*, the delay plugin will also process audio generated by the *Fruity Reeverb 2* plugin.

Custom VST plugins are discussed later on.

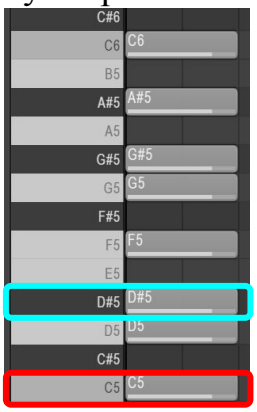
SCALES/CHORDS







This is a keyboard. The letters correspond to what **note** each key plays, and the number corresponds to what **octave** each note is played in. The easiest scale is the C Major scale, which is all the white keys. A common scale in sad music is the C Minor scale. Once you memorize these two scales, you can make any scale. A common scale in trap music is D# Minor. To find this scale, first plot the C minor scale on your piano roll. It will look like the image below.



To place notes on the piano roll, left click. To remove notes, right click them. Once you have done this, select the notes by holding [SHIFT] and your left mouse button, then drag over the notes you want to select. Then, to bring them up or down, you can hold [SHIFT] again and press the [□] or [□] to shift it up or down. The base note is the note that determines what scale you are in. For example, if you were to shift it up 3 times (semitones) from C5, you would have the D# minor scale. This D# minor scale is used in many productions, and has become popular in the dark trap genre, although it is not limited to that genre specifically. For now though, shift the notes back down to a C minor and we will discuss chords.

For a basic chord, you want to use the 1st, 3rd, and 5th notes in the scale. Ex: C minor chord is a C5, D#5, and a G5. You can start your chords on other notes than the root note of the scale though. You can start the chord on a D5, and use F5 and G#5 and it will still be in key. There are also special chords you can make to add more detail. Specifically, manipulating the middle note and adding more notes.

Manipulating the Middle Note

For a **suspended** chord, you cannot use the third note in the scale. You must move it to either the *perfect fourth* or the *major second*. A Csus4 would be a **C, F,** and **G**. A Csus2 would be a **C, D,** and **G**. You can also move the 5th note up an octave (*to the next number*) by clicking on it while holding [CTRL] and clicking the note; continue holding [CTRL] and press [□]. You can also move it down an octave, which can add a different sound to the chord.

Adding Notes Without it Sounding Bad

There are many ways to add notes without the chord sounding bad. The main rule is to stay in key and try not to put too many notes out of the chord. For example, a Cmin7 would be a **C, D#, G,** and **A#**, which is the 7th note in the C minor scale. A C7sus4 chord would combine the aspect of adding the 7th note and the aspect of suspending a chord and adding the 7th note. This chord would be a **C, F, G,** and **A#**.

Diminished Chords

These chords are more confusing because they do not follow the usual way one makes chords. To make a diminished triad (*regular 3-note chord*) skip 3 semitones (*steps*) for every note. For example, a Cdim7 (C diminished 7th) would be a **C, D#, F#, A**. These chords are less common, and are sometimes notated with a degree symbol (°).

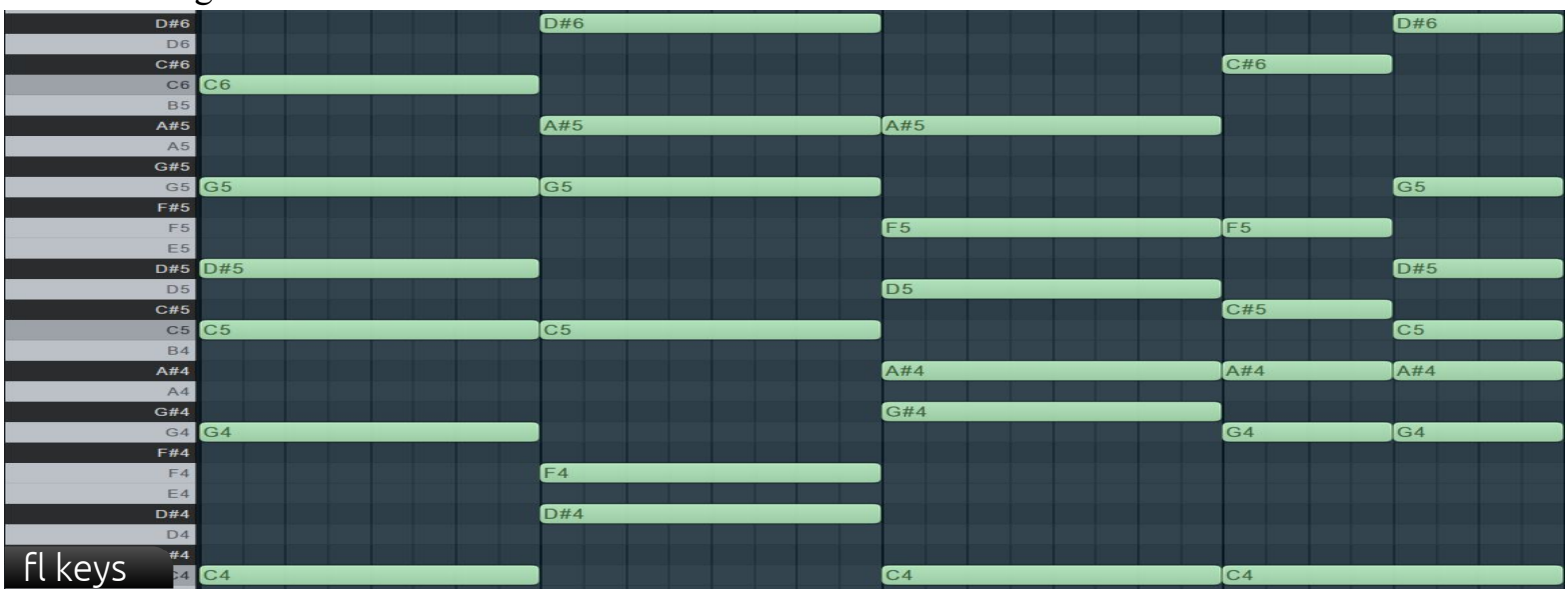
Chords are a very important aspect of music production, and will lead into the next section, **Chord Progressions.**

♯ is pronounced “sharp”,
♭ is pronounced “flat”.
= ♯, b = ♭

CHORD PROGRESSION

To make a chord progression, start by experimenting with root notes. Chord progressions are usually around 4 bars long, and are played through the majority of the song. Once you have your root notes set up, make the triads for them. For example, with the root notes **C, C, G, G**, i would do:

These chords are Cmin, Cmin, Gmin, Gmin. You can add some spice to these chords by expiremented with the things we talked about earlier in the **SCALES/CHORDS** section.



In this example, I added quite a bit to my chords but they still sound good.
These chords are: **Cm, D#6/9, A#9, A#m6/9, D#6**
You can also see that I split the last chord into two chords, which adds a little bit more change to the progression and makes the song more interesting. The plugin I am using for this is *FL Keys*, which is a stock FL Studio plugin that comes with every version of FL.

The main aspect of this element of the song is just experimentation, figure out what sounds good and do not get discouraged because it takes practice to get good at this.

MELODY

Create a melody on top of your chord progression! This part is the most fun to me because this is the part of the song that people will want to play on their own instruments. Quick melody tips:

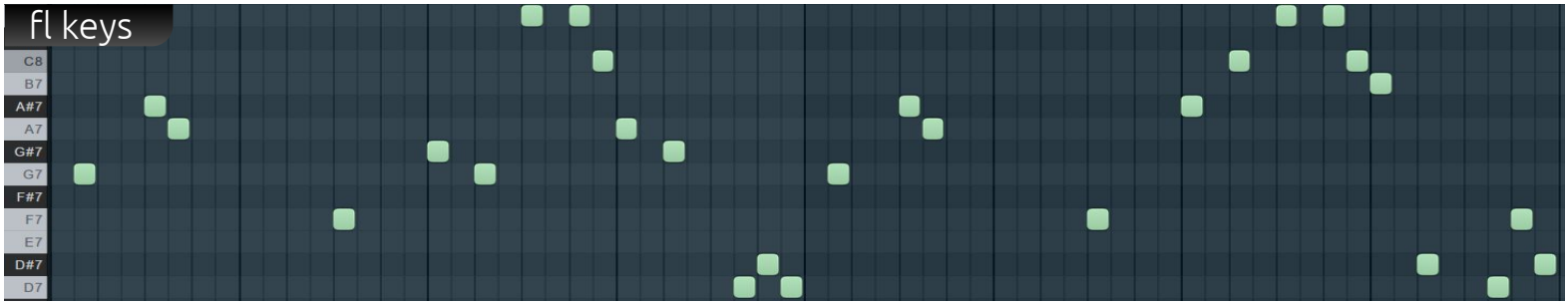
- Do not overcomplicate it as this will make it difficult for people to play on their own or be memorable
- Do not oversimplify it as this will make the song boring
- Stay in key
- Do not make it too low or too high

Here's an example melody from the song we have been working on. I am putting it on a separate pattern from my chord progression.

This melody is pretty basic, and yours can be a little more complicated but my best advice is to just tweak it until it sounds good.

COUNTER-MELODY

All the counter-melody needs to do is play along with the melody. One thing you can do to make the song more interesting is make the counter-melody respond to the melody. For this, however, I am just going to make a basic counter-melody for this song.



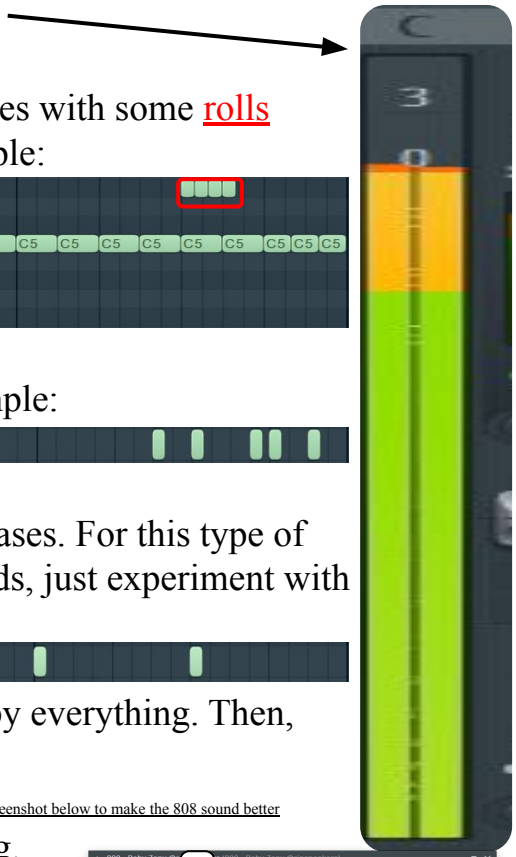
This counter-melody is also pretty basic but gets the job done. Your counter melody and melody should play well both with each other and on their own.

DRUMS

This is where the RIP Speakers drum kits come into play. They are organized into samples that you can use like kicks, claps, snares, hats, etc.
The sounds I have selected for the example song are:
Hi Hat – Clicky (Magnetic Drum kit)
Clap – Duo (Magnetic Drum kit)
Kick – Roses (Magnetic Drum kit)
808 – Baby Zany (Earthquake Drum kit)
To put the drums into the playlist, drag the samples (*the sound files, in this case* ***.wav***) onto the track and tell FL to make an instrument track.

Kick, Pt. I

When I make my beats, I usually start by making some basic edits to my kick. To start, I open up the sampler window for the kick (double click the track name in the playlist) and navigate to the wrench icon. In this menu, there are a ton of knobs but the one I am looking for is the `VOL` knob. Tweak this to your liking, keeping in mind that we will be putting Fruity Soft Clipper on it (*limiting the volume so it doesn't interfere with the mix*). Once you are ready, navigate to the mixer and click the channel that the kick is on. In one of the empty slots, add Fruity Soft Clipper to your track. Turn down the `THREES` knob and adjust the `POST` knob until the kick sits around -3 to 0 dB.



Hi Hat

For the hi-hat, keep it simple. Most hi-hat patterns are just eighth notes with some rolls (*rolls are when you make very short and fast bursts*) Here's an example:

Clap

The clap is pretty straight-forward, just do not use it too much. Example:

Kick, Pt. II

The kick should not be too complicated, yet not too simple in most cases. For this type of trap beat, you want it to match the rhythm. Hard to explain with words, just experiment with it yourself. Here is mine:

When you are done, press [CTRL]+[A] and [CTRL]+[C] after to copy everything. Then, move on to the 808.

808

use the screenshot below to make the 808 sound better

The 808 is one of the most tricky parts, as it has to fit with everything. Paste the kick pattern into here, and adjust the pitches. Here is mine:

Pro tip: keep all your drums except the 808 on C5 unless there is a reason not to (like rolls).

Pro tip: the "C" channel on the far left side of the mixer shows the current channel. Not to be confused with the Master channel.

INSTRUMENT CHOOSING

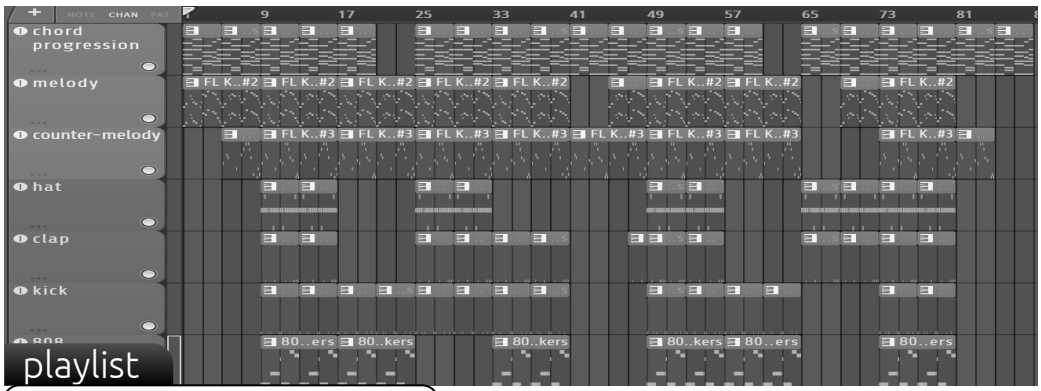
Now that you have gotten a basic understanding of what your beat is going to be, it is time to choose your instruments. To use VST/AU (*AU is mac exclusive*) instruments, drag them from the browser to the playlist. To see your plugins in the browser, refer to the screenshot on the right-hand side. With these, experiment and use Google for any problems you have. Be patient, and remember that there is a solution to every problem. If you cannot find it online, contact me or create a support ticket with Image-Line.

EFFECTS

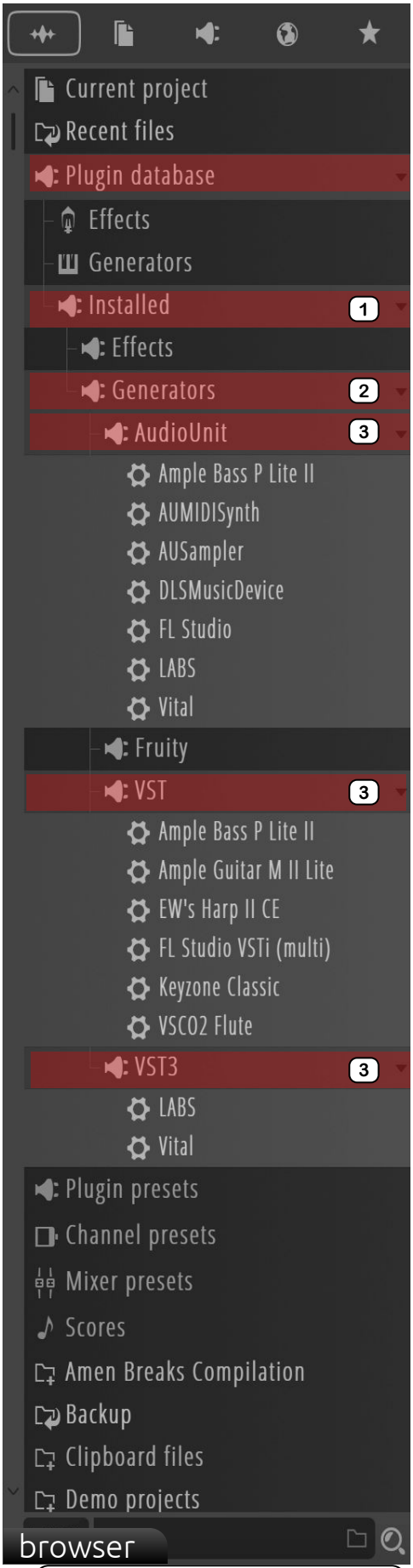
This one is pretty straight forward. For your tracks, mess around with different effect plugins and find the ones you like. I would make sure you check out Valhalla Supermassive, as it is one of the most powerful reverb and delay plugins I know about. A tip I have is to refrain from putting reverb or delay on your kick or 808, as those are kind of what keep the beat together. You can also use effects in an artistic way, like with Gross Beat[2].

STRUCTURING

Now that you have a good-sounding beat, you can begin to structure it into a full beat instead of just a slice. When structuring, remember that there will (most likely) be vocals over it, so keep in mind that there will be an intro, verse, chorus, bridge, etc. It is hard for me to explain, so I will show you what it looks like after structuring.



grayscale to not waste ink

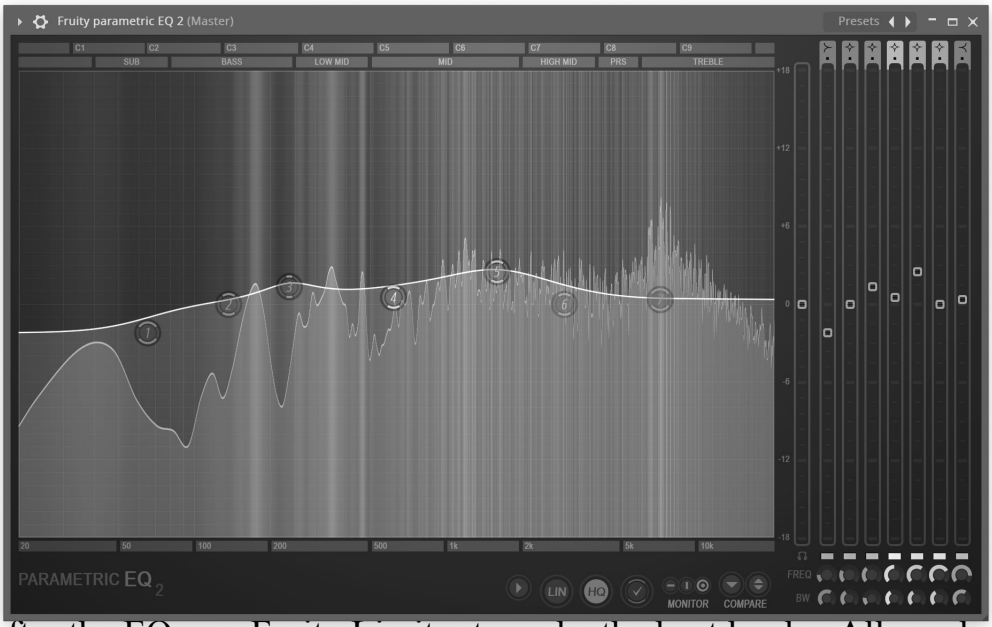


grayscale to not waste ink

2: Gross beat requires FL Studio Signature Bundle or above, or its $70 at the Image-Line store. A free Windows alternative to some of the effects is Glitch 1.3, although the UI is hard to navigate and it will not work on Windows 11.

MIXING

Mixing is basically making the beat sound more levelled. Part of the mixing process is trying your song in different speakers, but for the most part you can stick to Fruity Parametric EQ 2 to monitor your levels (this is what I do). To start mixing, turn all of your tracks down to 0 in the mixer, and turn up the ones you think should be the loudest. Then, play it with only those and get them right relative to each other. After that, turn up the ones that should be quieter and fine-tune those. Then, put an EQ on the master channel and use it to make the beat more "flat" (meaning the waveform stays around the middle).



NOTICE HERE:

The waveform is not drastically top-heavy or bottom-heavy, it's pretty balanced

(eq is in grayscale to not waste ink)

After the EQ, use Fruity Limiter to make the beat louder. All you have to change is the "Gain" knob, to around 5dB (or right click → type in value → 0.63).

Then, use Fruity Soft Clipper default preset.