

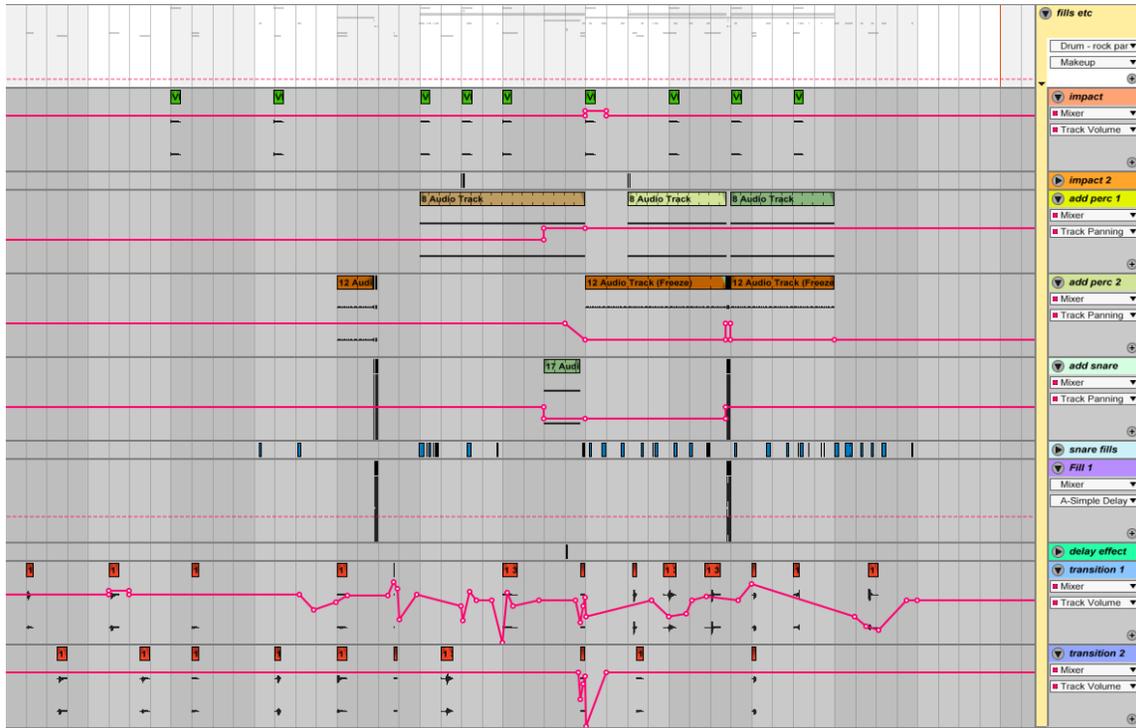
# Make an EP in 30 Days

## Ableton Course

### Day 14

Keeping your song interesting

# The extra bits



The little details that make all the difference

## Keeping your song interesting

Today's lesson is going to be similar to yesterday's. Some of the things that help a breakdown sound interesting can also be used to keep your song interesting.

The difference is that today we are going to be building up instead of breaking down. The goal is to keep the energy and interesting throughout your song.

## Interesting groove

Keep in mind that you should already have a solid groove that you can nod your head to. If you start off with a lifeless or boring groove, work on that before moving forward.

## 8 bars

Generally speaking, the brain has a very low threshold for sameness in our music. Typically your brain can handle about 8 bars of music before it gets a bit restless. Luckily, very minor things can reset that threshold for another 8 bars.

Crashes, Impact noises, percussion sounds,  
delayed bits

## 16 bars

After 16 bars of hearing the same repeating part, the brain wants to hear a new element added to the groove. Maybe a pad sound, a vocal bit or an extra bit of percussion.

Where the 8 bar reset sounds are generally 1 shots, think of these additions like adding a loop. It doesn't have to be a busy loop, just something new that repeats.

You can also keep things interesting by removing an element to create a bit of tension and then bringing it back in, 16 bars later.

## Feel

This isn't an exact science, so you will have to develop a “feel” for when something is needed & when it isn't. Use the general rules & then follow up with your own instinct for what sounds correct to you.

## Transition sounds

Transition sounds are those sounds that give your song more of a flow & glues together the looped blocks that make up the structure of your track. It helps your song sound like a *song* instead of a collection of repeated loops.

Transition sounds reset your “loop tolerance” so your song doesn't sound boring. They create a bridge from one 8 or 16 bar loop to the next.

## Transitions

Transition sounds are usually sounds with a slow attack and long release. In other words, the sounds rise & fall in volume.

Reverse sounds with long reverb work really well to make transitions as does short pad sounds.

## Fillers

Where transition sounds typically bridge together blocks of 8 or 16 bars, fillers are those little added sounds that happen within your 8 bar blocks to keep the loop itself sounding interesting & new.

Fillers can be a quick drum hit, voice bit or effect sound that stands outside your basic groove to pull attention away from a repeating groove for a moment.

These sounds can be the difference between a boring track & one that consistently stimulates the brain.

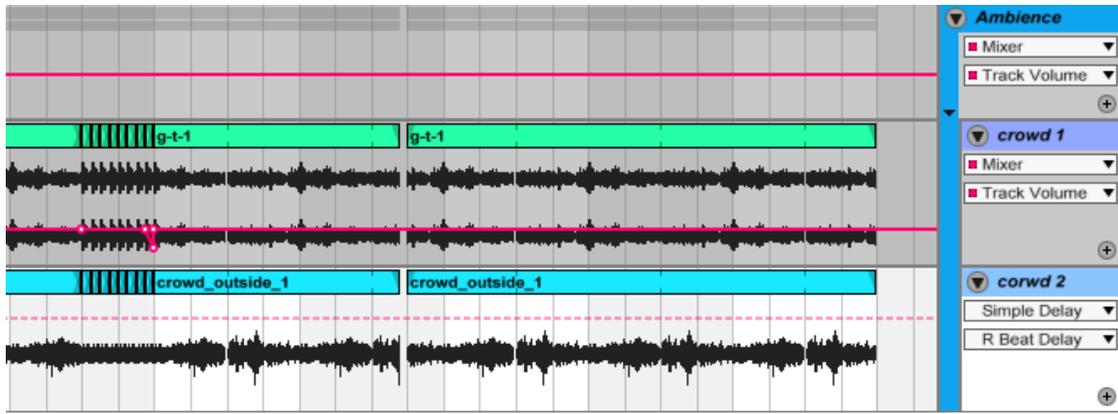
## Evolving sounds

Evolving sounds are an incredibly powerful way to keep your song interesting & telling the brain that you're on a journey, not just a predictable repeated pattern.

Little changes in timbre, filter, eq, lfo, pitch or send effects can all help a sound to evolve. Pads can be a great evolving sound that can give your whole song movement, but it can be almost any sound that changes over time.

In rock music, it was usually a lead part that worked as an evolving sound, because it was the part of the song that kept the groove from sounding boring & predictable. It took you somewhere new.

# Ambience



Ambience is used to add subtle texture to your song & make it sound more natural. In real life there is no such thing as silence. There are always sounds in the background.

Cars, wind, airplanes, birds, the low buzz of the refrigerator or your computer fan all break the silence in life. It can be important to break the silence in your music by sitting it on top of some low ambience sounds.

## Ambience

Ambience creates an evolving feeling even at very low volumes. The brain detects silence as unnatural & ambience can be the missing ingredient that makes your song work.

I like to make field recordings on my iPhone. I'll record out my window, in shopping centers, at a diner, out in nature & use these as background ambience in my songs.

## Headcandy

Headcandy is a word I use to describe sounds that move around your head from left to right. I like to run percussion sounds through an autopan, delay & filter to give random, ever evolving movement around the headspace.

This is a stylistic technique for me, but headcandy are any sounds that pull your attention away from the center of your mix. It makes your song more spacious & 3 dimensional.

## Keep in mind

Keep in mind that you don't have to use every type of *filler* in your own song. Think of each of these elements as a problem solver. If your song no longer has any issues to your ears, there is no reason to add needless stuff *just because*.

Consider what your song might be missing & what it needs to fill that *hole*. Don't feel the need to add something if it isn't essential to the improvement of your song.

# Homework

1. Start placing sounds throughout your composition, having it tell a story & have a theme. Also use sounds for transitions (reverse sounds or sounds with delay/reverb can be very effective)