

# Make an EP in 30 Days

## Ableton Course

### Day 13

Breakdowns & builds

## Builds and breaks

Besides the groove itself, breaks & builds are an essential part of any type of electronic music. It's the place where you build up tension to a peak before releasing it, creating the big moments in your tune.

A break can be anywhere from 4-32 bars. You can also create mini-breaks as short as a  $1/8^{\text{th}}$  or  $1/16^{\text{th}}$  of a note, typically removing some or all of the song's elements.

A lot of people find this part of song creation complicated, but it doesn't have to be. I'll walk you through some simple ways to get this accomplished.

## Filter or drop the kicks

In order to build tension, you need to pull back the energy in your song to create anticipation for its return. This is typically done by removing the low end of your song.

1. The easy way to do this is to simplify or remove your kicks like I had you do in the early stages of structuring your song.
2. Another approach is to use a filter effect to remove the low end from your kicks, creating a sharp pulse through your break. Adding some resonance to the filter or a little saturation can give it more impact.

## Simplify or remove the bass

Just like with the kick, you can simplify, filter or remove the bass during your breakdown. Give a listen to other songs in your genre to see the approach they take.

You can also drop an auto filter or eq8 on your master track to get rid of all low frequencies in your song at once. Just make sure the effect is off when it isn't being used.

## Rising & falling sounds

Adding sounds that rise or lower in pitch over time is a pretty universal technique for building tension & excitement in a song & it's really easy to do in Ableton.

Here are a few methods:

### Automate transpose



Transposition envelope

Pitch range

Automation

Automate the transpose on an audio or midi clip over 3, 8 or 16 bars.  
Rises work best in multiples of 12 semitones (octaves)

## Pitch envelope



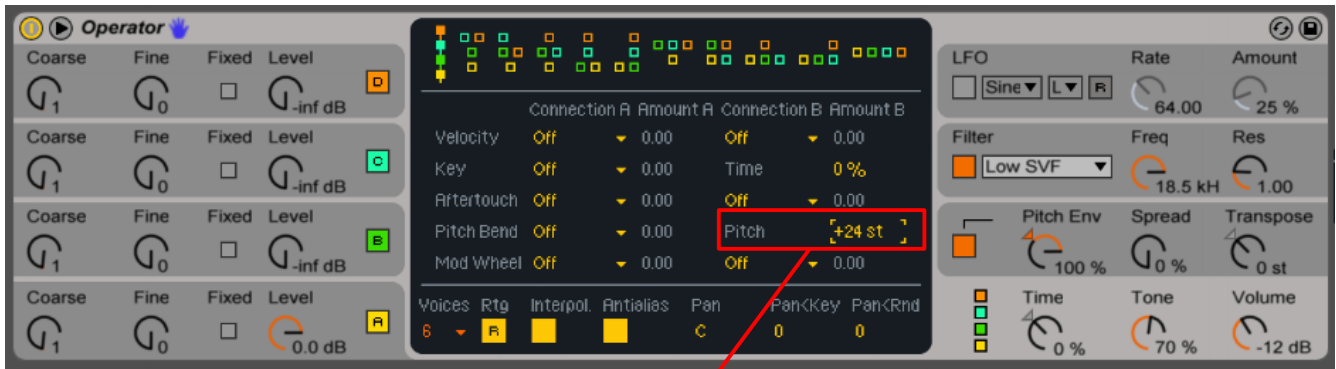
pitch envelope window

adsr & bend amount

pitch effect amount

In most synths you are able to automate a pitch bend over time. In Operator I have set the attack time for a 12 second long pitch bend from 0 to +24 semi-tones. After 12 seconds it will hold the highest tone until the key is released.

## Pitch bend wheel

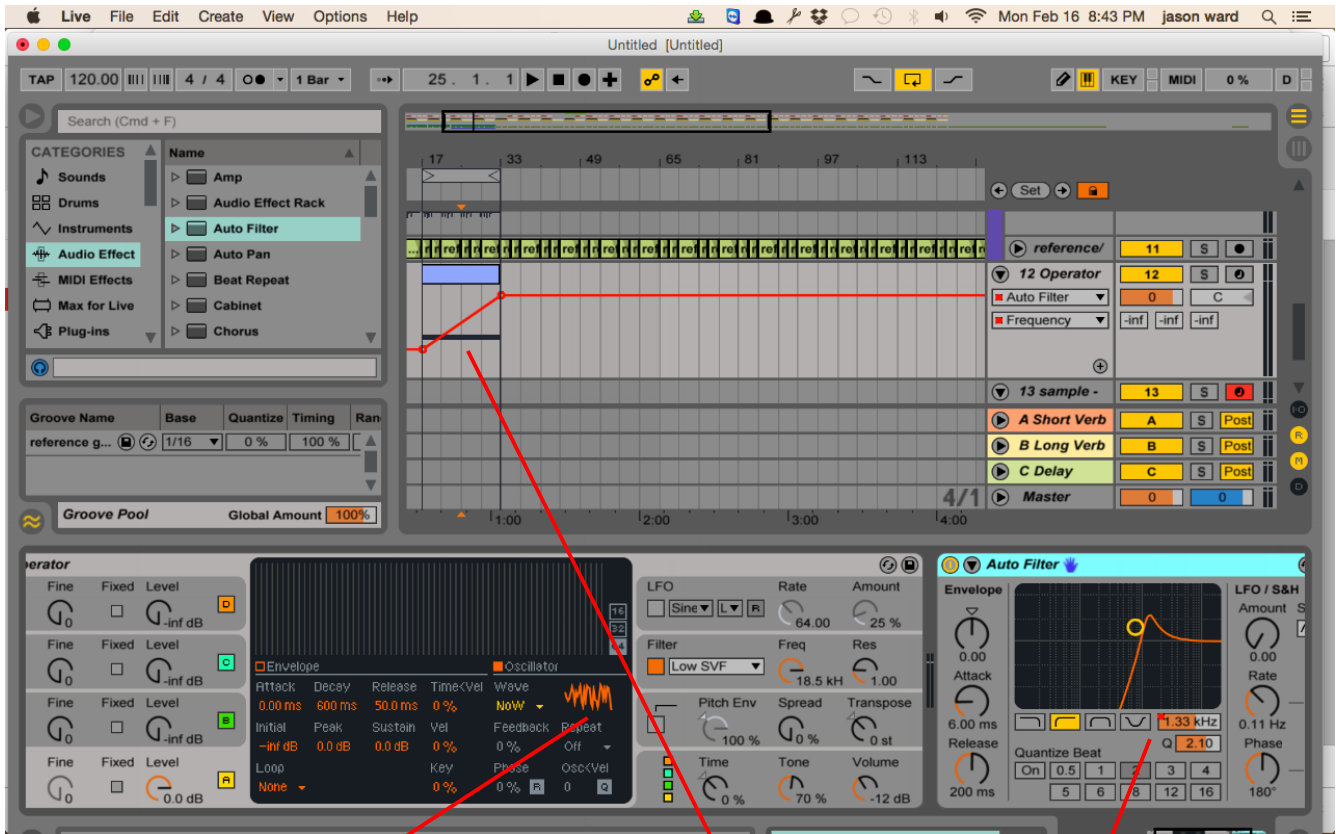


Set pitch wheel amount

All synths & samplers should have a pitch wheel amount. Many are set to + or – 5 by default, but you can create a more extreme setting. Then you can simply record your pitch wheel on your midi track.



## Filter sweeps



Noise wave

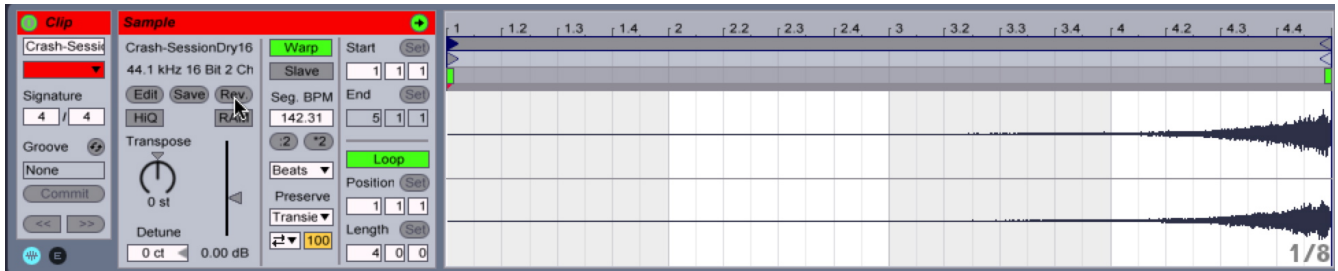
filter freq automation

Freq / Q(rez) setting

Where as we just looked at rising and lowering pitch, filter sweeps are a rising or lowering of frequency. By automating the frequency envelope on a noise wave using an auto filter with a medium to high rez setting, you can easily create a bigger moment in your song.



## Reverse



Reverse sounds are a fantastic way to build tension, especially toward the end of your break. Higher frequency sounds like reverse crashes work great for this.

## Impact sounds

Impact sounds like a crash, an explosion or other high energy sounds work great to introduce a break, to punctuate a middle point or at the return from a break.

Adding reverb or delay can add to its impact as well.

## Effects, delays, reverb

Breaks often benefit from increasing the intensity of effects, creating a bigger wetter build before cleaning it up again when the song kicks back to life.

1. Try adding reverb to your hi hats, slowly increasing the decay & wet/dry as the break comes to its peak. Make sure to return the settings to their previous positions when returning to the groove.
2. Long delays on voice parts, pads, stabs etc can also help to build tension.
3. Other effects can be used to kinda make your sounds become almost unrecognizable & allow the listener to feel a bit “lost” before returning to normal when the groove resumes.

Depending on your style, some will build all the way to the end of the break, while others will leave a couple of bars for the effects to quiet back down before kicking things back in. Even giving a  $\frac{1}{4}$  note rest can give more impact to the return of the groove, so experiment & see what works best for you.

## Fills

With rock bands, a drum fill is like a short break in the song creating a change in the groove before crashing back into the main beat. Drum fills work well in club tunes as well.

Little fills throughout the track can keep things interesting, but they can be especially effective when coming out of your breakdowns.

There are many live drummer sample cds that will give you all the fills you could want. This is a stylistic thing & this works for some music genres more than others, but never be afraid to try it out for yourself.

## The breather

Like I hinted at earlier, many songs benefit from quieting things down just a couple bars before the return from the breakdown. If done right, this can create a huge sounding release back into the groove of your song.

As you are creating your build ups, make sure to ask yourself “should I give this a breather before the song jumps back to life?”. You'll want to decide on a case to case basis.

# Homework

1. Fill in those breakdowns for maximum impact with your style. Start simple, listen & try to figure out what is missing before adding another layer. Make sure not to overdo things here. You don't want a world of mud.