The Workflow Booster

An action plan designed to help you finish more tracks, improve your mixing and mastering skills, and create an efficient EDM production workflow

BEAT TWEAKS

1. Introduction

The Workflow Booster is all about getting organized, optimizing your workflow and getting more done in less time.

This action plan is especially useful if you're the type of producer who spends more time looking for plugins and losing instruments in your project than actually finishing songs.

Use this action plan to create a workflow template you can use to start, produce, mix and master new tracks, or reorganize older projects.

Having a clear path and workflow will help keep you focused and reduce distractions. It will also boost your confidence and make you feel more committed and serious about your music.

If you want to build a successful music career, you need to treat your music as more than just a hobby. Part of being a professional producer is having a professional workflow and sticking to it.

In this action plan you'll learn how to

- Organize your tracks and instruments
- Use send, return or bus tracks to speed up your workflow and save on CPU resources
- Start and finish new tracks fast
- Set up mixing chains to boost your productivity and improve your workflow
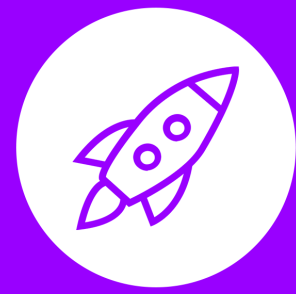
2. Color Code & Group

Staying organized is key to boosting your productivity. One of the most basic and useful things you can do to stay organized is to color code and group your sounds and instruments.

It's such a simple step but a crucial one that will help you work faster and navigate your projects better.

You can group and color code your sounds any way you like.

Tip: Try using the same groups and colors every time you work on a new project. This will help you stay consistent and even feel more professional. Below are some good guidelines to use:

Group	Color
Drums	Red
Bass	Brown
Synths	Green
Vocals	Yellow
Effects	Grey

In some DAWS, groups are called Aux channels or Bus Tracks. Regardless of the name, the point of this step is to organize groups of sounds in a way that makes sense for you.

Grouping also allows you to add effects and adjust volume levels of entire groups of sounds and instruments, making your workflow even faster.
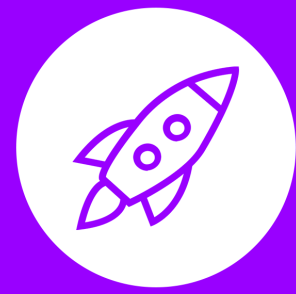
3. Use Return/Aux Tracks

One of the biggest time wasters in EDM production is adding reverb, delay and other creative effects to every track in your project.

You can slash this time by using the same reverb, delay and creative effects for all your sounds and instruments. This can done using return/aux tracks. The naming will vary depending on the DAW you use.

A return track is simply a track that has audio effects on it. You can then apply those audio effects by sending some or all of your sounds to the return track.

By placing something like a reverb plugin on a return/aux track, you can use that same reverb on multiple sounds, or all your sounds if you want.

To save even more time, don't worry about designing your reverbs and delays or other effects like chorus and flangers. Just use presets. You can go back and tweak them later.

Follow these steps to get started:

1. **Create 3 return/aux tracks for reverbs**. One short reverb, one medium hall reverb, and one long reverb. You can then add as much of each of the reverbs as you want to any of the sounds in your track

2. **Do the same but this time for delays**. For example, you can have a dotted delay, slap delay and a long delay. There's no right or wrong, use presets to start and change them later if needed

3. **Create one more return/aux track** for your most commonly used creative effects. This could be a chorus, flanger, phaser, or any combination you want. Have fun with it. **Try** a short reverb followed by a flanger and then a short delay and a bit of this chain to your synths, vocals, or basses for some cool vibes.

<u>**Quick Tip:**</u>
Save even more time by re-using the same settings for effects. Let's say you designed a reverb you think sounds great in another project. Copy it to the one you're working on now, and use it as a return/aux track effect. Save the settings of that reverb as a preset so you can use it over and over again.

4. Identify Arrangement Structure
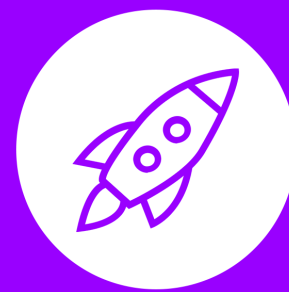
Getting stuck in the dreaded 8 bar loop is an issue a lot of producers have. But there's a very easy solution to this problem; *using reference tracks*.

Reference tracks are just tracks from other producers that you really like and that are in a similar style and genre to the track you're working on. For this step, use the arrangement of a reference track as a guide for your own.

1. **Find a track from another producer that you really like**. Try to find a track that has an arrangement you like and is in the same style/genre

2. **Purchase or download that track**. You can find lots of freely available tracks on SoundCloud and other music sharing sites. Find one you like and download it

3. **Import the reference track into your project**. Place it on its own channel

4. **Listen to it from start to finish and add time signatures or locators indicating the different sections**. What you're doing here is identifying the arrangement structure of the reference track. For example, the first 8 bars are the intro, then the next 16 bars are a verse, then there's a 32 bar breakdown/buildup followed by a 16 bar drop/chorus. That could be the structure of the reference track and you will use that structure as a template for your own arrangement.

5. **Identify the sounds and instruments being played in each section of the reference track**. Create your own placeholder (empty) tracks and/or midi clips as if you were recreating each section of the reference track. For example, maybe the intro of the reference track is 16 bars long and has a kick drum, snare, vocal effect and a riser effect. If that's the case then create channels for each of these and fill them with your own sounds, melodies and parts. If you don't have any musical ideas yet, then you can just fill the parts in with empty midi clips or any audio clips.

4. Identify Arrangement Structure

Below is an example of how you might label and identify the different parts of an arrangement. Simply listen to the reference track, and fill in what you hear.

5. Create Plugin Chains

Another big time waster is choosing which plugins to use when you're mixing. You probably have tons of EQs, compressors, reverbs, delays and other plugins in your library and deciding which ones to use and in what order can eat up a lot of time.

LIFE CHANGING TIP: USE THE PLUGINS THAT COME WITH YOUR DAW. *Especially* when you're just starting out, *but even* if you're a pro. Don't listen to anyone that says you can't make amazing sounding tracks with stock plugins.

With this step, you can save tons of time by not worrying about what plugins to choose each time. Just pick the ones you use most often and save them as a group, plugin chain or channel strip (different name depending on the DAW you use). Make a plugin chain for each sound and instrument in your template. Here are some examples:

- **Kick Drum**: Distortion/Saturation > EQ >Compressor> Limiter

- **Lead**: Distortion > EQ > Compressor > Saturation

- **Vocal**: EQ (cutting)> Multiband Compressor > EQ (Boosting > Compressor

Here's a plugin chain you can use for many different types of sounds and audio

EQ (cutting only) **>** Compressor **>** EQ (boosting) **>** Creative effects (chorus, flanger, phaser) **>** Saturation and/or Limiter (if you want loudness)

Remember: this plugin chain is a good starting point. The purpose is to help you develop a mixing approach that works for you, your style and your genre. So use this as a starting point, then tweak it and make it your own.
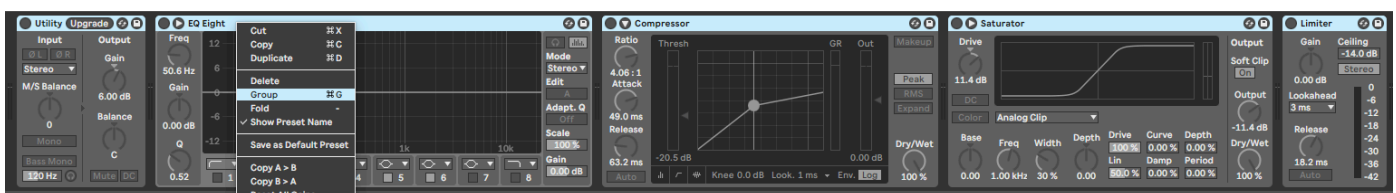
6. Work In Stages

It's easy to get lost in plugins and settings when you're trying to finish a track. That's why it's useful to divide your workflow into stages. Think about how you like to work and come up with an order of stages to follow. The stages can look something like this:

1. **Composition & Sound Design** – this is the stage where you generate ideas, choose samples, presets and sounds. Start by building an 8 bar loop with all the musical ideas, chords, harmonies and melodies. Speed things up by using loops and presets. If you're stuck for ideas, use construction kits and sample packs for inspiration

2. **Arrangement** – this is where you build out your 8 bar loop into a full arrangement. Doing this before mixing will help keep you focused instead of wasting time with plugins and settings

3. **Mixing** – you've composed all the parts of your song, chosen the sounds and samples, and have a complete arrangement. Now it's time to get everything sounding professional. Mixing is an important production stage and can take up the most amount of time. Try working in 1 hour time blocks. Set a timer for 1 hour and try to get the most done in that 1 hour

4. **Mastering** – this is the final step in the production process. It's the stage where you make sure your track is loud enough (this will vary depending on your goal) and ready for release. It's good practice to export your mix and do the mastering in a separate project. This will help reduce distractions and force you to commit to your mixing and production decisions

Going through these steps puts you on a set schedule and gives you a clear path to follow when you're producing a track.

Keep in mind that your stages don't have to be in the same order as this example. Maybe you're more comfortable mixing as you design your sounds. That's fine. Just try to follow some kind of logical path from the time you start a new project to the time you finish it.

Conclusion

At this point you should have a clear and optimized workflow you can use to finish more tracks, make better mixing decisions, and get yourself organized.

Part of being a professional EDM producer is having workflows and good habits to help you get more done in less time.

Keep things simple but consistent. This is key to improving. More importantly, keep doing what you're doing, keep practicing and keep learning.

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