

Project 1: A Beginning, a Middle, and an End

Objectives

- Create music using the included loops in Mixcraft.
- Audition loops and add them to the Sequencer Window.
- Balance the sounds of your loops using the Mixer window.

Class Time Required

You should be able to complete this lesson well in three 45 minute sessions.

Procedure

1. Create a folder in your Music Technology folder on your flash drive.
2. Launch Mixcraft 6. Give your project name the title of “YOUR NAME Beginning Middle End.” In the Project Folder slot, hit the choose button and select the pathway to the file for your project. Then select Build Loop & Beat-Matched Music from the New Project screen. It is a good idea to save your song every few minutes as you go through the project. You can do so easily by clicking the Save button (it has a picture of a floppy disk on it) or by selecting File > Save. You can also use the shortcut key combination Ctrl+S.
3. In the lower part of your screen, the Details section, select the Library tab. This is where you can access hundreds of loop from within Mixcraft.
4. Look for some rhythmic loops first of all. Drums are always good to start with when creating music. On the right side of the loop Library screen, you’ll see a drop-down option for Category. Select Instruments as your sort category and then select Drums in the panel below. You’ll now see many different drum loops listed on the right in the Library. As you click on the play head (the blue triangle) beside any of these loops, they will download from the Internet (which is why you need an Internet connection when working in Mixcraft), and you will hear the loops play in your headphones. Audition any loops that have a length of 1, 2, or 4 in the #bars column. Keep auditioning until you find one you like for the beginning of your music.
5. Click the yellow plus sign beside the name of the loop you chose, and the loop will appear in the first available track in the Sequencer window. If you see a dialog box that asks you whether you wish to switch the tempo of your song to the tempo of the loop you selected, click Yes, and your song will now follow the exact tempo (speed) of the loop you chose.

You can also drag the loop into the Sequencer window by grabbing the name of the loop with your mouse and dragging it upward. A vertical line will show you where your loop is going. Make sure you drop it in the first available track, at the beginning of the song. If you drop it in the wrong place, you can always grab its name bar and move it to the right place.

6. Now that you have the first loop in your song, you'll notice that across the top of the loop you have a play triangle (click it and you hear the loop), a Loop Repeat button (click it and the loop duplicates), and the Loop Name. Underneath that you see the waveform of the loop. That's what the loop looks like in digital audio. In a drum loop you will see many spikes - these are the loud hits in the waveform. The spikes tell you how loud the music is - the bigger the spike, the louder the hit. Experienced audio engineers can tell what a loop sounds like just by looking at the waveform.

Duplicate the loop until it goes all the way from the beginning of the song to the number 5 (the end of the fourth measure). You won't have to do this if you already selected a loop that lasts four measures.

7. Return to the Loop Library and find another drum beat to go with your first selected loop. Find something that contrasts with the one you first chose. You can add this new loop to the song at measure 5. Click on the timeline just below the number 5 on the timeline. (A vertical line will now appear at that point.) Drag the loop into the Sequencer and place it at number 5 in the first track, right beside the loop you already put in. Duplicate this loop until it goes to the number 9 (the end of the eighth measure).
8. Choose a third drum loop from the Library. Drag it to the Sequencer at measure 9 and duplicate it until it reaches the number 13 (the end of the twelfth measure). Now click the Rewind to Beginning button (or hit the Home key on your keyboard) and then click the Play button (or hit the spacebar) to hear how the three drum beats you chose sound consecutively. Click Stop or hit the spacebar again to stop playback. If you change your mind about a drum loop, you can get rid of it. Highlight it in the Sequencer by clicking its name, press Delete on your keyboard, and then choose a different loop to replace it.
9. In the Category option in the Loop Library, change from Drums to Bass. Audition some bass sounds. Choose one to go with your first four measures and add it into the Sequencer, but make sure you choose a loop that lasts 1, 2, or 4 bars. (Check the number in the #bars column.) If you see a dialog box that asks you whether you wish to switch the key of your song to the key of the loop you selected, click Yes, and your song will now follow the same key of the loop you chose.

Make sure you don't drop the bass loop on top of the drum beat - put it in the next track down. Duplicate it so it lasts as long as the drum beat in the beginning section (up to the number 5 on the timeline). Listen to the first four measures and make changes if you don't like the bass and drums together. Add different bass loops in for the middle section, measure 5-8 (up to the number 9 on the timeline), and the end section, measures 9-12 (up to number 13).

10. In the Category option in the Loop Library, change from Bass to Guitar. By now you should be getting really good at adding loops to the Sequencer. Add a guitar line so you have different loops for the beginning, the middle, and the end of your song. Make sure your loops are 1, 2, or 4 measures long and don't overlap into other sections. Keep listening all the time to see whether you like how the loops fit together.

11. Add another instrument to your song. Change the category from Guitar to something different (your choice now). Add in loops in three sections of the song.
12. Now select the Mixer tab. As you listen to your song, use the volume faders to adjust the relative volume of each track so that each instrument is equally audible. It's easier to mix if you set the song to loop - that way, you don't have to keep restarting the song every time it plays through. To set the song to loop, look in the green display counter where the time code is displayed and click on the loop arrow. Mixcraft will select all 12 measures of the song to loop automatically.

Use the L-R sliders above the volume faders to adjust where your instruments are from left to right in the mix. Imagine where you would like them to be on stage as they would be in live performance and then reflect this by mixing them to the appropriate side in the mix.

You can adjust the Hi, Mid, and Lo response in each track by turning the knobs in the EQ section of the Mixer. As you mix, make sure that the volume levels do not light up the red warning light at the top of the volume faders. If this happens, you must bring down the volume fader, or it will sound distorted in the final mixdown.

You should check volume levels every time you change a pan position (L-R) or EQ setting, as even small alterations will affect the output level of the track. It is important to get a strong volume signal without lighting the red warning light. Keep your Main Mix fader down fairly low until you have eliminated all red lights in the instrument faders, and then you'll find you have some room to boost the Main Mix level. You'll learn many skills of mixing as you work through each project, but for now your most important task is to avoid the red lights.

13. When you feel that your song is the best you can make it and when the volume indicators never go into the red, click on the button to mix your song down to an audio file (it looks like an arrow pointing to a sheet of paper) or select File>Mix Down To> MP3.

If Mixcraft asks whether you would like to save your changes before mixing down, click Yes. Select a location for your mixed-down song and save it as an MP3 version. That way, you'll be able to listen to your song on your iPod or other MP3 player or use it as a ringtone on your phone.

EXTRA

After you have mastered making a song with a beginning, a middle, and an end in 12 measures, make another song with 24 measures (8 measures per section), or extend your existing song of 12 measures (but be sure to save it to a different file). This will allow you to use some of the longer loops. Also, try adding in more than four instruments to the song, but still start with drums, bass, and guitar.