

FL Studio: pattern to finished arrangement

Scale highlighting, the chord stamp done properly, groove that doesn't sound quantised, and turning the eight-bar loop into a song.

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

Four lessons, in order. Read the lesson, do the steps in your own project, then use the check at the end before you move on. The video walkthrough on the course page follows the same four chapters.

LESSON 01 - 12 MIN

Set the key before you write a note

FL Studio will happily let you draw any note anywhere, which is why so many FL projects end up harmonically muddy. Fix it at the source: open the Piano roll, hit the stamp tool, and set the scale highlight to the key you are working in. Every note outside the key is greyed, so wrong notes stop being accidents.

Pick the key from the sound you already have. If your lead sample sits around F, work in F major or D minor rather than transposing everything to C because C is easier to count.

DO THIS

- 01 Piano roll -> Helpers -> Scale highlighting, then choose root and scale.
- 02 Set the project tempo now, in the toolbar, before you record anything to a pattern.
- 03 Name the pattern with the key: 'Verse - Dm'. Future you will thank present you.
- 04 Play the scale up and down once on your instrument so your hand learns where the black notes are.

CHECK YOURSELF

Every note you draw for the rest of the session is inside the highlight, or you know exactly why it isn't.

LESSON 02 - 14 MIN

Chords with the stamp tool, then fix them by hand

The chord stamp writes a shape from whatever root you click. It is fast, and it is also the reason a thousand tracks sound the same: everything lands in root position in the same octave.

So stamp the progression, then spend two minutes voicing it. Drop the top note of one chord an octave, keep a common tone in the same place across two chords, and take the third out of the bass. Same harmony, completely different feel.

DO THIS

- 01 Stamp a I-V-vi-IV in your key, one chord per bar.
- 02 Move each chord so its top note travels by a step or stays put, never by a leap.
- 03 Delete the root from every chord except the first, then put those roots on a separate bass channel.
- 04 Widen the last chord by adding the 9th on top; leave the others plain so the change is audible.

MAKE IT YOURS

Rotate the progression to start on vi and the same four chords read as a minor song.

Groove: swing, humanise, and the Piano roll's riff tools

Straight grid programming reads as machine. FL gives you three cheap fixes: global swing in the channel, the Randomise tool for velocity, and Riff machine when you need a starting rhythm rather than a finished one.

Use them in that order and stop early. Swing at 55-60% is groove; swing at 80% is a shuffle you did not ask for.

DO THIS

- 01 Nudge the channel swing knob to about 56% and listen to the hi-hats only.
- 02 Select the chord notes and use Randomise on velocity with a narrow range - 90 to 118, not 20 to 127.
- 03 Push the snare 3-5 ticks late and leave the kick exactly on the grid.
- 04 Quantise the bass to the kick, not to the grid: the two must agree or the low end blurs.

CHECK YOURSELF

You can nod along to the drums with the melody muted. If you can't, the melody was carrying the groove.

Arrange the loop into a song

The playlist is where FL projects usually die, because a good eight-bar loop feels finished. It isn't - it is one section. Arranging is mostly subtraction: build the full section first, then delete parts to make the earlier sections.

Copy the chorus, remove the lead and half the drums, and you have a verse that is guaranteed to fit.

DO THIS

- 01 Build your fullest section as one pattern group and label it CHORUS.
- 02 Clone it twice; strip the clones down for VERSE and INTRO.
- 03 Add one new sound at each section change - that is what the listener hears as 'the song moving'.
- 04 Put a one-bar drop (everything muted but the vocal or lead) before the last chorus.

MAKE IT YOURS

Export the arrangement as an MP3 and listen on your phone. Anything you cannot hear there is not in your mix.

Session checklist

Print one per session. Tick as you go; anything left blank at the end is your next session's first job.

- ☐ Tempo and key set before any notes were written
- ☐ Progression written down as chord symbols
- ☐ Chords voiced by hand, not left in root position
- ☐ Groove checked with the melody muted
- ☐ One new sound at each section change
- ☐ Rough export listened to on a phone or laptop speaker
- ☐ Project saved with a name that says what it is
- ☐ Next session's first task written at the top of the page

NOTES
