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EXPORT FOR MIXING

HOW TO EXPORT SINGLE
TRACKS FROM ABLETON LIVE
FOR EXTERNAL MIXING

Live

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INTRO

IT'S DONE!

After weeks or months of hard work, your song, EP, or album is finally produced.

The last missing step is to make it sound right to keep up with your favourite artists or references!

And after your work as a producer, a professional mixing engineer with fresh and professional ears should take care of that. Great decision!

But what is the best way to export individual tracks from Ableton? And should all the effects be deactivated or not? They actually sound good as they are ... maybe it's better to do everything yourself in the end?

There's no need to panic, exporting stems from Ableton Live to have them mixed by a professional, is going to be quick and easy with this guide!

BEFORE YOU START

In order to make the transfer to an external mixing engineer as fast and smooth as possible, you should pay attention to a few small details beforehand.

Production done?

To save the mixing engineer unnecessary work, you shouldn't add new tracks after she/he has started her/his work.

So make sure that you are really finished and satisfied with your production.

'Mixing consoles are no sewage treatment plants'

That's what Engineers say in Germany.

Keep in mind that a mixing engineer can't turn bad productions into gold. If your tracks are overdriven, sloppy, or sound significantly different from what you want for your project, you may want to rework your tracks. Don't expect the mixing engineer to fix your mistakes.

Editing is not part of the mixing process!

However, if you haven't edited your tracks yet and don't have any experience with it, talk to your engineer to see if she/he offers editing and can take over. Even the best mix won't help if you have unedited tracks or editing errors.

Export necessary?

If the mixing engineer also works with Ableton Live, you might be able to skip the whole export process (steps 10-12) and just send a cleaned up project file or the project folder.

The question of all questions

'But should I disable the plugins or leave all the effects active?'



The answer: 'It depends!'

You can distinguish between artistic effects (delay, phaser, autotune, octaver, automations, ...), which tend to belong to the production process, and the more technical effects (compressor, equalizer, ...), which tend to belong to the mixing process.

It's better to leave the latter to the engineer, because these effects are what the mixing process is all about. There should also be no plug-ins on your master track.

If you have not yet created any "artistic" effects or if you are not satisfied with your settings, these can of course also be created completely by the mixing engineer (in this case just jump directly to the instructions).

If you have applied artistic effects yourself and are completely satisfied with them, you can keep them when exporting.

However, if the effect plug-in is located directly on the respective audio track, that can be a problem. For example, if you send out a vocal track with reverb on it, the mixing engineer is not able to deal with the voice and reverb separately. If, for example, a compressor is applied to the track to emphasize the vocals, the reverb could also become more intense. The mixing engineer is therefore clearly limited in her/his ability to get the best out of your song.

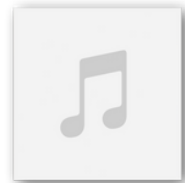
To prevent this, you should work with "parallel processing". This means that you do not place the effect plugin directly on the audio track, but send the signal of the audio track to a parallel effect track (called bus track, send track, aux track). On this second track the effect is put with a mix value of 100%. This way you have both a 100% dry and a 100% wet track. The intensity of the effect can then be controlled by the volume ratio of the two. If you use effects in this way, you can send the raw signal and the effect signal to the mixing engineer in two separate tracks. This allows the mixing engineer to control the intensity of the effect as well as the raw signal and the effect separately.



EXPORT FROM ABLETON

1. Create a demo version:

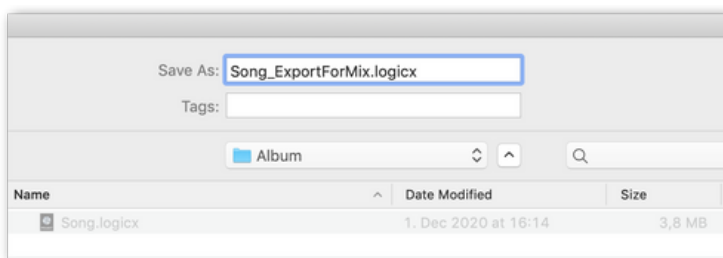
Before you change anything in your session, bounce the current version of the song as a demo. This can help the mixing engineer orient herself/himself in which direction to go, and serves as a helpful reference as to whether all tracks of the song are present, for example.



DEMO.wav

2. Save the project:

Next, to be safe, save a new version of your project file and mark it with "ExportForMix" after the existing name so you don't get confused later.



3. Take out the trash:

Delete all the elements that aren't supposed to be in the song. Like ideas that are already discarded but are still present in the session as disabled, or muted elements. Also delete all plug-ins. As mentioned earlier and if present, leave only the effects on the Aux Tracks enabled to deliver your effects as separate effects tracks.



4. One track per element:

Check that each element in the song has its own track. The shaker in the verse does not belong on the same track as the chorus tambourine, nor should clean guitars share a track with distorted guitars.

5. Prepare MIDI drums & percussions (if present):

Again, make sure that each element has its own track.

To avoid CPU overload from multiple instances of the same plugin, you can instead route the different elements to an individual aux track containing that plug-in.

With drum plug-ins like Superiordrummer/EZDrummer, Studiodrummer, Addictive Drums, etc. you can even subdivide into the individual microphones.

Instead of a stereo track called "Drums" you have tracks like "Kick_In", "Kick_Out", "Snare_Top", "Snare_Bottom", "OH Left", "OH Right", and so on.

When using the Ableton Live "Drum Rack", the "Extract Chains" function is the equivalent to this. To separate the drums into individual tracks, right-click on one of the samples in the "Chain" section of the „Drum Rack“ and then click on "Extract Chains" to create a separate track for it.

6. Name the tracks:

Name the tracks as briefly, clearly and above all factually as possible. Also use meaningful abbreviations. „Benjamin_Strat-ChorusShredding_Left(Final)“ becomes "Git_L_Chorus".

The track names will be automatically applied to the file names later during export.



7. Edit and clean the tracks:

First, make sure your song doesn't start left-aligned right at bar 0. If this is the case, move **EVERYTHING** 4 bars to the right to create some space before the song starts.

Cut out unwanted gaps where noise or mouse clicks can be heard and add fades to the beginning and end of the regions. Be careful not to cut away any breaths on vocals (it tends to sound unnatural). Use short crossfades for overlapping regions.

8. The export:

Go to "File - Export Audio..." in the menu bar to open the window for exporting your tracks. Select the option "All Individual Tracks" next to "Rendered Track" and then define the range to be exported.

"Render Start" should be set to 1 | 1 | 1 as shown in the picture.

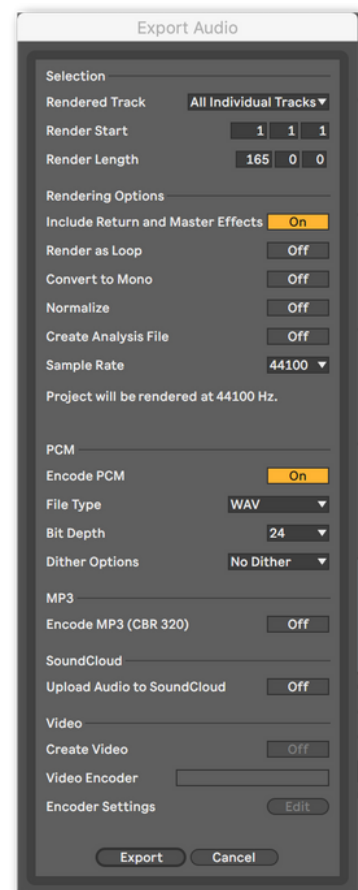
"Render Length" should be behind the end of your song.

Leave enough space for longer reverb tails or decaying delays to avoid cutting them off in the export files.

If you are working with parallel effects, check the box next to "Include Return and Master Effects" to have them exported as separate audio tracks. Also switch "Encode PCM" to "On". Leave the existing settings for your session next to "Sample Rate" and "Bit Depth" as they are and select "No Dither" for "Dither Options".

Leave all other options at "Off" and click on "Export".

Now create a new folder for the export. The folder name should consist of the name of the artist, the song, and the BPM (tempo) value of the song. As file name you can enter an abbreviation of the song name. Then click Save. Do not divide the folder into further categories after the export process, just leave all audio files in this folder. Also move the demo you created in step 1 into this folder.



9. Export MIDI files (if wanted):

In Ableton Live, all MIDI tracks must be exported individually.

To make sure that the MIDI notes start at the right places after importing, your MIDI clips must first be "consolidated" to the complete project length.

To do this, select all existing MIDI clips in your project and expand your selection to the left end, i.e. the beginning of your project, and right-click on one of the clips to select the "Consolidate" option.

Now there should be one contiguous clip on each MIDI track that extends to the far left side. Now name these clips (again by right-clicking) after their respective tracks, since the resulting file names correspond to the naming of the clips.

Now you can export your MIDI tracks one by one by right-clicking on the respective MIDI clip and selecting the option "Export MIDI Clip ...".

Also save the MIDI file in the general folder with the audio tracks.

10. Double check:

Test out if everything worked by importing the export files into a new, empty project and checking if everything is correct.

CHECKLIST

DONE!

Now your project is ready for shipping.

To summarize, here is a checklist:

1. Create a demoversion of your song.
2. Save a separate version of your project before you begin preparing it for export.
3. Make sure that unwanted and unnecessary tracks, regions, plugins, etc. are removed from the project.
4. Check that each element in the song has its own track.
5. Create individual tracks for midi elements (if existing).
6. Name your tracks in a structured and understandable way.
7. Edit and clean up your audio tracks.
8. Export all tracks.
9. Export MIDI files (if wanted).
10. Check your export independently.

Did everything work?

Then send the folder via a platform you trust (Wetransfer, Dropbox, Google Drive, ...) and away with it!

I hope I could help you and bring you a big step closer to your next release!

If you have any questions, feel free to send me an email at

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I'm looking forward hearing from you and your project!