

Cubase arrangement workbook

Markers and the Arranger Track, arranging by subtraction with Track Versions and folders, and transitions that make the joins the best part.

Markers, Arranger Track and the shape of the song

Lesson 01 · 14 min

Cubase is the DAW that most rewards deciding the shape before you fill it in. Add a Marker Track and drop cycle markers for INTRO, VERSE, PRE, CHORUS, BRIDGE and OUTRO at the bar numbers you expect, even before the parts exist. The empty timeline stops being intimidating the moment it has named rooms in it.

Then add an Arranger Track. It lets you play the sections in any order without moving a single event, so you can audition 'chorus first' or 'drop the second verse' in ten seconds instead of an afternoon of cut and paste.

DO THIS

- 01 Project → Add Track → Marker, then draw cycle markers for each section at 8- or 16-bar boundaries.
- 02 Project → Add Track → Arranger and drag the markers into the arranger chain.
- 03 Play three different chain orders and keep the one that surprises you.
- 04 Flatten the chain (Arranger → Flatten) only once you have committed to an order.

Check yourself — You can name every section of the song out loud, with its bar numbers, before you touch a plugin.

Track versions, folders and arranging by subtraction

Lesson 02 · 13 min

Build your densest section first — usually the last chorus — then make everything earlier by removing things. This is the fastest reliable way to arrange, and Cubase has two features built for it: Track Versions and Folder Tracks.

Track Versions hold alternative takes of the same part on the same track, so a stripped-back verse keyboard lives beside the busy chorus one. Folder Tracks group drums, keys and vocals so you mute a whole family with one click while you test what a section actually needs.

DO THIS

- 01 Build the full chorus, then duplicate its events into the verse and delete half the drums and the lead.
- 02 Right-click a track → Track Versions → Duplicate Version for a sparser alternative; name them 'full' and 'thin'.
- 03 Fold drums, keys and vocals into three Folder Tracks and mute-test each section.
- 04 Add exactly one new element at each section boundary — that is what listeners hear as the song moving.

Make it yours — Mute everything but the drums and the vocal and listen through. If the arrangement still tells the story, the rest is decoration and you can be ruthless with it.

Transitions: fills, risers, automation and the one-bar drop

Lesson 03 · 12 min

Sections rarely fail in the middle; they fail at the joins. A transition needs three ingredients — something ending, something announcing, and a gap. Cubase's automation lanes and the crossfade editor make all three cheap.

The most reliable move in any genre is still the one-bar drop: everything out but one element in the bar before the chorus. Silence is louder than a riser.

DO THIS

- 01 Write a one-bar drum fill into the bar before every section change.
- 02 Draw a filter-cutoff automation ramp on the pad bus over the last four bars of the pre-chorus.
- 03 Add a reverse-cymbal or reversed vocal tail landing exactly on the downbeat of the chorus.
- 04 Mute everything except one part for the bar before the final chorus, then bring it all back.

Check yourself — Play the four bars either side of each join in isolation. If a join is dull on its own, it is dull in the song.

CHECKLIST

- ☐ Marker Track created with every section named
- ☐ Arranger chain tried in at least three orders
- ☐ Densest section built first, earlier sections cut down from it
- ☐ One new element added at each section change
- ☐ Fill, riser and one-bar drop written into every join