

Make an EP in 30 Days

Ableton Course

Day 7

Concepts of working fast

Day 7B

Starting your looped Groove

Concepts of working fast

Start with an idea in your head, then discard it.

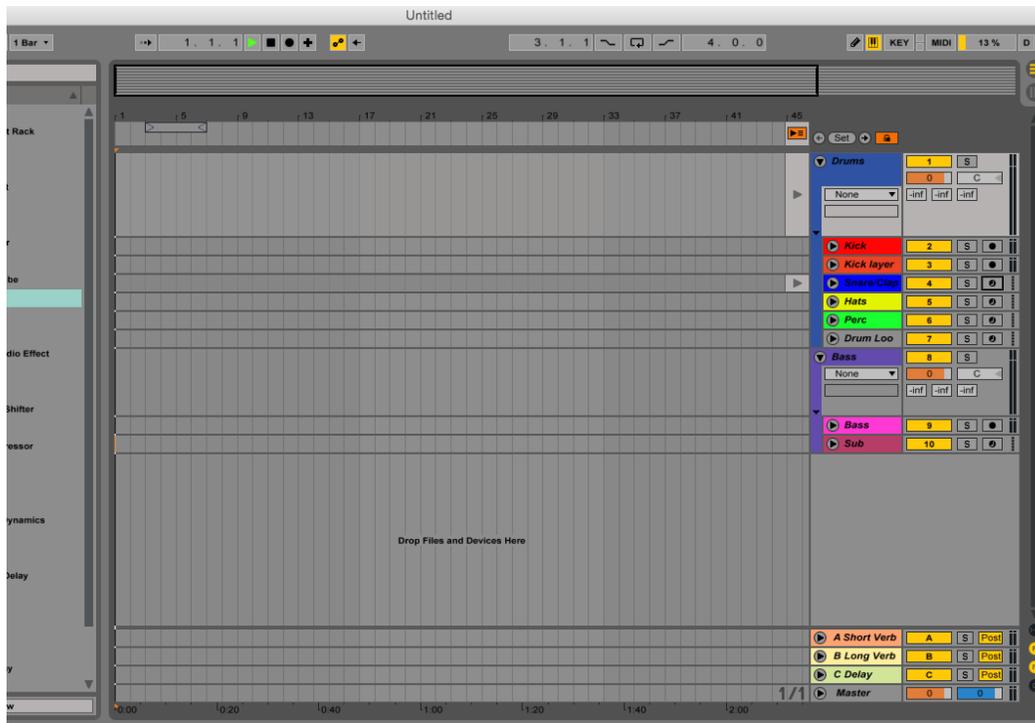
Think of your idea as a launch point, something that gets you started. Then realize that staying too focused on getting 1 particular idea or sound closes you off creatively from every other wonderful idea you stumble upon.

The things you didn't plan on are often the parts that bring magic to your song. Listen for & embrace accidents.

Less choices

This is where those preset sounds & effects you created will really pay off for you. Instead of fumbling around going through every possible option, you'll get right to where you need & be able to move to the next step.

Templates

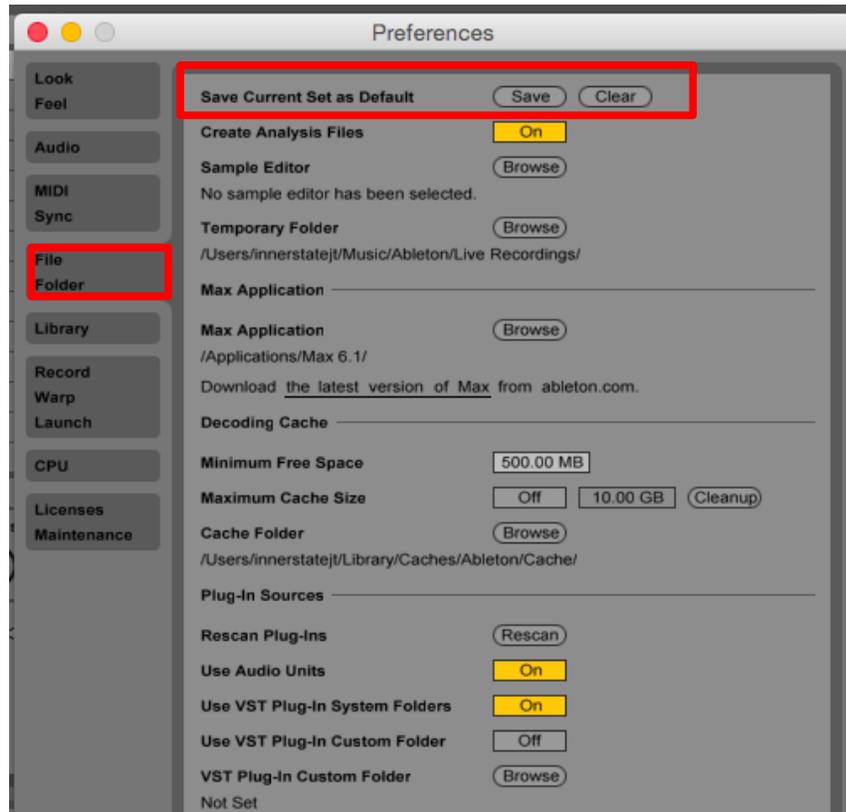


Templates are a huge timesaver much like presets.

In Ableton you are able to save a set up that will load every time you open the program. Perhaps you like having certain drum & bass instruments loaded & ready to go as well as 2 or 3 return tracks with reverbs & delay options.

You may even have a starter beat ready for you to jam to & change as you refine your idea.

Saving a template



To save a template as your default:

Go to File/Preferences
Click on the File Folder tab
At the top of the page, click save (in red)

Your template will evolve as you continue writing more music

Starting a looped groove

Here is where the rubber hits the road. You are now ready to start a looped groove that will soon become your first finished song.

It's important to keep yourself in a relaxed but focused state. Everything around you will try to distract you & stop you from writing. You'll need to ignore both the outer voices & the inner voices.

Close all distracting browser windows, turn off your phone & let family know that you need some privacy when you are in songwriting mode.

The timer trick

If it helps you, set a timer for 30 minutes where you are to putting 100% of your attention into writing.

When the alarm goes off, take a 5 minute break.

When you return to your studio, set the timer for another undisturbed 30 minutes.

Your sample pack

Included with today's lesson are some sampled drum sounds, & bass sounds that you can add to your toolbox.

If you already have sounds you are happy with, there is no need to use what I have provided.

Don't get stuck considering every possible option. Find something that works & move forward. You can always tweak things as you go.

Using drum samples

There are many ways to create drum sounds, but for the sake of time & to guarantee professional sounds, I'm going to recommend samples.

90% of big producers that are finishing songs are using drum samples as an essential tool. Don't get hung up on creating every sound from scratch until you've build the habit of completing a lot of music.

Using drum Samples

Sound design is time consuming, requires a lot of research & can be energy draining. It can also be very inspiring, but lets reserve your energy for when you really need it. Trust me, you are certain to hit a couple walls in the creative process & *that* is when you need full focus and all your energy.

Elements that make up your music style

Before putting together the first 8 bars of your track, you need to have a good idea of the elements that will make up your chosen style.

A great way to find those elements is by listening to a DJ mix in your style and pick out the recurring sounds that make up your style.

You did this before when you were collecting sounds & creating presets, but now it's time to really know your style.

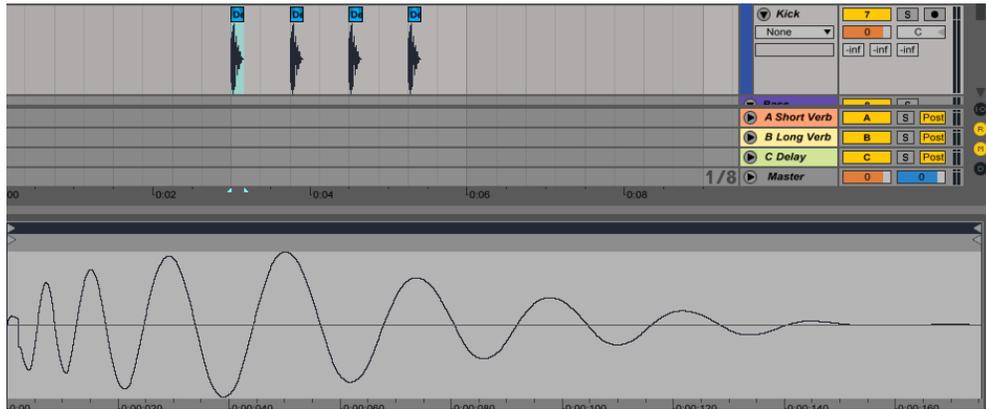
The rhythm

While listening to each sound, keep in mind how each part plays off the other and adds to the rhythm. I'm not suggesting you copy another song, but more about creating something with the same kind of feel.

Listen to the drum sounds. The tone of the kick, snare, clap, hi hats, shaker, cymbals, percussion, etc.. Write down each element with a short description. (Punchy short kick, sharp snare with long reverb, open hi hats bright & dry...etc)

Do the same for strings, pads, stabs, leads, background sounds, vocal, dirty tones.

Kick



The kick drum is possibly the most important element to get right. If you don't have the right kick, your song will suffer.

Get the kick right & you are on your way!

Before we dive in

The next section focuses specifically on the kick drum. You may want to also use the technique below to create a full drum kit if you are more comfortable creating your basic beat all at once on 1 midi track.

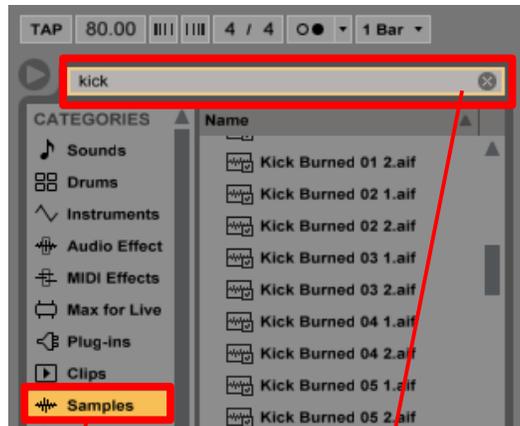
My preference is to separate my kicks, snares/claps, hats & percussion each on their own track. I like to be able to edit the midi of each drum sound separately. Also I have separate kick, snare & hi hat templates which give me a number of choices very quickly.

If I don't like one kick, there are several other kicks in the kit that I can try without having to drag in another preset.

If you are confused, it'll make sense in the next section.

Choosing your kicks

1. Click on Samples in the sidebar
2. Type Kick in the search window



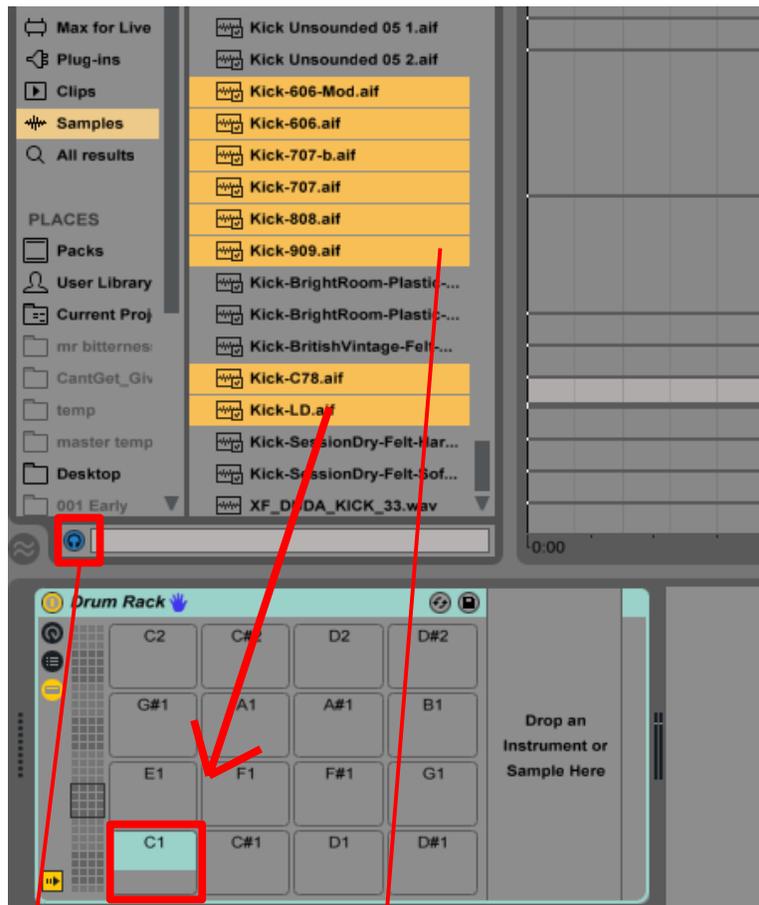
1

2

3. Click on the speaker icon
(this allows you to hear each sample)

4. Click & highlight the kicks you like
(to multi-select Control click/PC Command click/Mac)

5. Click & drag the highlighted kick samples into the
Drum Rack instrument
(It will automatically give each sample it's own drum cell)



3

4 & 5

Inside Drum Rack

Each drum sound gets put in it's own Simpler instrument, allowing for complete control of each kick.



Editing & layering your Kick

A great kick sound is often the result of 2-3 separate kick samples, each representing one aspect of the sound.

First look for a sound that has good “bite” or “snap” at the beginning. It shouldn't be a long sound, so if it is, you want to back off the decay and sustain settings.

Next find a kick with good low end boom, or a tighter sound with good low end.

In many cases, this will do the job, but sometimes you want a 3rd layer that adds a bit of body or character to the sound.

Be sure to eq each according to their purpose, especially in the sub frequencies. Using a light compressor can help the kicks gel together as one. The “mix gel” preset tends to do a pretty good job.

Note: If you find 1 kick sound that you think is perfect, don't worry about layering. It's a very good technique to learn, but the goal is just good sound.

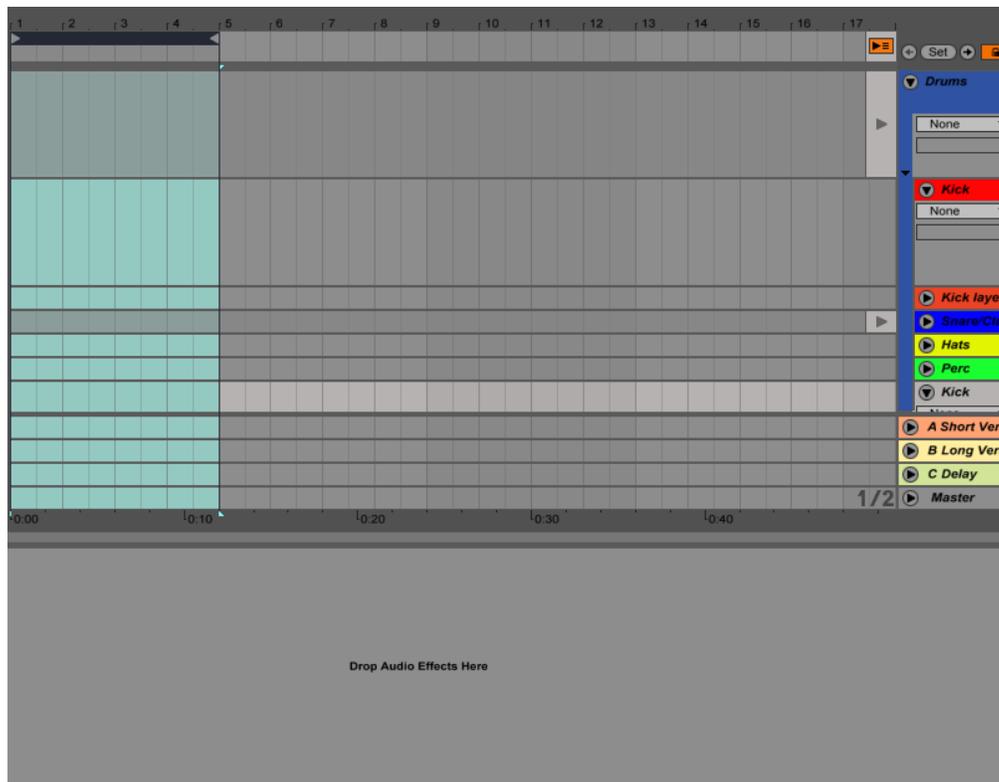
Consider your bass sound

When creating a kick that is going to work best in your track, you should consider whether you are going for a huge sub sound or a tighter sound with more mids.

Generally, your kick & bass shouldn't both be long subby sounds. Choose one or the other for the longer sounds & scale back the decay time of the other sound.

Create your kick loop

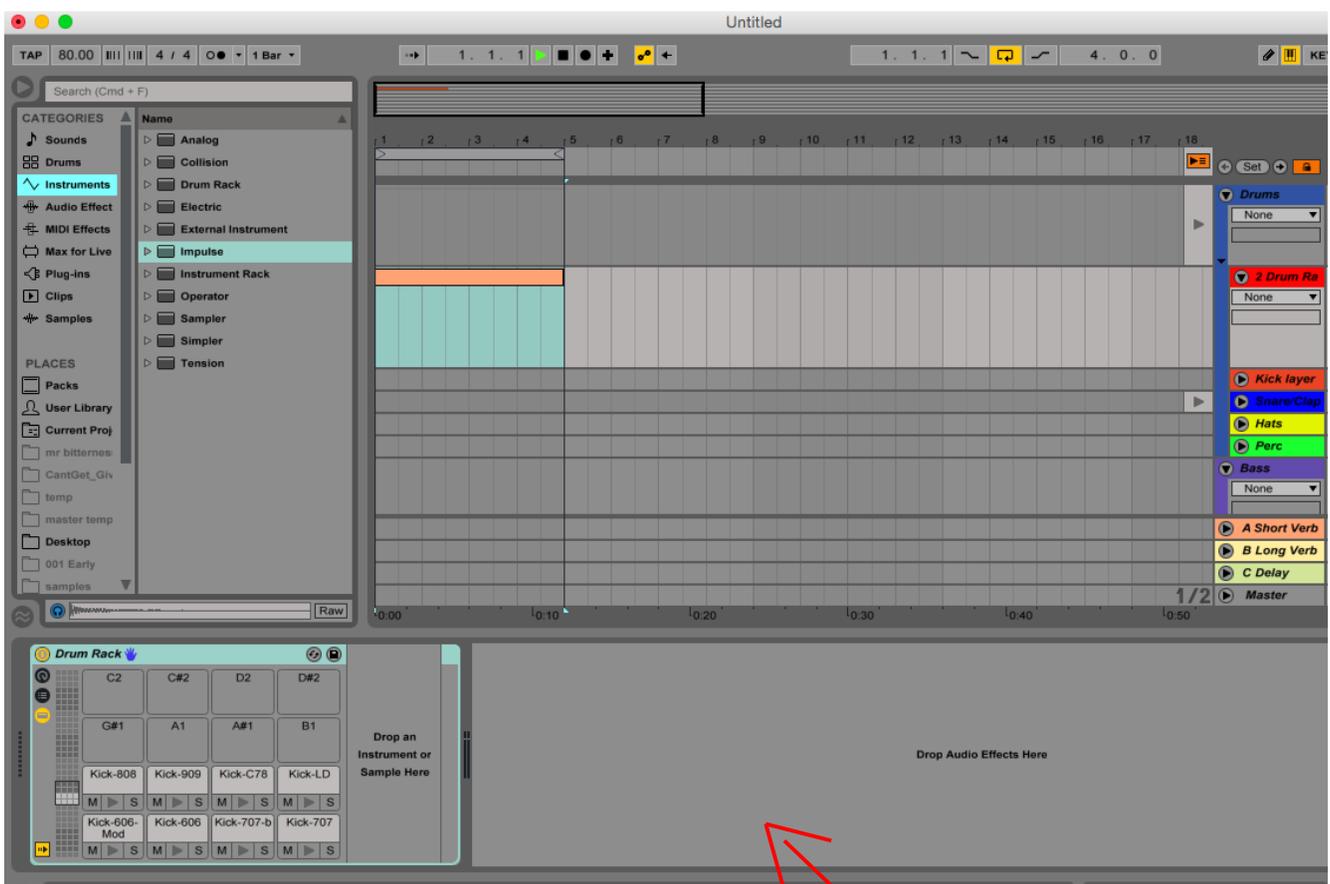
1. Highlight your first 4 – 8 bars
2. Control or Command L will set your loop



Create your kick loop

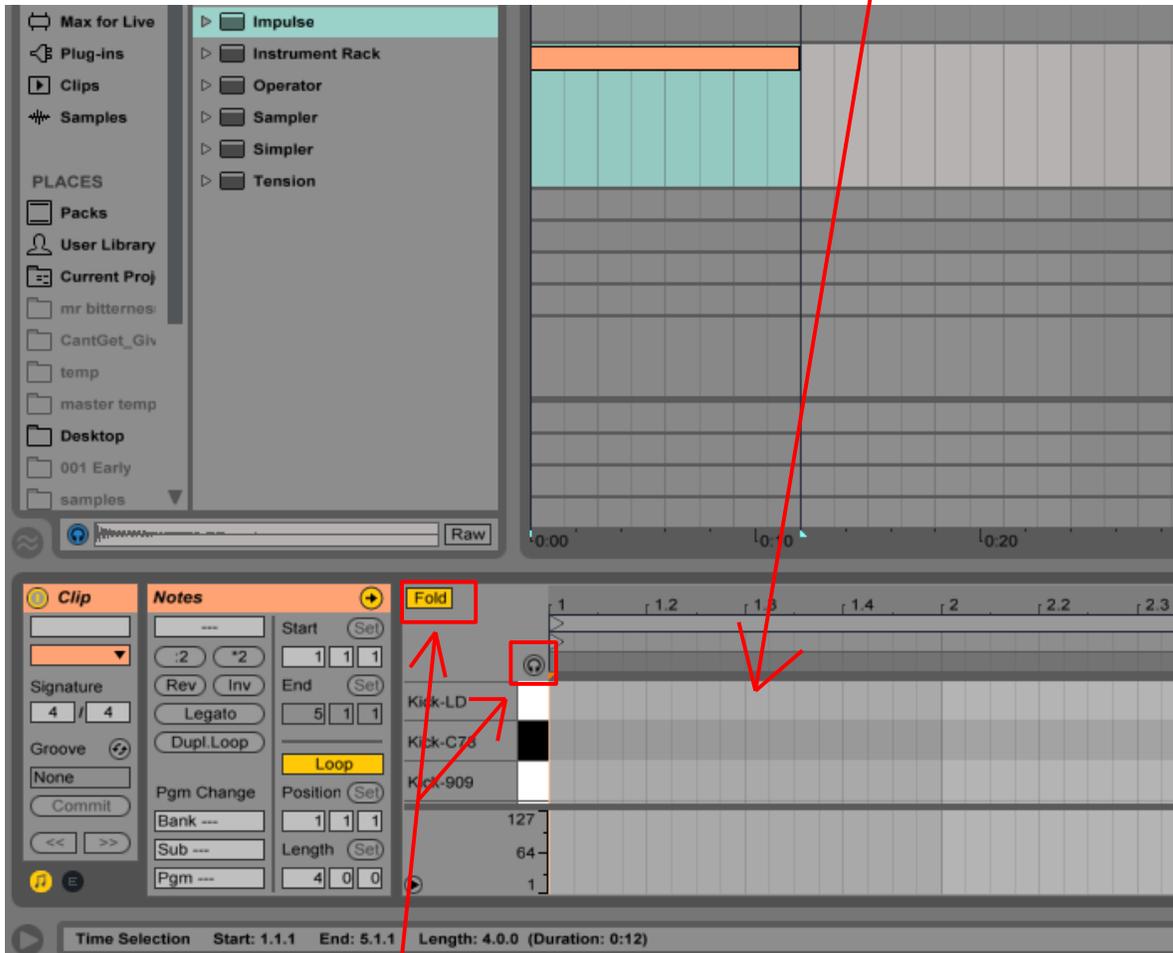
Create your 4 – 8 bar clip

1. Highlight the looped section of your kick track
2. Create a midi clip with Control or Command Shift M



By double clicking on the track name, it will show your instrument & any effects you might add.

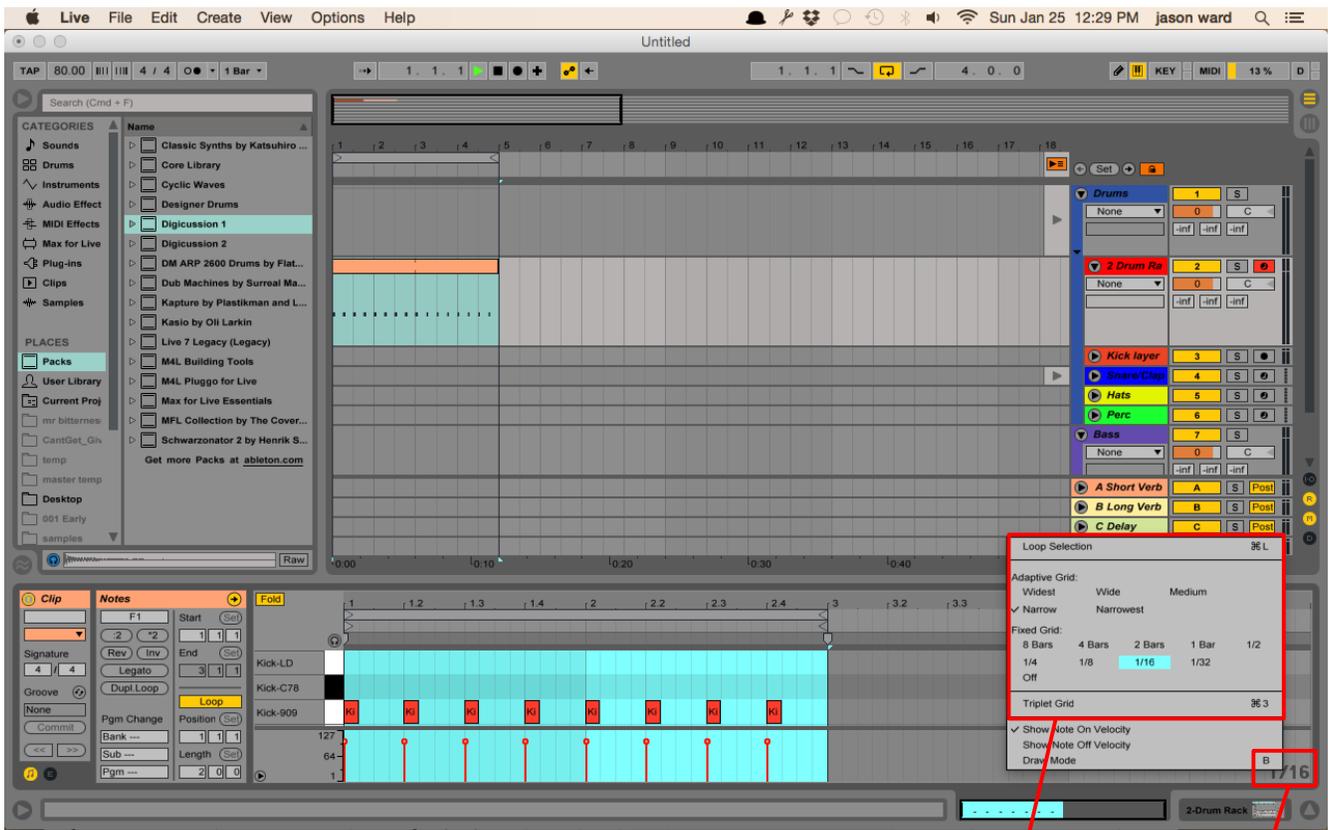
By double clicking the midi clip, it will show you the midi editing window.



Make sure to click in the **Fold** icon so it will only show notes that have drum sounds on them. Makes things easier to program.

The speaker icon allows you to hear each drum sound when you either click the piano key to the right of it or when you click to add a midi note. *(Not needed if using a midi controller or qwerty keyboard to play notes)*

Drawing in your kick pattern

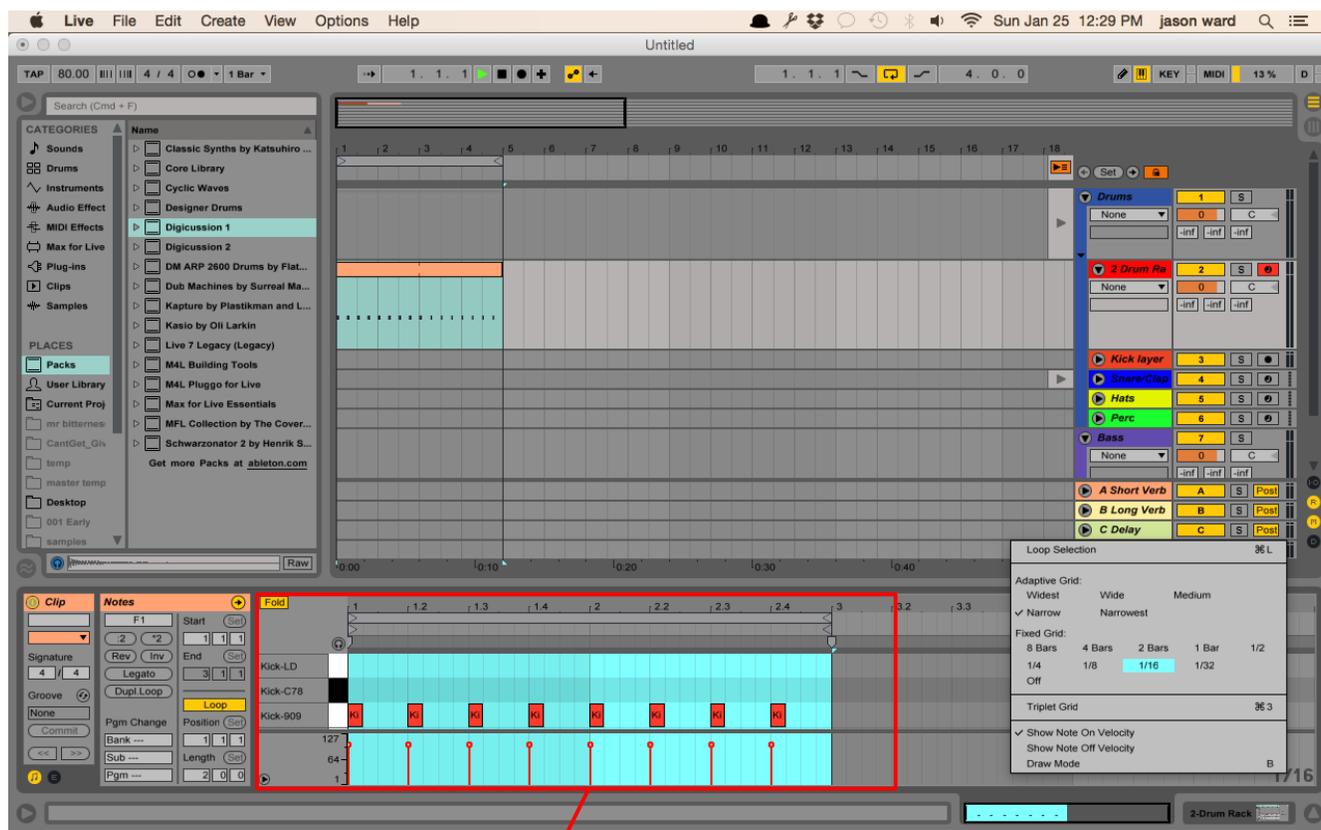


Midi Resolution

Resolution Options
(right click to display window)

When drawing in your beats, it's important to set the resolution. $1/16^{\text{th}}$ is usually the best place to start. To do this simply right click or *control* click (Mac) on the midi resolution.

You also have adaptive grid options (as you get in closer, the resolution gets smaller) & a triplet option, which can make for interesting rhythms (great on hi hats)



Here's where you will enter in your kicks. You simply find the sample name on the left & enter in your notes by double clicking. You can also double click to remove notes.

In this shot I have a kick on every quarter note, which is usually a good place to start & then add and remove notes according to your tastes to get the right groove.

Repeat the process

For your other drum sounds (snare/clap, hi hats, & other drum elements), just repeat the same process you did with the kick. Getting a basic groove should come together pretty quickly with a bit of experimentation.

If you get stuck, just listen to a couple songs & pick out the drum patterns you like & work from there.

Bass

When it comes to importance, Bass is probably secondary only to the kick, although sometimes it can even be more important. Getting the right sound can make or break your song.

Getting a good bass doesn't have to be as hard as people make it out to be, and once you have created a sound you like, you can save it and use it on future songs as well.

Having just a handful of bass sounds in your music can help you create a recognizable sound.

Bass Layers

Bass usually consists of 2 sounds. The main tone & then a supporting sub. The main bass is the one you hear & the sub is the one you feel.

The main bass can be any sound that excites you while the sub layer is usually created from a simple sine wave or even from a long 808 kick.

With EQ, I cut out all the low frequencies below 100hz on the main bass sound & remove high frequencies above 100hz on the sub.

Just Sub

With some music styles, sub bass is all that is needed and having too many mid frequencies can decrease the impact of the bass. Know your style before designing your bass sound.

When layering your Bass, your main bass will typically have the transient “click” that cuts through while the sub will usually have a slower attack (50-100ms is a good start).

When using strictly Sub, you'll generally want a faster attack, often with a pitch envelope to give it some presence in the mix.

The bass groove

When creating a bass groove it's very important that the kick & bass play off each other well and don't muddy up your low end.

Remember, there should only ever be one sub bass playing at any time. So when the kick & the bass play at the same time, you may want to use sidechain compression to keep things clean. This means when the kick & bass play at the same time, the kick will trigger the bass to lower it's volume or vice versa.

You can learn a lot about bass & drum dynamics from referencing other songs in your style. It may not come naturally at this point, but as you continue to make songs, you'll feel the groove in your bones.

Reference tracks

As I have mentioned a couple times already, it's of huge importance that you have a reference to the sound you want to make (or something at least similar). You likely haven't yet developed the instincts to know exactly what elements make a song come to life & sound professional.

The reference is a shortcut to compare the elements of your song with another song. It can tell you when you are on or off target pretty quickly. It will also improve your listening skills.

I drop my reference song in an audio track in my project & warp it. I turn off the track so I only hear it when I solo it. I also bring the volume down to -15db so you aren't focusing as much on loudness but more on the elements of the groove.

Borrowing grooves

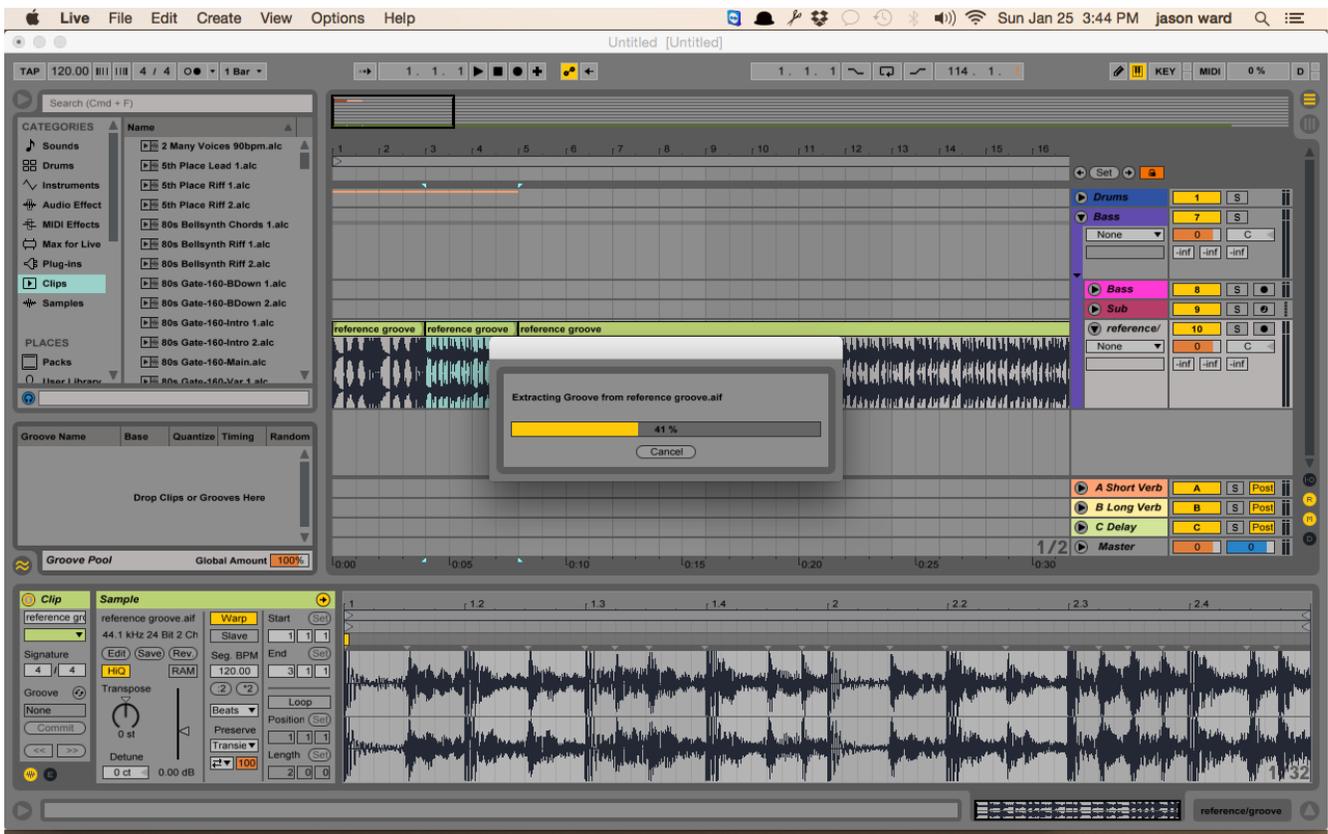
In the same way it's helpful to reference individual sounds of a good groove, it's also very important that your groove doesn't sound robotic. This is also described as “swing” & makes a huge difference in your song's danceability. It makes things feel a bit more natural & human.

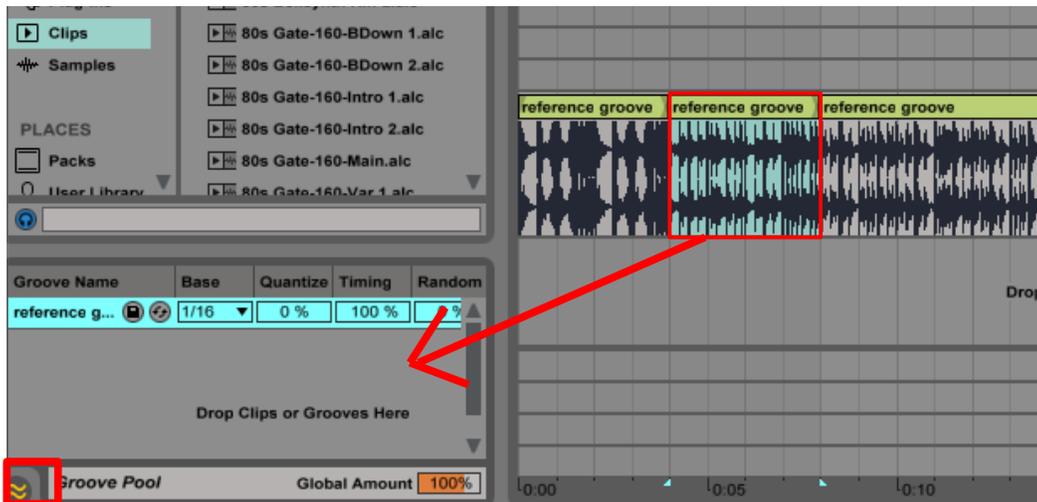
Ableton makes this very easy, as it can analyze the timing of a loop or song & apply it to any or all elements of your own song.

Find a 4 bar groove



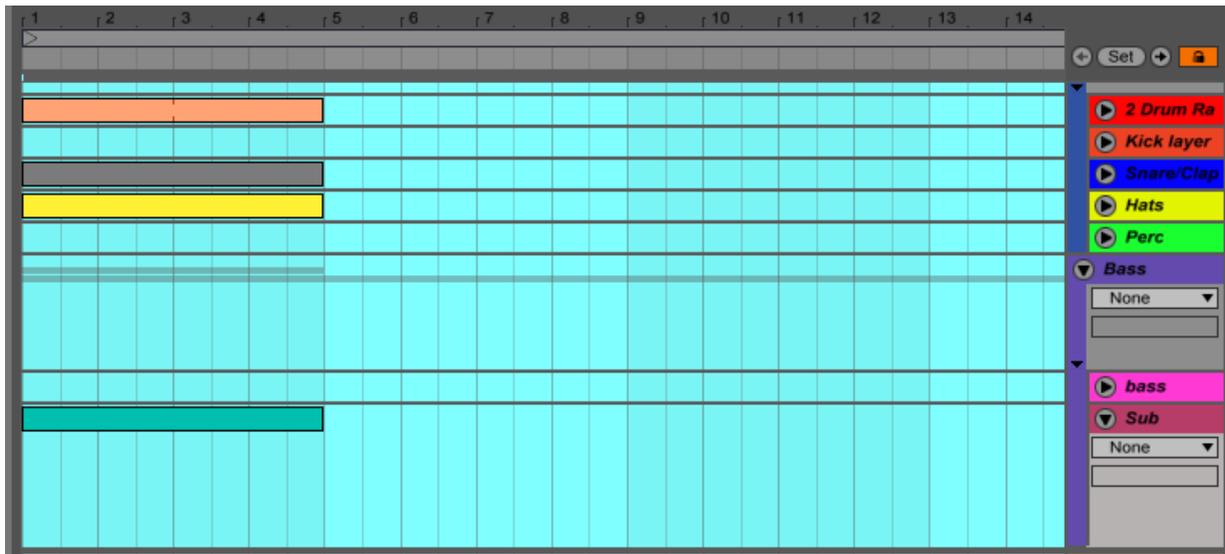
When you find a groove section you want to borrow, simply highlight the section (above) and the consolidate with Control or Command J (below).



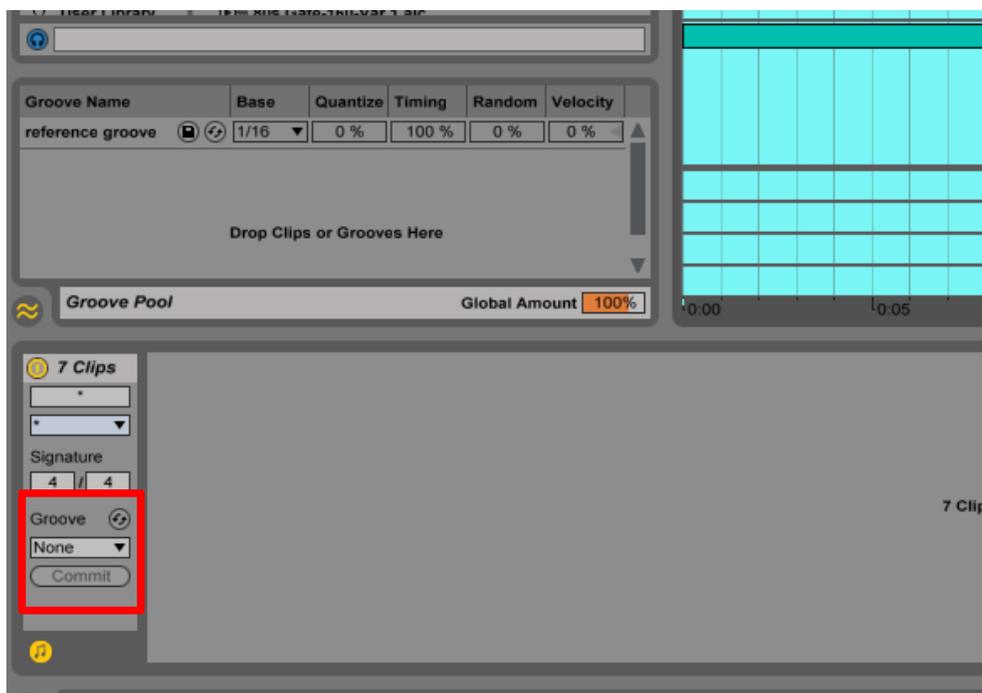


Click and drag the highlighted section to the groove pool. If you don't see it, click the grey & yellow icon you see highlighted in red above.

Assign the groove

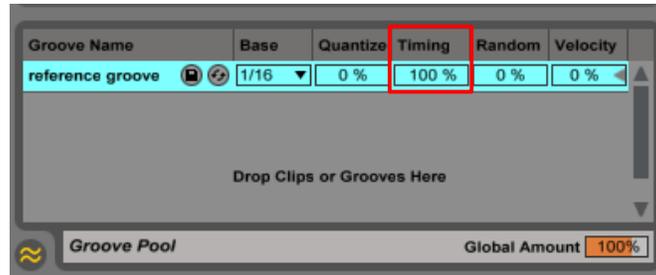


To assign the groove to first want to double click on any clip, then hit Control or Command A. This will highlight all the clips.



Next find your groove settings (in red above) & click the dropdown menu which will say “none” and choose the groove you saved.

Set groove %



Although there are several options for your groove, in this case you only need to concern yourself with the timing setting. The higher the %, the closer it will bring you to your chosen groove.

Extra Notes

Sample Rates/Bit Rates

Sample Rate choices are: 44.1kh, 48kh & 96kh.
Bit Rate choices are: 16, 24 & 32bit

Samples rates should be kept the same throughout a song project. Otherwise some files may play slower or faster than they are supposed to.

The most compatible sample rate for audio & samples is 44.1kh, which is CD quality. 48Kh is higher quality but less compatible.

I personally wouldn't bother with 96kh or 32bit. Ableton isn't incredibly good at rendering these & the benefits are only noticed by a rare few with incredible ears. Plus it will eat away your hard drive space fast.

At the end of the day, all files are mastered back down to 16bit, 44.1khz, so I generally record at 24bit & 44.1kh & haven't had any complaints.

Regarding your Chosen Style

If you are attempting to write a certain style of music & keep ending up with another style at the end, you want to pay more attention to choosing a good reference track & improving your listening skills.

It's easy to go "off the rails" if you start thinking "I've got this" and stop checking in with the elements that make your reference song "tick".

After you've finished a few songs with this approach, your instincts for that style will improve & you will be able to go with your own flow more often.

Homework

1. Create an 8 bar loop of your 1st song. It doesn't have to be perfect, it just has to be a start. Just get a groove with your drums & bass.