

Presumably there are a few beginners around here who use FL and would benefit from some tips.

I'm no expert, but having used it for a few years now I've probably picked up a few techniques along the way that others may find useful. Most of this stuff is self learned as I'm not really the type to read tutorials or manuals in great depth. (Though there are some good FL tutorials here: <http://www.youtube.com/warbeats>)

This isn't a full on tutorial, just a basic guide based on some of my own personal techniques.

It won't be anywhere near as comprehensive as Phatchance's studio guide, it's really just some tips that some people may benefit from.

I'm not going to cover EQ and compression here as there are far better guides elsewhere than I could offer as mixing isn't my strong point and I don't have a huge amount of knowledge on the subject. This guide is just intended to help explain some of the stuff FL can do that people might not be that familiar with, rather than a guide to mixing in general. If you do want that sort of info though you can easily find it.

To make things easier to explain (and easier to understand) I'll add screen captures at times.

Feel free to use this thread if you either have any tips/tricks to share, and if you have any queries that someone might be able to help with don't hesitate to ask.

Some of this might seem obvious, but alot of this stuff I didn't pick up as a beginner so I'm trying to concentrate on things that people who don't have a huge amount of experience with FL might be unaware of, even if it seems elementary to others.

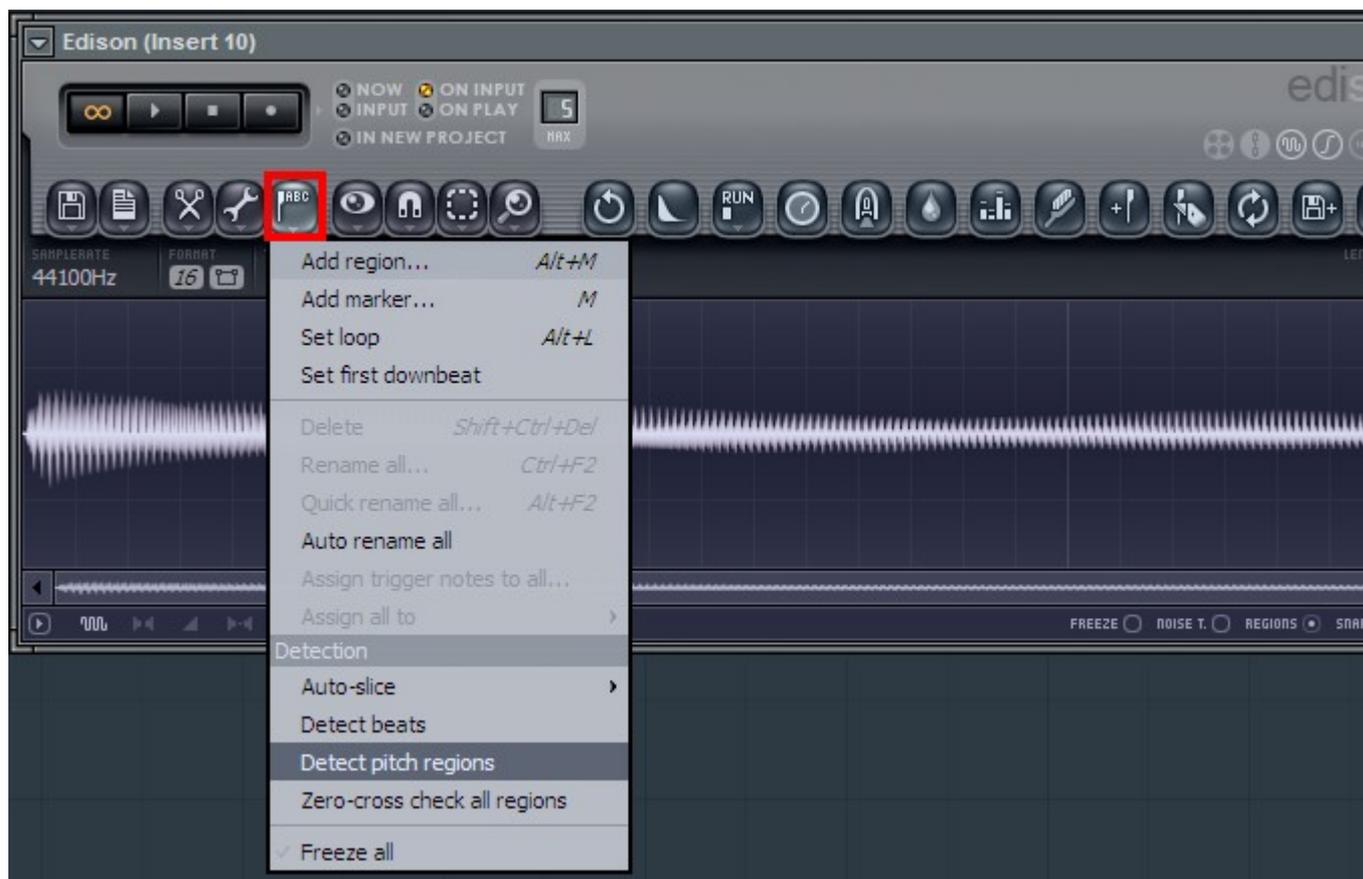
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Edison

So if you wanted to tune a bass note to C (the root note in FL for all synths) so that it would be in tune with a vsti you're using, but the bass note is F#, you'd increase or decrease the pitch of the bass sample by 600 cents. To make this even easier, go to the piano roll and click 'ABC' next to the piano icons, this will change the piano display to just display the notes.

Each step in the piano roll = 100 cents. 1200 cents = an octave...



Channel Envelope and Filter

One of the most important and useful things in FL is the envelope that can be used on any sample or pretty much any FL plugins (other than 3rd party VSTI's etc. that have their own ADSR envelope)

The envelope is especially useful (read: essential) for bass samples, but I use it on pretty much everything. What I do (generally speaking) is turn the attack all the way down, or almost, then turn the sustain up and the release down to about 15%. Once you've done this the sample will only play for the length that you want it to play, rather than playing from start to finish every time you trigger it. You can also prevent overlapping playback by editing under the 'MISC' tab in a sampler channel, change the 'Cut by' value from '--' to '1' (I don't really do that though as using the envelope stops it from being necessary)

Using the envelope makes it alot easier to work with one hit samples of all sorts, try

playing them through a midi keyboard or just your regular computer keyboard (click the keyboard next to the tempo/pattern number to enable it) and see what you come up with. I need to get a midi keyboard at some stage, but even a pc keyboard is usable.

On the same part of the channel where the envelope is, there's a basic filter in the bottom right. For basslines I tend to change the filter from 'Fast LP' to 'SVF LPx2', then turn the cutoff down most of the way (if I'm aiming for a low, deep bass) and experiment with turning the res up (or just leaving it if it sounds better as it is) till you're happy with the sound.

And of course you can filter individual notes in the piano roll or step sequencer, as well as in the 'Misc' tab of each sampler channel where you can also edit volume and panning. Obviously other people might differ in how they use the filter but this is pretty much what I do most of the time (if it was a double bass or slap bass etc. I wouldn't turn the cutoff down that much though, but for a typical hip hop sounding bass this is what I do)

For hihats I usually change the filter to 'HP' and play with the knobs till it sounds how I want it to sound. Also for hihats, if you have a really grimy sounding hihat but you want a cleaner sound you can change the cut/res AMT in the envelope which will either increase or decrease the 'dirtiness' (don't know the technical term) of the hihat. If you want a real grimy beat you might increase it (or leave it as it is) but if you want a cleaner sound you might want to get rid of it.

The below pic is generally what [my envelope](#) and filter settings would roughly be for bass.



Time Stretching

Under the 'SMP' tab of each sampler channel, there's a time stretching section consisting of three knobs. What I always do is right click on 'Pitch', then click 'Reset'. This will change the stretching method from 'Resample' to 'Auto', enabling you to stretch the sample without changing the pitch. Use the 'Mul' knob to stretch the sample. And if you want the stretching to affect the pitch, leave it set to 'Resample'.

I don't use the 'Time' knob much at all so I don't have anything to say about that (it's mostly good for stretching whole loops to the track tempo).



Fruity Slicer

I had always avoided using the fruity slicer up until a few months ago when I realised how useful it is. In the past I'd just chop up a loop in Edison and drag each bit into the step sequencer, which is still the best way to go if you're chopping one hit bass or drum samples that don't need to be chopped further, but for longer samples the slicer is extremely convenient and allows you to be more creative.

At first it kinda felt like 'cheating', but after using it for a while now I think it's definitely the best way to go about chopping loops as you can easily rearrange the sample to your liking in the piano roll, and it's also nice to have the whole loop contained within the slicer channel instead of having a dozen different channels with a bunch of one hit samples. Plus in the slicer the envelope is automatically set so that samples only play for the length that you set in the piano roll, so it's easy to get fairly intricate with it.

PS = Pitch Shift

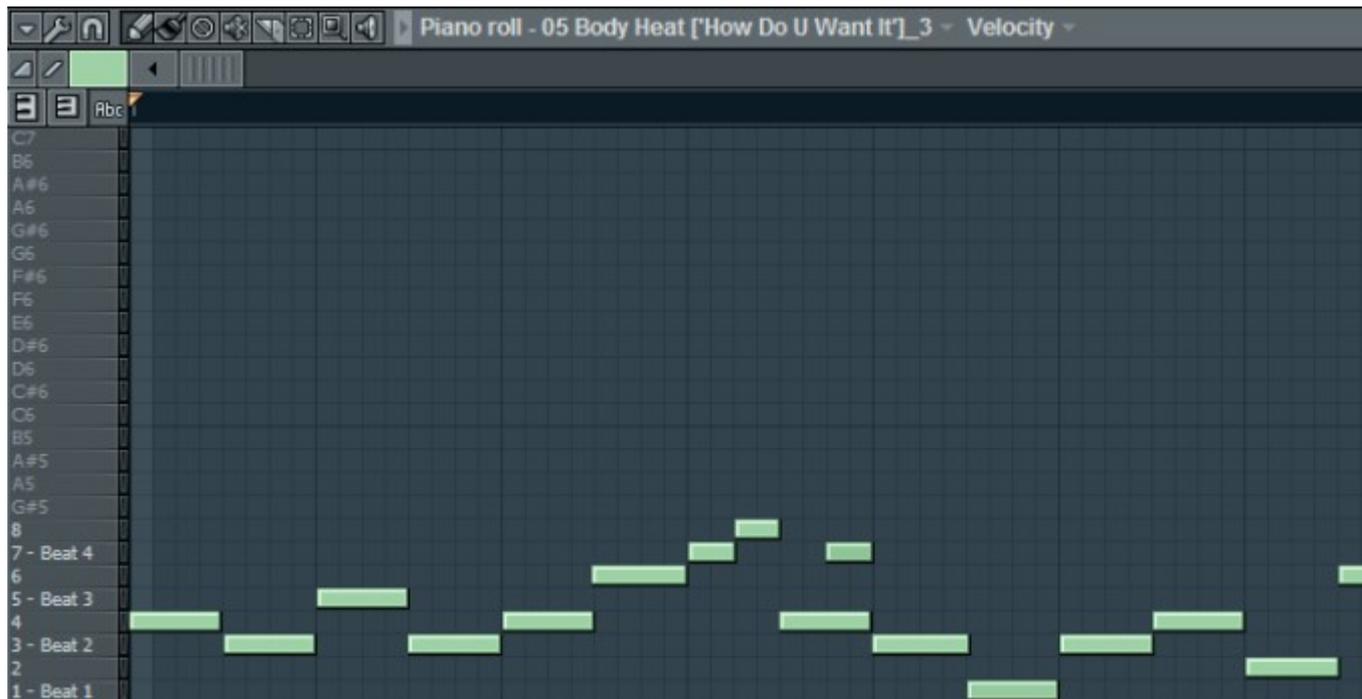
TS = Time Stretch

Att = Fade In Slice

Dec = Fade Out Slice (in milliseconds, affecting every part of the sliced sample)

If the sample is choppy, use the Att/Fade In or Dec/Fade Out controls to get rid of it. Try and use them only as much as you need though as the less you have to use them the better, generally speaking.





FPC

It was only a few days ago that I actually decided to give the FPC a go, and holy ****! I love this shit so much, can't imagine ever going back to using the step sequencer/piano roll for drums again.

Apparently the FPC is supposed to be somewhat similar to an MPC in design (makes sense) but I wouldn't know as I've never used an MPC (I'll probably buy a hardware sampler at some stage in the future but right now they're just too expensive for me so I stick to software...)

There are heaps of preset drum patterns as well as a default kit, obviously you won't want to be using presets (even though some of them actually sound very good), but it's a good idea to mess around with them just to see how the FPC works before importing your own samples and making your own drum beat. I found it handy to look at some of the premade loops in the piano roll just to see certain things like the varying velocity levels of the hihats which give the drums a much more organic feel than having the same velocity over and over again.

What I'd recommend to do when making a drum beat in the FPC is start with the closed hihat or pedal hihat, make that pattern first (experimenting with velocity in the Note Properties section of the piano roll) then gradually add the kicks and snares etc. Obviously it's up to you how you make a beat but that way makes the most sense to me as the hats are what give the drums most of their rhythm and energy, and it makes sense to me to build the rest of the drums around them.

Or if you have a midi keyboard you can record the drums live like you would in Ableton. Regular PC keyboards are okay for playing synths or bass notes but I found it awkward when trying to trigger FPC sounds through it so you'd probably want an

actual midi keyboard to do that.

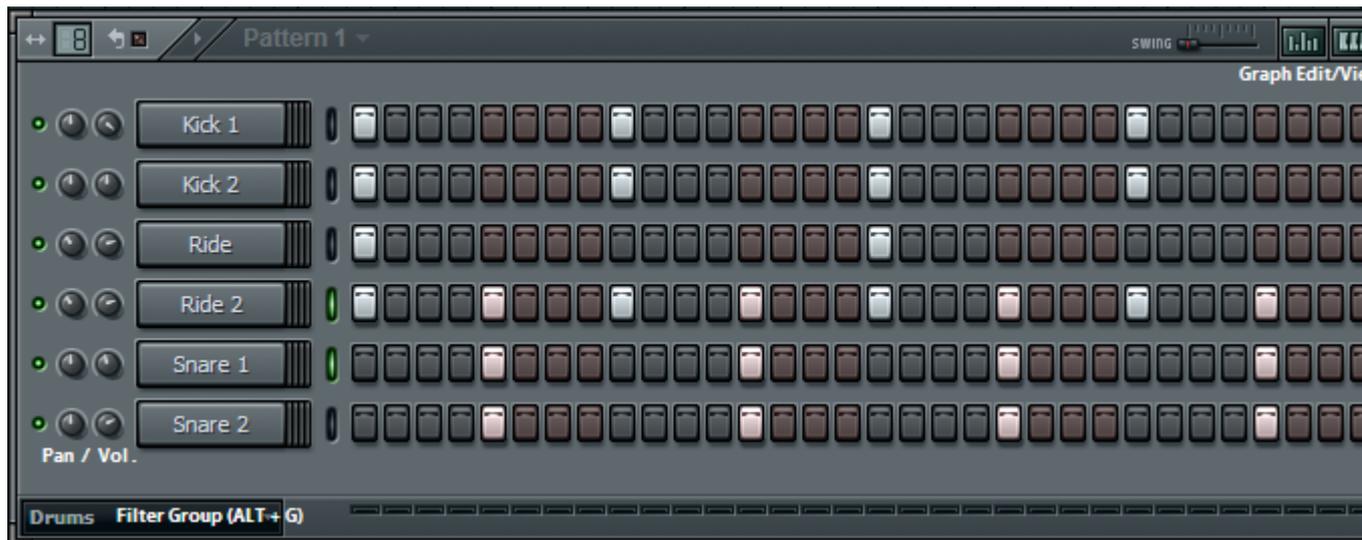
The only thing I don't like that much about the FPC is that the filter seems a bit hard for me to understand as it's totally different to any other filter I've used. What you could do though is add all the drums you want to one FPC channel, then clone that channel once for every different drum component, then set each cloned channel to a different mixer channel (where it says FX in the top right corner of a channel). That way you could still EQ and filter the individual components of the beat the way you would if you were making the drums in the step sequencer/piano roll.



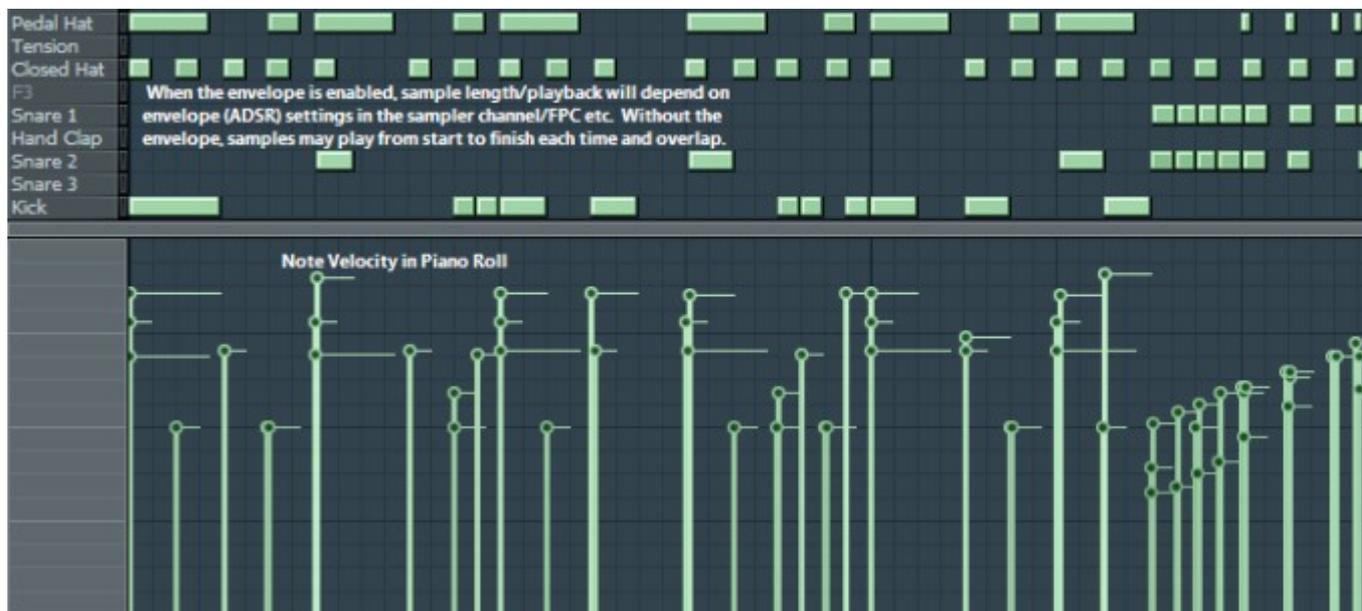
Step Sequencer

The step sequencer in FL is very basic but it's good for people who are just getting started beatmaking, but using the piano roll is far more satisfying as it gives you much more control over everything. You can use the graph editor/mini keyboard in the step sequencer to edit various parameters or enter notes, but using the piano roll gives you more control as channel envelope settings only apply to notes entered in the piano roll. Beats made entirely in the step sequencer might sound a bit robotic so it's not a good idea to use to that extent. Though you can input a basic drum beat in the step sequencer and then right click and 'Send to piano roll' where you could then edit the drums further.

If you're making a beat that has a lot of different components you can easily split them into groups by selecting them (right click next to the channel in the step sequencer) then pressing Alt + G. Even if you're not composing much in the step sequencer it can still help things from getting cluttered.

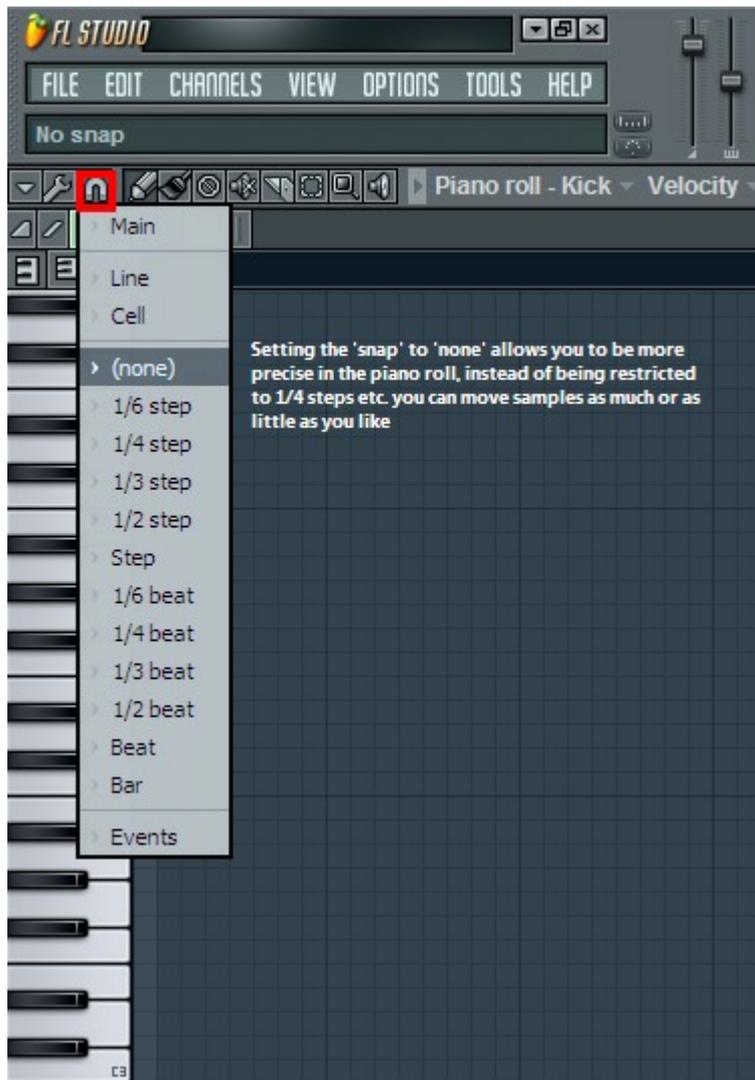


Piano Roll



Setting the 'snap' (or quantize) to 'none' gives you more freedom to be more intricate and make subtle changes when composing in the piano roll. E.g. giving a kick some swing is a lot easier if you can place each kick exactly where you want it instead of being restricted.

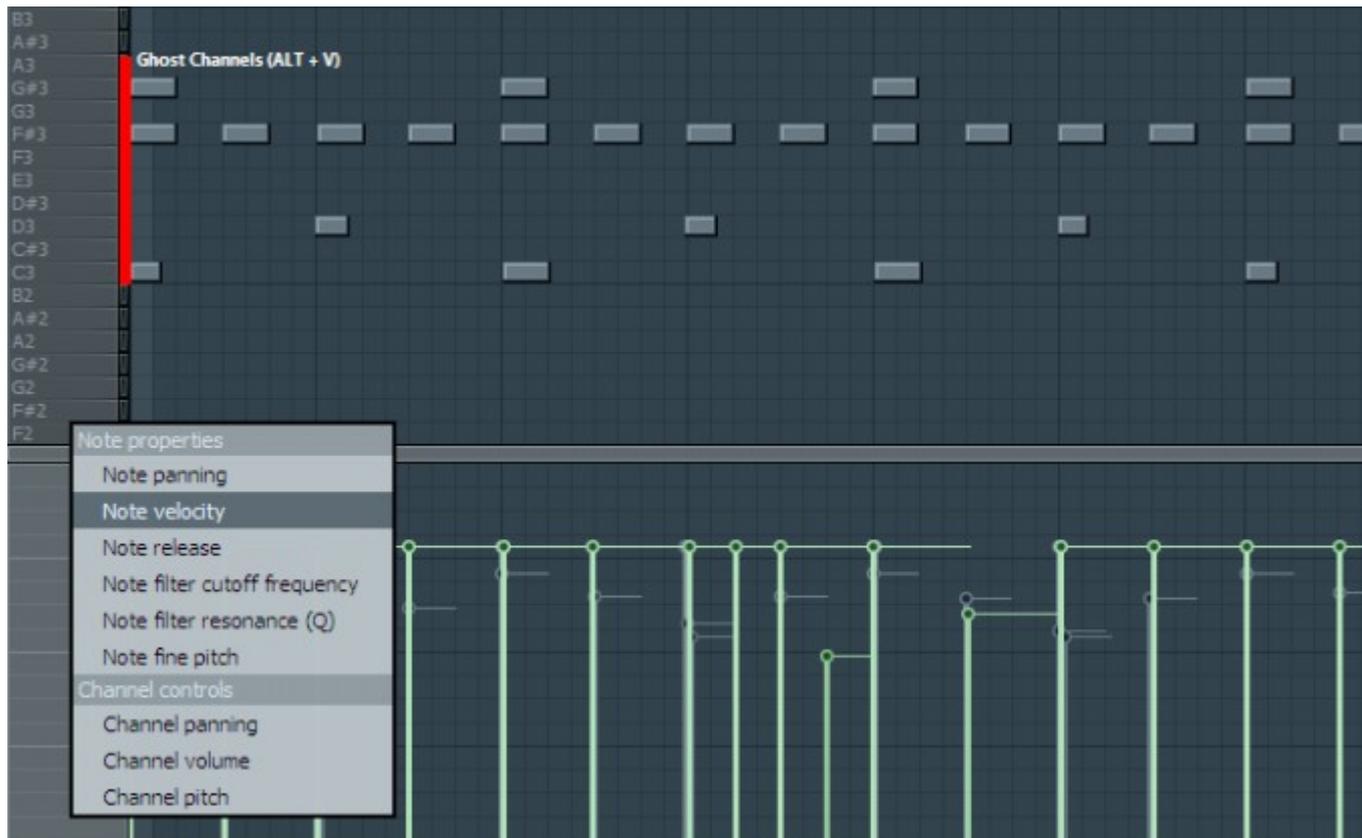
Beginners might prefer to use a defined snap setting though till they've gotten used to where everything is supposed to go... but I personally find that using no snap setting works best for me as you can quantize everything manually exactly as you want it.



(I took the screenshots/added text to them before I'd finished writing this, hence repeating some stuff)

Note Properties

In the piano roll towards the bottom you'll see the velocity properties (assuming something has been entered into the piano roll), right click the grey area to the left of that and you can change from editing the note velocity to the note panning, cutoff frequency/resonance etc. It's basically the piano roll equivalent of the 'graph editor' part of the step sequencer. See what I mean in the below pic.

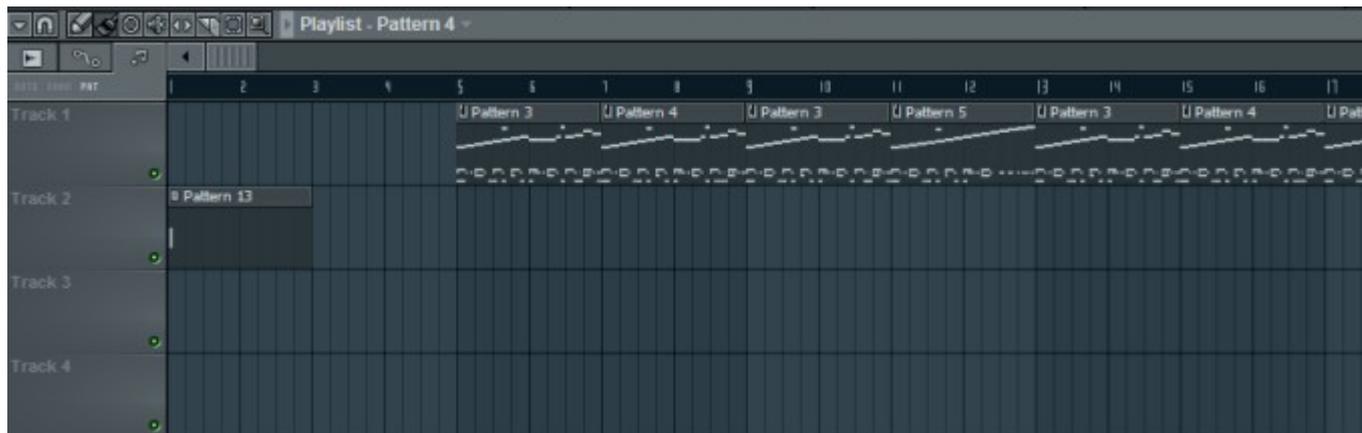


I'll quickly mention ghost channels, basically if you're working on a pattern in the piano roll and it consists of several different samples/synths you can show or hide the ghost channels (the ones in blue) which are the channels that you're not currently editing. It can help to display the ghost channels when composing as you can see which notes are already being used, but if you're going to be concentrating on just one part of the pattern for an extended period of time it's probably better to hide them, especially when editing the note properties. Just press Alt+V when in piano roll to show/hide them, or you can select them in the piano roll options and tools menu which has a lot of other stuff that I can't be bothered getting into as I don't often use the piano roll options as it's mostly shortcuts to stuff I'd rather do manually.

Playlist

I'll keep this part short as it's really simple. The playlist is where you sequence the complete track after you've made the individual patterns. I tend to add everything into the first two tracks, but if you're the type to have separate tracks for each instrument then you can always use more. You can stretch or shorten the blocks, if you want to cut a pattern off just drag it till it's the size you want it.

This is just a pic of the last beat I made, if you were using individual patterns for each instrument/drum component then your composition would probably look more hectic than mine, but I tend to keep it fairly straightforward.



Installing VST effects and VSTI synths

98% of the plugins I've used have been installed the same way. Make a 'VstPlugins' folder in Program Files if there isn't one there already (there probably already is). Most plugins will automatically install into that folder after going through the setup process but if not you'll just need to copy and paste the appropriate .dll file (e.g. Gladiator.dll) into that folder.

If it's a VSTI (synth), right click on a sampler channel in FL and hover the cursor above 'Insert' or 'Replace', which will bring up a menu of stuff that's already installed. Go to the top and click 'More', then click 'Refresh' and choose 'Fast scan (Recommended)', being careful not to choose 'Scan and Verify (Unsafe!)'... This will scan for any recently installed plugins. If it finds some it will show in the results, then you'll just need to find the plugin in the list and check the little box next to it's name, then you can close that whole thing and return to the step sequencer.

If you've installed a VST effect, just left click an fx slot and do the exact same thing in the mixer that you did in the step sequencer.

It's also a good idea to uncheck any plugins that you're sure you're not going to use to avoid ending up with a massive list of useless shit.

Loosely related, the built in 3xOsc synth in FL is surprisingly good once you know how to program it. It's extremely basic but it's still fun to mess around with, and probably good for people who don't have experience with more advanced synths. Turn it down a couple of octaves, change the oscillators to saw, mess with the various envelope and filter settings and you'll be surprised at how you can get it to sound. Editing the delay/tracking/arp settings under the 'FUNC' tab in the channel can also affect the sound greatly. And checking 'Porta' on the Polyphony part under the 'MISC' channel tab is often a good idea too. Plus you can always come up with a bassline or whatever with the 3xOsc and then replace it with a better synth later.

Monitor/Peak Meter etc.

The peak meter will flash red if what you're playing is exceeding 0db, which will cause clipping/distortion on the mixed down track. Pay attention to the main peak meter but pay even more attention to the peak meter in the mixer. If the peak meter in

the master fx channel is going above 0db, you'll need to do something to lower the overall decibel level. You can easily figure out what's causing it by looking at the individual fx channels as a pattern plays. If the snare is set to 4 in the fx rack and number 4 flashes red when the snare hits then it's obviously the snare. Sometimes there'll be more than one thing causing it but it's often just something like the snare being too loud.

The below pic shows the monitor/peak meter and the main snap/quantization (which I set to none, but you might differ) for sequencing in the playlist.



And the mixer peak meter (Little red line is where the maximum db should stay below...)



Misc. Tips and Shortcuts

Ctrl + C = Copy

Ctrl + V = Paste

Ctrl + X = Delete

Shift + Arrow = Shift

Alt + G = Display/hide ghost channels (in Piano Roll)

Shift + Ctrl + C = Clone channel

Ctrl + G = Group selected channels

Hold Ctrl + Left click mouse = Select notes in the piano roll. Makes it easier to make

stuff about rather than doing it one note at a time.

Press 4 in Piano Roll to zoom to twice the size, only works if your pattern is at least 8 beats per bar.

- Right click on a sampler channel and click 'Clone' to clone it, or use the shortcut posted above. It's best to have the envelope and time stretching etc. set the way you like in the first channel before you clone it so you don't have to keep doing it.

- Save a project as your 'default template', even if it's just a few sampler channels each set to a different effects channel and time stretched to auto, maybe with some minor envelope settings on most of them to save time. As soon as you've made any significant changes to the default template, save it under a new filename so the template isn't altered. And somewhat related, when working on a project, it's good to 'Save new version' every now and then, so you can always go back if you decide you ****ed it up later. Also, if you're making something dope you should export a zipped folder which will contain all the elements of the beat and an .flp project file. If the non-zipped .flp file was ever to become corrupted, you'd still have the working version in the zipped folder.

- It's not a good idea to rely on default sounds in FL (or any program really, even if the sounds are good quality there's no point using stock sounds that everyone has heard). Some of the built in effects are actually pretty good, but you can still replace them with better stuff quite easily.

E.g. A couple of months ago I got some waves plugins and they were dope so I deleted about 90% of the FL effects from the mixer so that I'd get into the habit of using the waves ones instead.

- Use the Fruity Notebook plugin in the effects mixer. Say you were having trouble with your bass making your kick sound murky or vice versa, and you look online till you find some useful info e.g. an EQing tip.

Copy and paste the relevant info into the notebook part in one of the fx slots, so you can access it at any time in the project (if it's too complicated to memorise immediately). This'll save you from going back and forth to firefox, and if you come back to the project later the info will still be there. There's also an HTML Notebook plugin but I've personally never felt the need to use it.

- A real basic one to finish... When you hover the mouse cursor over something in FL, just look to the top right of the screen under the main toolbar and you'll see some text explaining what it is. Probably general knowledge but might as well mention it for the sake of the brand newbies :naughty:

I'll probably add more stuff soon, can't be ****ed writing any more right now. I may have left out some crucial info that I'll think of later.

Hope someone finds some of this info useful!

This is all just how I work personally, so I'm not necessarily saying it's "the right way". Most of it's just habits I developed that for all I know could be totally different to what most people do.

Like I said before, if anyone has any of their own tips to add (or wants to disagree with any of my tips or offer alternatives) feel free, or if you have any FL related problems someone here can probably help you.