

Lesson 1: Remix Techniques



1. Whenever possible, always start with the original multi-track

In practice this is not always possible, but obtaining the multi-track recording dramatically increases your remixing options and potential to make a great final remix. Whereas remixing the stereo, mastered file restricts your creative options, especially as you approach the final stages of your remix. Work with the artist, spend time in pre-production to plot out how you can get as much control over the track as possible.

If you cannot obtain the multi-track recording, chop, splice, slice and edit the stereo file to a high degree (even more so than you usually do so you can test the method). Use your DAW and extreme region definition to create plenty of sample options prior to beginning to layout and plan your remix. The more time you spend initially editing, the more options you will have. This will facilitate your re-arrangement ability, and most importantly, it will help you get a deeper understanding of what's happening within the original track.

2. Determine what the “main attraction” elements of the track are, and work your remix around them

Every song has a theme and a hook: musically, rhythmically, and lyrically. Find them, and understand how they work together to create the feeling and impact of original track. It's not enough to just know the song, you need to know how it works before you start taking it apart and rebuilding it. A superficial understanding of the original track will weaken the power of your remix and your transitions between sections will most definitely suffer because they will lack intent.

Sometimes you will have to maintain the hook or main attraction of the original track. However, if you are provided a lot of creative license, then spend some time approaching and listening to your edits from a different perspective, and see if you can create an attraction from something different than the original track. Featuring a transition out of a bridge section, for example, can maintain the original feel of the track, but make the remix more unique.

3. Add new musical elements, and change the feel of the groove. Be creative and stay away from redundancy

What's your style? Why would someone send a track to YOU to remix as opposed to someone else? You can give your work a unique voice and identity by adding new elements. Try changing keys, record some real instruments and use them to augment the original, use all those synths and libraries. Above all: don't be boring! A good remix is more than shuffling tracks account in a playlist. Use all the tools you have. Try everything. If something doesn't work, just undo it and try something else; you never know when you might make that happy mistake. Being aggressive with your own voice will also help prevent redundancy and keep you away from producing a repetitious and predictable remix. You want to maintain the theme, but the sounds and splices you use to paint that theme are nearly infinite.

4. Detail is everything. Pay close attention to transitions, fills, and effects. You can give your remix a sense of spontaneity by systematically introducing new elements and using these smaller-scale elements to glue it all together

Try using your effects like glue so that they help fuse together different parts of the remix. They can also help facilitate movement throughout each section; the same is true for subtle drum fills. In this stage, don't rely strictly on your sample libraries.

Do whatever you can to change your perspective each time you listen to your remix. You can use the large amount of regions you created in the beginning stages, and drop them in, sometimes at unexpected sections, to help ensure there's something “special” throughout the remix. If you start to lose perspective (it happens all the time, don't worry about it), take 10 minutes to go outside of your creative space (whether you work in a large studio, or at home on a laptop), and change your environment.

5. Keep your samples focused and use them deliberately. If introducing new spoken samples in the remix, be sure that they are used tastefully. Nothing will ruin a good remix faster than the same sample retriggered every few beats

Maintaining intent throughout a remix can be very challenging, but you always want to be aware that you're not simply dropping in samples for the sake of adding samples. Everything should be intentional and have at least a modicum of purpose and context. Listen to ensure that your samples are either moving the track along, giving it structure, giving it rhythm, or helping to create a transition or energy.

Sometimes you can think about this as assigning sample a value, and like anything, the "more" of something there is the less value it has each time it's reproduced. If you are very selective and deliberate with your samples, then they can add much more impact.

Lastly, the over-arching goal is to create something new, not just a re-conceptualized version of the original within the context of a different musical genre.