

Make an EP in 30 Days Ableton Course

Day 3

Improve your Listening Skills

Listen

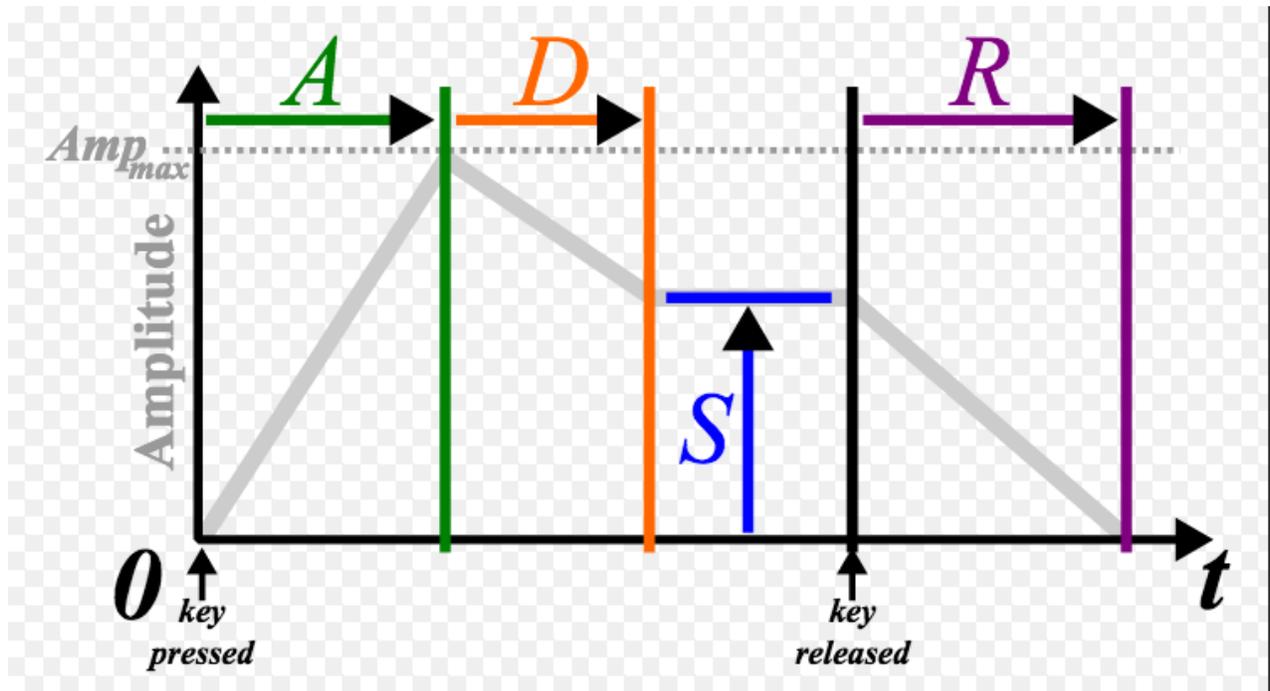
The fastest way to become a good music producer is to improve your listening skills

Define what you hear

If you can define what you are hearing, you are 70% to getting the sound you want.

Understanding Sound

Attack, Decay, Sustain, Release



By understanding how a sound moves through time & the elements of a volume envelope, you can much more easily translate what you are hearing into your own work.

A,D,S,R

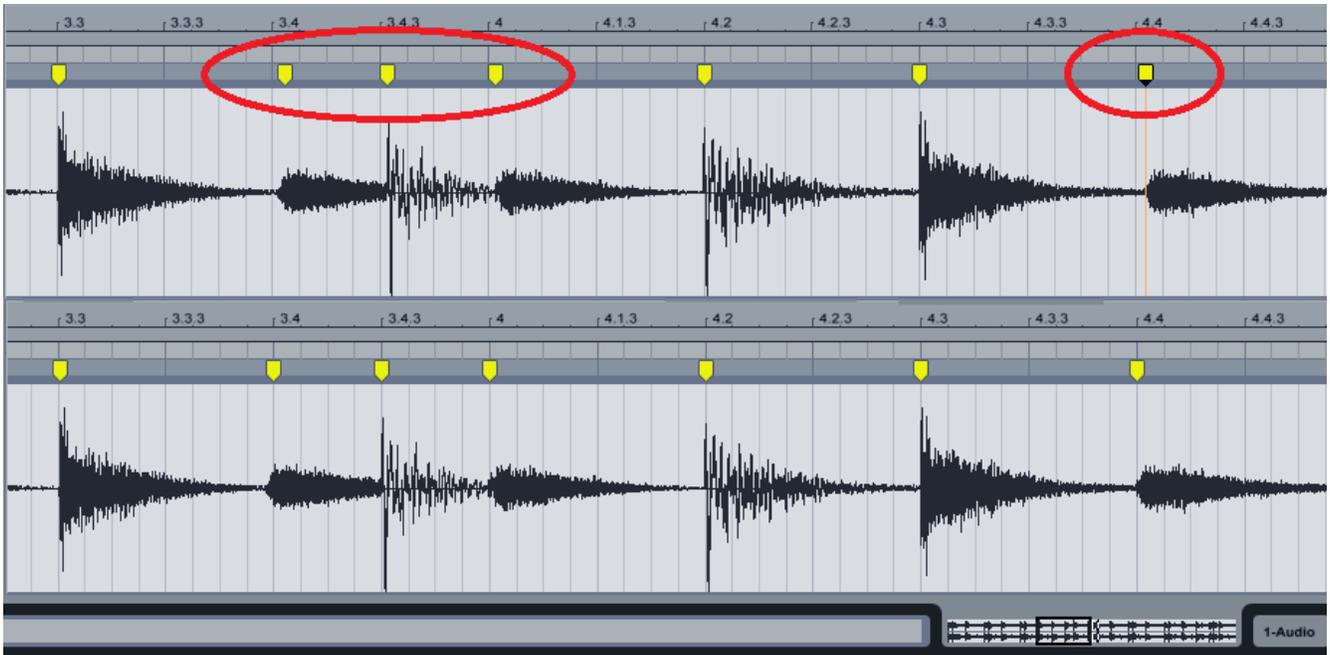
Attack – The time it takes a sound to go from silence to its peak volume. Sometimes this can be immediate or can take several seconds.

Decay – The time it takes a sound to settle into a chosen sustain volume after the initial attack.

Sustain – The constant volume that a sound settles at after decay, until that note is released

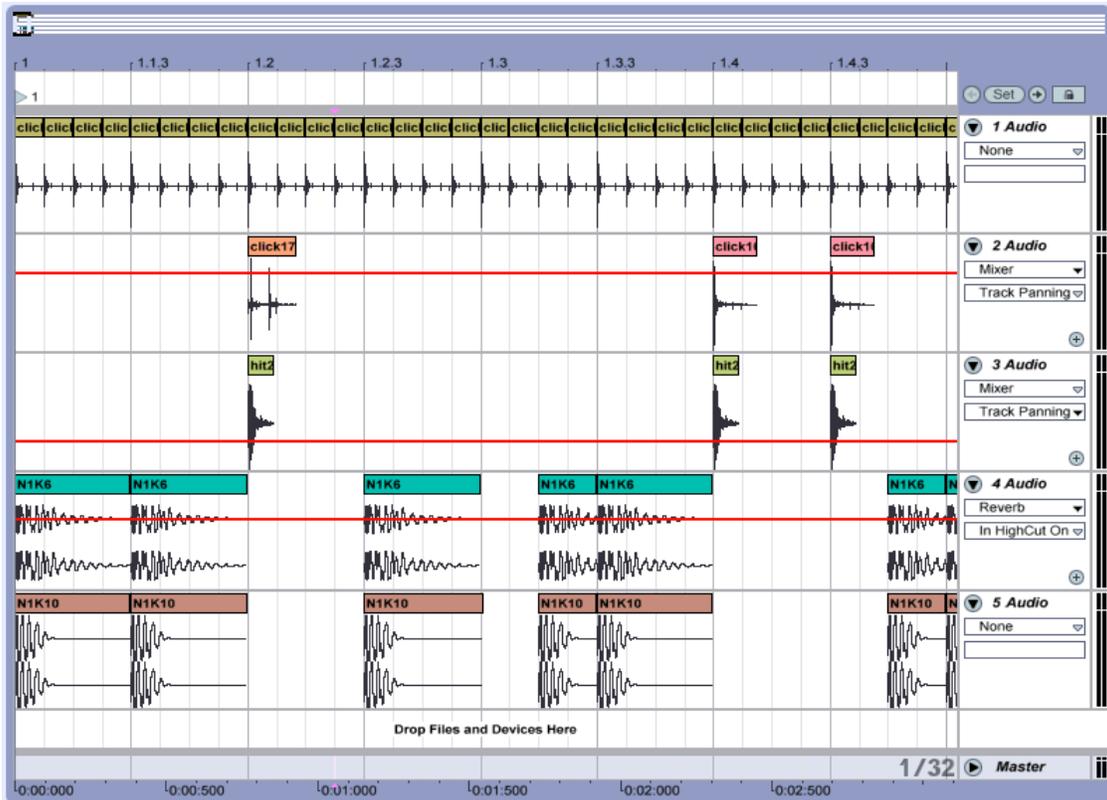
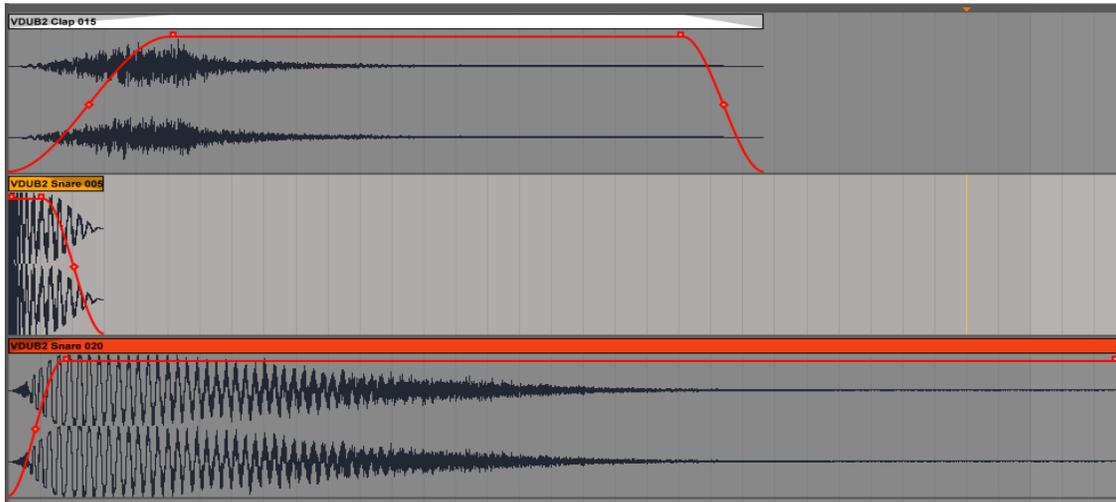
Release – The time it takes for a sound to fade back to silence after a note ends (on a keyboard, this would be when a note is released)

Transients



A transient is a short-duration sound that represents its attack phase. It's typically the loudest part of a sound & it's the part that really helps a sound cut through the mix.

Layers



Layers

Often times, what appears to be only 1 sound, is actually several layered together, giving a richer & more complex result.

This can be synth sounds, kicks, snares, claps, fx & just about anything else you can think of.

Often the best results come from each layer representing a frequency range
(low, mid or high)

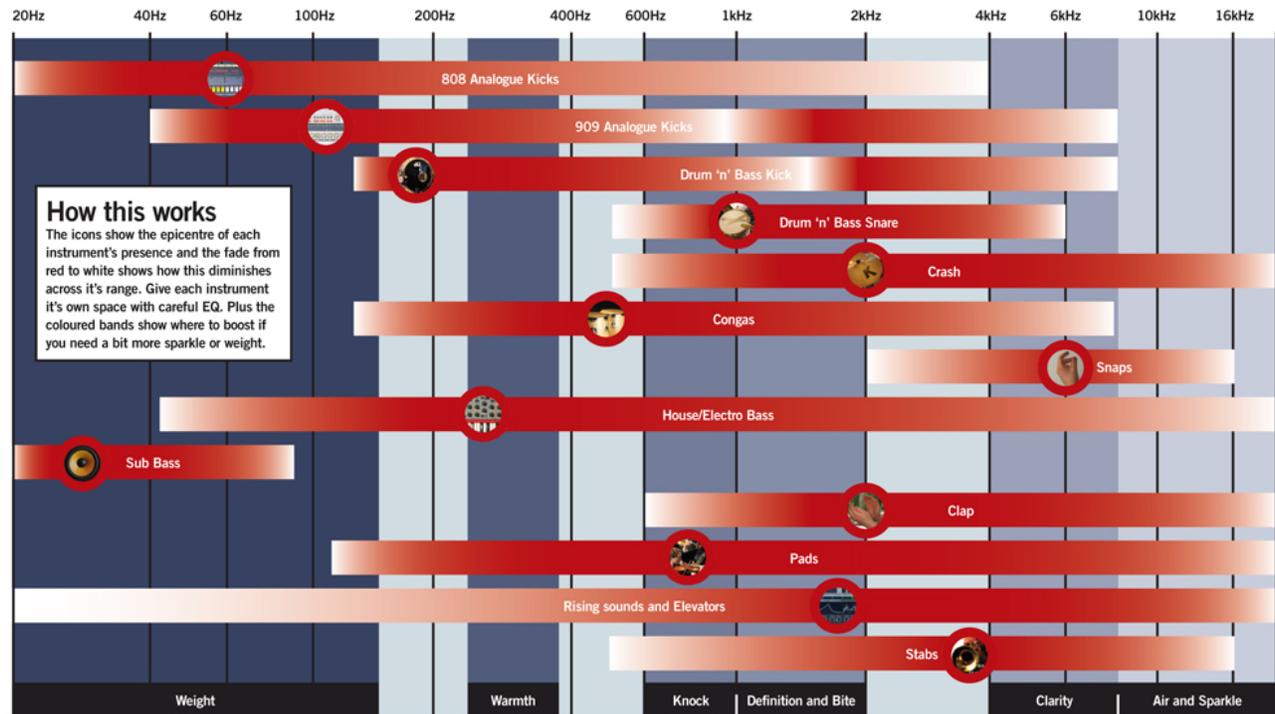
A transient sound is often used as an added layer to give a sound more *bite*.

Frequencies

A Club Track's Frequency Map



Fit your mix together and give your tracks room to breathe with our simple guide to frequency ranges



By understanding frequency ranges, you'll be able to define which frequency ranges a particular sound falls into.

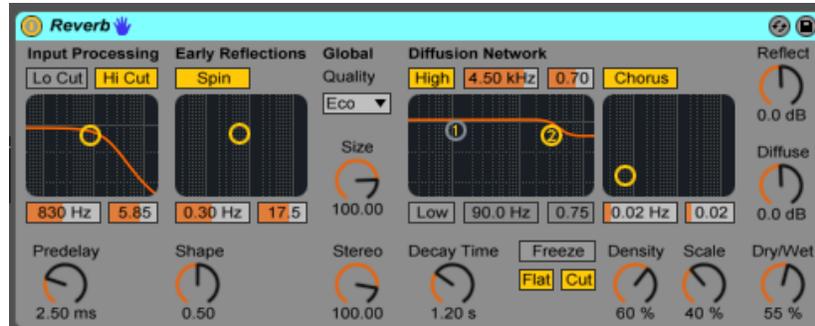
With practice, you can recognize a general frequency range an instrument you're hearing falls into. This can make it much easier to dial in your eq when something isn't sitting well in your mix or if a certain frequency range hasn't been represented well in your song.

Spectrum



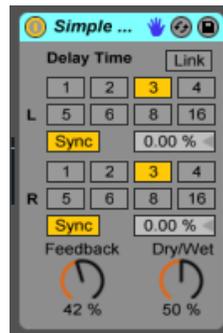
A great way to get familiar with the eq frequency of certain sounds is to use Ableton's Spectrum effect, or the EQ8. Both will give you accurate feedback on the frequency that makes up each instrument. When you hear something pleasing, understanding what is happening in that frequency range will make you better able to recreate or tweak your own sounds to your liking.

Reverb



Reverb is a natural occurrence of a sound placed in a specific space. The reverb effect depends on the size of the space and the surfaces that are reflecting the sound. Reverb is the accumulation of all these reflections.

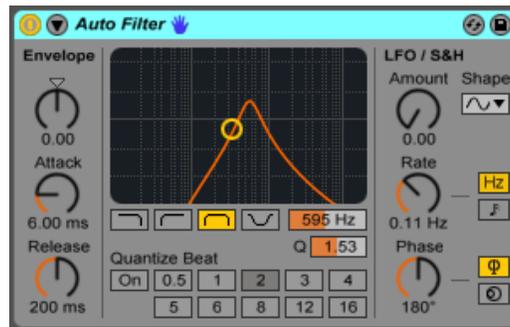
Delay



Where reverb reflections are fast enough to still sound like 1 sound (typically less than 50 milliseconds), a delay (or echo) has reflections long enough to sound like a separate copy of the original sound, or several copies.

Your vst effects attempt to mimic this natural occurrence. By experimenting with Ableton's reverb & delay effects, you'll better be able to recognize it's influence on the music you listen to.

Filter



A filter can be described as an eq sweeping through the frequencies, typically with the enhancement of whatever frequency it is moving through. This sweeping effect can be done in several different ways.

Low Cut – A low cut filter will remove any frequency below its cutoff point (think of when a DJ removes the bass momentarily to create a bigger impact when it's brought back in).

High Cut – A high cut filter will remove any frequency above its cutoff point.

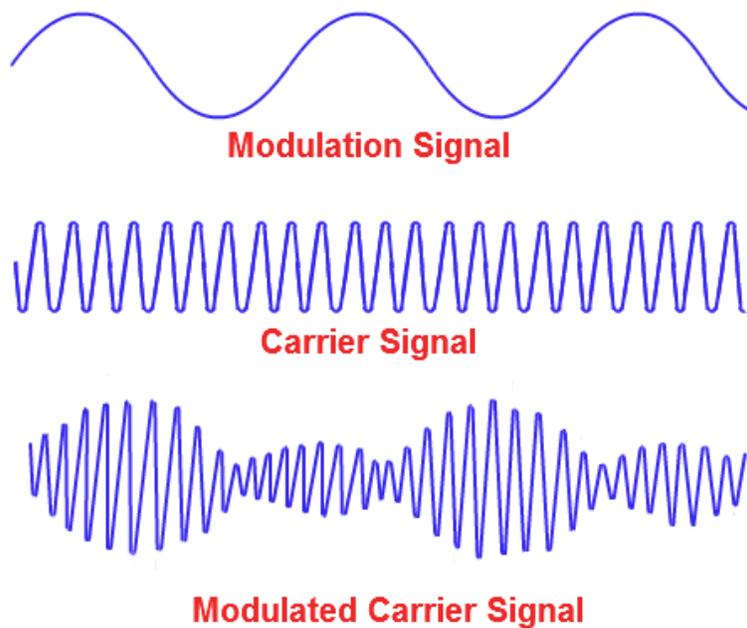
Bandpass - A bandpass removes both lows or highs while it enhances (boosts) a certain range of frequencies as it sweeps through the frequency spectrum.

Notch - A notch filter is the opposite of a bandpass in that it attenuates (lowers) a certain range of frequencies as it sweeps through the frequency spectrum.

As with all effects, once you experiment with the plugin for a bit, all this will begin to make much more sense.

Modulation

The process of interrupting an audio signal with another signal (a waveform), thus changing the sound.



Modulation typically effects the original sound with a waveform process moving at a certain rate (or speed) & amplitude.

A vibrato effect, for example, is a sound being modified by a waveform (sine, triangle, saw or square) affecting the pitch at a certain speed (rate) & amplitude.

Volume, filter & panning can also be modulated among nearly endless choices.

Octaves & Chords

Often times the same or the similar sounds are layered an octave higher or lower to add energy or impact.

Sometimes the extra layer is a harmonizing or dissonant note that creates more atmosphere or an emotional moment.

Listen

Groove

Break down what elements are driving the song forward & keeping you in the 'groove'.

Are there any sounds that aren't contributing to the groove?

Listen for subtleties

Homework

1. Define a style for your ep
2. Listen to **one** of these songs below & be as descriptive about what you are hearing as you can.

If your style is different from these styles, choose your own song example & link me to that along with your homework.

Minimal:

<https://soundcloud.com/dubfire/01-agua-snippet?in=dubfire/sets/agua>

Techno:

https://soundcloud.com/bedrock_rec/b2-breccia-and-sebastian

Progressive:

<https://soundcloud.com/max-cooper/nick-warren-devils-elbow-max-1>

EDM:

<https://soundcloud.com/calvinharris/calvin-harris-summer-extended>

Dubstep:

<https://soundcloud.com/knifepartyinc/knife-party-give-it-up>

Try to break down each instrument. Long decay, slow decay? Sharp, soft, punchy? Slow attack? (like with pads), describe the kick drum, the bass etc. Are these sounds made up of several layers? What effects do you hear?

