



Intro to Pro Tools

Pro Tools® M-Powered™ Essential

Version 8.0.2



Welcome to Pro Tools M-Powered Essential

Read this guide if you are new to Pro Tools® or are just starting out making your own music. Inside, you'll find quick examples of how to record, compose, mix, and produce your own music in Pro Tools.

One quick question: Have you installed Pro Tools yet? If not, follow the *Essential Quick Setup* instructions or your detailed *Essential User Guide* to install Pro Tools® M-Powered™ Essential software. For instructions on how to install your M-Audio interface, follow the instructions that came with it.

💡 *Install the hardware drivers and connect the interface before installing Pro Tools.*

📖 *Support for Pro Tools M-Powered Essential is available only at Digidesign® User Conference (DUC) and through Digidesign email support. Go to: <http://duc.digidesign.com> or <http://www.digidesign.com/tsr>*

Connect Headphones or Speakers

You have to be able to hear your music, so plug in some headphones or speakers to your M-Audio interface.

📖 *For detailed instructions on how to connect your M-Audio interface to headphones or speakers, follow the instructions that came with it.*

Listen to a Demo Song

To get started, you can use any of the demo songs included with Pro Tools to see and hear many of the things you'll soon be doing in Pro Tools. They also give you sounds to play so you can test your headphones or speakers. These demo songs are automatically downloaded onto your system when you install Pro Tools M-Powered Essential.

To open a demo song:

- 1 Make sure your M-Audio interface is connected to your computer and powered on.
- 2 Launch Pro Tools M-Powered Essential by clicking its icon in the Dock (Mac) or double-clicking its icon on your desktop (Windows).
- 3 From the File menu, select Open and navigate to the default location of the demo songs. They can be found at the following locations:

Mac Applications/Digidesign/Pro Tools/Pro Tools Essential Demos

Windows C:\Program Files\Digidesign\Pro Tools\Pro Tools Essential Demos

📖 *In addition to the "Filtered Dream Essential," there are other great demos to check out: "Be There" (male vocal with a fully produced version and a basic version); "Salvation Essential" (female vocal); "Essential Loop Demos" (instrumentals based on the included loop content).*



Play and Listen

To play a demo song:

1 On your M-Audio interface, turn the headphones or speaker monitor level fully down to be sure your volume is at a low enough level.

 For more information about headphone and monitor connections and volume control on your specific interface, refer to the interface-specific instructions that came with it.

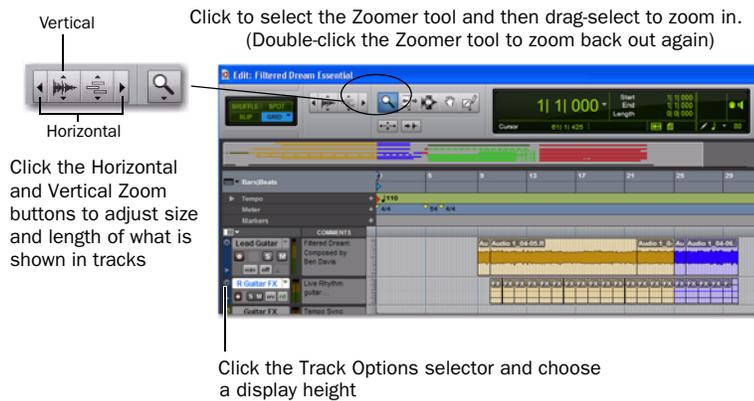
2 To start and stop Pro Tools, press the Spacebar, or click the Play and Stop buttons on-screen. (These buttons are located at the top of the Edit window; you can also have them appear in their own Transport window by choosing Window > Transport.)



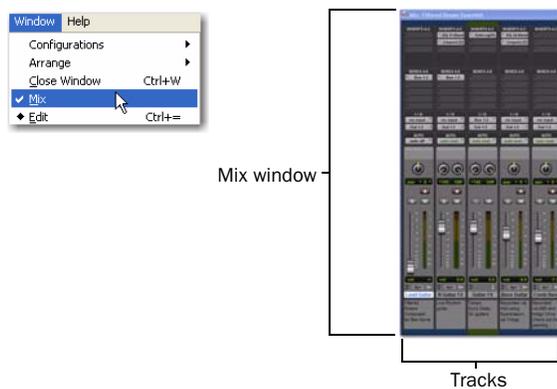
Stop and Play controls in Edit window's Toolbar (left) and Transport window (right)

3 While the session plays, gradually raise the volume on your M-Audio interface.

4 Explore Pro Tools while the demo plays: Use the zoom and Track view controls to zero in on different tracks.



5 Next, click the Window menu and choose Mix (Window > Mix). The Mix window shows tracks in vertical channel strips.



The Edit window and the Mix window are the two main work areas in Pro Tools. Throughout the rest of this guide, you'll see examples of both windows being used for different types of production work.

- 6 Press the Spacebar or click the Stop button to stop playback.
- 7 When you're through checking out a demo song, choose File > Close Session.

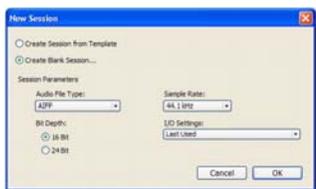
 *The demo songs are great examples of completed, finished projects that have been arranged, edited, and mixed. You don't need to return to the demo songs for anything else in this guide, but you might want to check them out again later, after you've been introduced to a few more Pro Tools features. To return to the demo songs or any recent session, click File > Recent and choose the demo song (if it is still one of your most recently opened sessions), or choose File > Open and open it that way.*

Bring in a Song from a CD

This section lets you see how to create a new Pro Tools *session* and then *import* a song from a CD. You can create a new session after you launch or when you first launch Pro Tools.

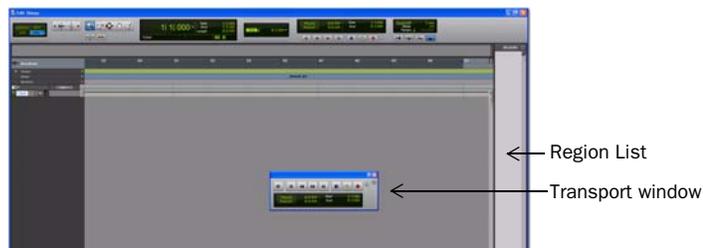
To create a new session:

- 1 If you already have a session open, choose File > Close.
- 2 Now choose File > New Session.



New Session dialog

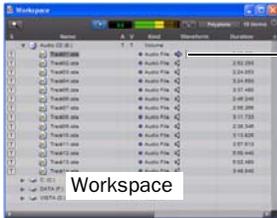
- 3 In the New Session dialog, choose Create a Blank Session, then click OK.
- 4 In the Name the Session dialog, choose where you want to save the session, and then name it and click Save.
- 5 After Pro Tools opens the new session, choose Window > Edit so the Edit window is displayed. It will look something like this:



The Edit window, with the Transport window showing in the foreground

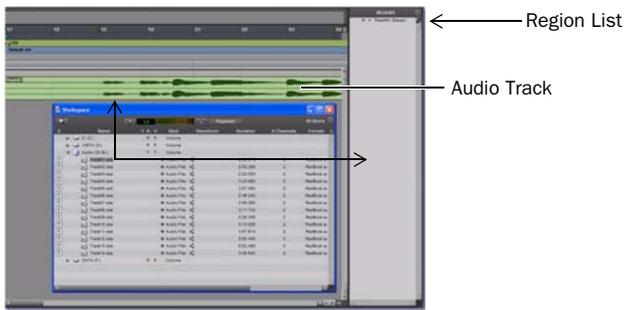
To import a song from CD:

- 1 Put the source CD into your computer's CD/DVD drive.
- 2 In Pro Tools, choose Window > Workspace to open the Workspace browser.
- 3 In the Workspace browser, click the Audio CD's Expand/Collapse icon to show the files on the CD.
- 4 Click an item (track) to select a song on the CD.



Tip: Click the speaker icon to audition a selected song; press the Spacebar to stop.

- 5 Drag the item from the Workspace to the open area in the middle of the Edit window; Pro Tools will create a new audio track containing the song. The song will appear in its new track where you let go of the mouse.

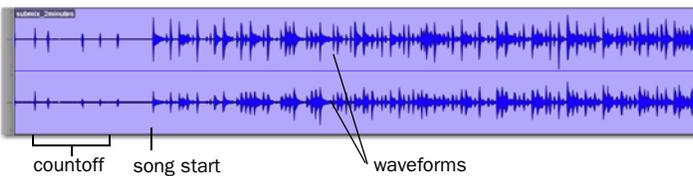


You can also drag items from the Workspace to the Region List and then later drag them into the track area. This lets you create a collection of audio (regions) for later use in different tracks or even the same track.

- 6 Close the Workspace browser, then press the Spacebar to begin playing back the song in Pro Tools (see “Play and Listen” on page 2).

Make an Audio Edit

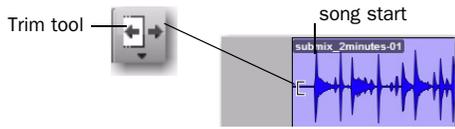
In this example we'll show you how to do a simple edit to change where a song starts. To show this, we'll use a song where the drummer is heard “counting off” the tempo (“1...2...1.2.3...”) before the song starts. Here's what this song looks like in Pro Tools.



In the picture, the two *waveforms* let you visualize the different sections. We can take advantage of this “what you see is what you hear” aspect of Pro Tools to be able to quickly silence the countoff by “trimming” the beginning of the song.

To trim:

- 1 Click to select the Trim tool (located in the toolbar).
- 2 Click in the track after the countoff and before the start of the song (you'll see the cursor display the Trimmer icon). Drag left or right to fine tune the location.



- 3 For future reference, you can “untrim” the song by clicking and dragging the song start back to the left with the Trim tool. You'll see that the previous audio (the countoff) is still there. This is a small example of how Pro Tools lets you edit *non-destructively*.

Creating a Composition With Loops

This section shows how to create a simple composition using audio loops.

💡 Loops are audio files that have musical performances meant to be repeated to create sections of a composition. They could be WAV or AIF files.

To import audio loops:

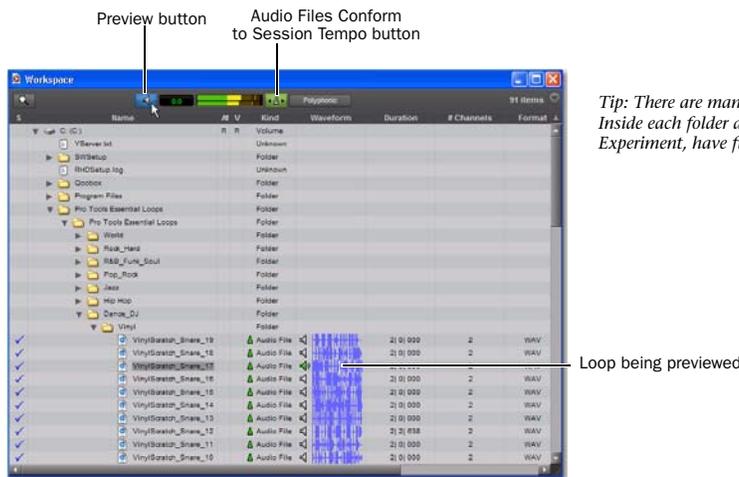
- 1 If the “Pro Tools Essential Loops” browser is not already open, choose Window > Workspace to open the Workspace browser. From the Workspace browser, navigate to the default location of the loops. They can be found at the following locations:

Mac Applications/Digidesign/Pro Tools/Pro Tools Essential Loops

Windows C:\Program Files\Digidesign\Pro Tools\Pro Tools Essential Loops

- 2 Click the Audio folder's Expand/Collapse icon to show the files.
- 3 Click to select the loop you want to preview.
- 4 Click the Preview button to audition the selected loop. (Make sure that the Audio Files Conform to Session Tempo button is still highlighted. This ensures that the file can be conformed to the session tempo, which is 120 BPM by default.)

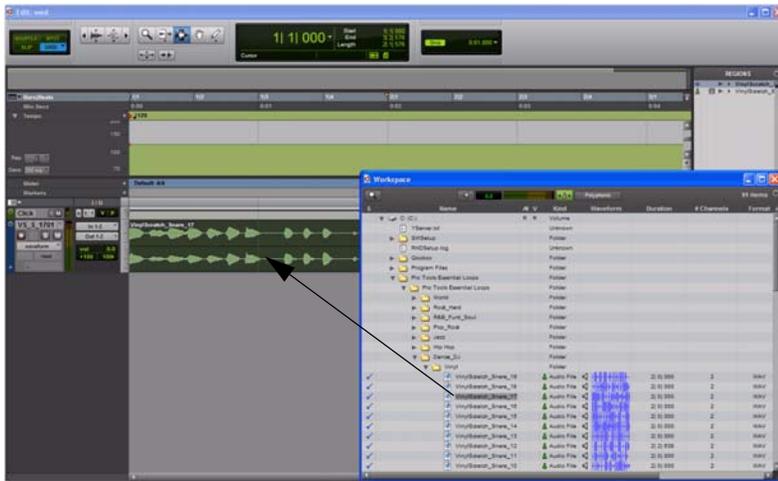
💡 You can also click the speaker icon to audition a loop. Click around different areas of the waveform file to hear different parts of the loop (like near the beginning, middle, or end).



Tip: There are many musical styles represented in the loops collection. Inside each folder are more folders containing instruments for that style. Experiment, have fun, and come up with unique musical combinations!

Previewing a loop in a Workspace browser

5 Drag the item from the Workspace to the open area in the middle of the Edit window; Pro Tools will create a new audio track containing the loop. Make sure you drag the loop all the way to the left of the open area (so that the audio begins at the start of the new track *and* on beat).



Dragging and dropping a loop file from a Workspace browser in the Track list

6 Minimize the Workspace browser, then press the Spacebar to begin playing back the loop in Pro Tools.

7 In the Edit window, create a couple more new tracks by dragging in more loops. If necessary, use the Grabber tool to move the new loops so that they all start on beat.



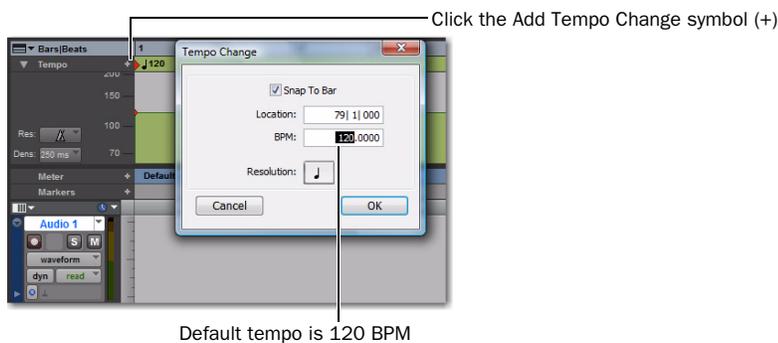
Moving new loops all the way to the left of a track

Changing the Tempo

You can change the session *tempo* to speed up or slow down your song.

To adjust the tempo:

1 Choose View > Rulers > Tempo. See where it says “Tempo” in the Edit window? Click on the plus symbol (+) that appears next to it. Then type the tempo you want in the Tempo Change dialog and click OK.



2 Press the Spacebar or click the Play button to listen to your audio play back at a different speed. Press the Spacebar again or click Stop when done listening.

3 Play around with changing the session tempo again on your composition.

Duplicating a Loop

You can easily repeat loops, making a longer composition from one loop.

To create longer compositions with a single loop:

- 1 Select a loop (or region) you want to duplicate.
- 2 Choose Edit > Duplicate. The material is placed right after the loop's end point.

💡 Press *Control+D* (Windows) or *Command+D* (Mac) to Duplicate any selected loops (or region).

- 3 Press the Spacebar or click the Play button to play back the new composition. Press the Spacebar again or click Stop when done listening.



Playing back a series of duplicated loops in an audio track

Record Yourself

This section shows how to connect a microphone and record yourself singing or playing an instrument. In the last section, you imported a song from a CD. Once you get comfortable with a mic in this section, you can go ahead and record yourself singing over a song you like.

Connect a Mic

To hook up a microphone:

- Plug a mic into a Mic input of your M-Audio interface.

📖 For more information, refer to your the instructions that came with your M-Audio interface.

Create a Track

Pro Tools *tracks* are where audio, MIDI and other elements get recorded and edited within a session. Before you can record, you need to create one or more tracks.

To prepare an audio track for recording:

- 1 In a Pro Tools session, choose Track > New.
- 2 To record a single mic or instrument (as in our example), set the New Track dialog for 1 Mono Audio Track, and click Create.



Creating a new mono audio track

If you want to record two inputs at once, create one or two new tracks depending on what you've got plugged in and what you plan to record:

- To record two different sources (such as one vocal mic and one electric guitar), create 2 *Mono* Audio Tracks. This lets the two input signals be recorded simultaneously, and be edited, processed, and balanced independently.
 - Or –
 - To record a two-channel stereo source (such as a stereo keyboard, or the left and right outputs from a DJ mixer), create 1 *Stereo* Audio Track.
- 3 Make sure the Mix window is open by choosing Window > Mix.

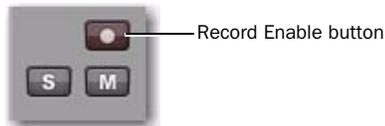
4 In the middle of the new track's channel strip, notice where it says "In 1 (Mono)." This shows which Input channel (Input 1 or Input 2) is assigned to this track. (To specify a different input channel, click the Input Path selector and choose the other channel.)



Record a Performance to a Track

To record an audio track:

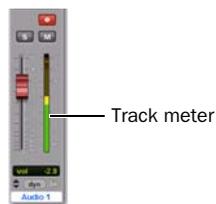
1 Click the track's Record Enable button.



Record enabling a track in the Mix window

2 Sing into your mic, and watch the meter in the Pro Tools track while you raise the gain control knob on the M-Audio interface. This lets you listen to your incoming signal so you can "set your levels." (Don't move the on-screen fader to try and adjust your level input because it isn't going to have any affect; It's only for setting your playback level.) Turn the gain control knob up until you see the on-screen track meter show green most of the time, or yellow for your louder passages.

- If the track meter shows red, gain is too high; lower the gain control.
- If you barely see green in the track meter, gain is too low.



3 In the toolbar (or in the Transport window) click the Return to Zero button to jump back to the start of the session, then click the Record button. This tells Pro Tools that you're happy with your levels and are ready to record (think of this as a "master" record enable button).



4 Choose Window > Edit so you can watch what happens when you record.

5 When you are ready to start recording, click Play or press the Spacebar. To stop, press the Spacebar or click Stop. Here's what Pro Tools looks like after a track has been recorded and the transport has been stopped.



Stopping the transport while recording a track

💡 If you want to use a click track/metronome, see the “Using a Click (Metronome)” section on Page_28

Listen to Your Work

To play back a recorded track:

- 1 Click the track's Record Enable button again to take it out of Record mode.
- 2 Click Play in the Transport window or press the Spacebar to start playback.
- 3 When you want to stop, press the Spacebar or click Stop.

Record More Tracks

To record another track:

- 1 Choose Track > New and create 1 Mono Audio Track.
- 2 In the new audio track, click its Input path selector and choose the same input (In 1) you used before.
- 3 Next, click the track Record button, just like you did on the first track.
- 4 In the Transport window, click the Return to Zero button to jump back to the start of the session, then click the Record button (the button flashes) to arm Pro Tools for recording. When you are ready to start recording, click Play or press the Spacebar.
- 5 Press the Spacebar again to stop playback.

Using a Virtual Instrument

This section shows you how to work with Structure Essential, a *plug-in* you can use to build beats and compose music.

The Structure Essential Virtual Instrument Plug-in

Structure Essential is a *virtual instrument* plug-in, which means it *makes* sound. It's installed automatically during the install. Here's how to start utilizing its many high-quality instruments, sound effects, and other sounds.

Set Up a Track

You add Structure Essential to your sessions by inserting it on a specific type of track called an *Instrument track*.

To create an Instrument track for Structure Essential:

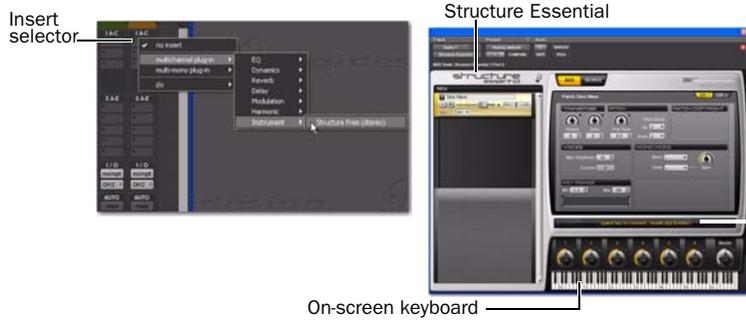
- 1 Choose Track > New. In the New Track dialog, click the pop-up menu that says Mono and choose Stereo, then click the pop-up menu that says Audio Track and choose Instrument Track. Leave the other settings as they are and click Create.



Creating a stereo Instrument track

- 2 Choose View > Mix Window to display the Mix window.

3 Click the track Insert selector near the top of the Instrument track and choose Structure Essential Instrument from the sub menu.



Inserting Structure Essential on a Stereo Instrument track

4 You can play Structure Essential and audition sounds by clicking the on-screen keyboard.

💡 See those greyed out notes on the on-screen keyboard that some patches have? Grey out notes have no sound associated with them.

5 Play some notes on your on-screen keyboard using the mouse. If all is well so far, you are hearing a signal from the default Sine Wave patch (listed at the top of the Patch list).



The default Sine Wave patch

Loading a Patch

Now let's load a sound. You can load patches using the Patch menu.

1 Go to the "dual-arrow" icon and click Structure Essential from the menu. Select a patch from the list of patches; each patch represents an instrument that can be played. Patches are pre-configured settings files, and they're a great way to see examples of what a plug-in can do.

2 Click on the on-screen keyboard to listen to the sound.



Click the dual-arrow icon to navigate to the list of patches, then choose an item from the list.



3 Make music by doing one of the following:

- If you have a MIDI controller already connected, you can record yourself playing Structure Essential. For information (and a refresher on using the Record Enable button and the Record button) see "Compose with a MIDI Controller" on page 11.
- or –
- To see an example of how you can compose without a MIDI controller, see "Make Beats and Compose without a MIDI Controller" on page 12.

Using a MIDI Controller/Keyboard to Compose

What's MIDI?

MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) data isn't audio, so it has no sound of its own. MIDI is just a way for musical devices, such as virtual instrument plug-ins, MIDI controllers, and MIDI sequencers, to talk to one another.

You must have a MIDI controller/keyboard when creating a MIDI recording (or MIDI sequence). To create a MIDI recording, there must be a MIDI instrument (real or virtual) available to trigger notes (or other data). Hardware MIDI instruments connect via MIDI cables to the MIDI inputs and outputs on your audio interface or MIDI interface. Virtual MIDI instruments are inserted as plug-ins on instrument tracks in Pro Tools and accessed directly from within Pro Tools.

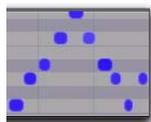
For purposes of this guide, we'll focus on Structure Essential, the virtual instrument that comes with Pro Tools M-Powered Essential.

Compose with a MIDI Controller

Here we'll show you how to compose with a MIDI controller/keyboard.

To Record MIDI on an Instrument Track:

- 1 Make sure your MIDI controller/keyboard is connected either to an M-Audio interface with MIDI cables or directly to your computer with a USB cable. (See your *interface guide* for detailed information on connecting your interface to your computer.)
- 2 Repeat the steps to create a stereo Instrument track and insert Structure Essential on it (see "Using a Virtual Instrument" on page 9).
- 3 Choose a bass patch that you like.
- 4 Select Options > MIDI Thru. (Verify that MIDI Thru is checked, if not select it.)
- 5 Click the Record Enable button to enable the Instrument track for MIDI recording.
- 6 In the Transport window, click Return to Zero to start recording from the beginning of the session. You can also record to a selection in a track or from the cursor location in the Edit window.
- 7 Click the Record button.
- 8 Now play your MIDI controller/keyboard and hear the bass sound.
- 9 When you are ready to start recording, click Play or press the Spacebar. To stop, press the Spacebar or click Stop.



MIDI data in the Instrument track

- 10 Click the track Record button again to take it out of record enable and play back what you just recorded.

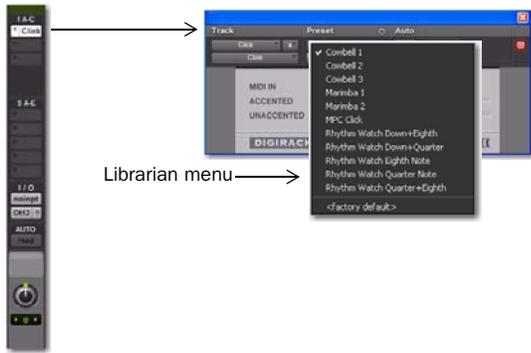
Using a Click (Metronome)

A *click track* (also known as a metronome) gives you a steady time reference while recording tracks. Pro Tools M-Powered Essential comes with a specialized click track named "Click" that has the Click plug-in already inserted.

To use a click track:

- 1 Choose View > Mix Window to display the Mix window.
- 2 At the top of the track, select the Click plug-in.

3 In the Click plug-in window, click the Librarian menu and pick a sound. You can pick a cowbell, sidestick, and other common click sounds.



Picking a sound for the Click Track

4 Select View > Transport > MIDI Controls to view the MIDI controls in the Transport window.

5 Click the Metronome Click button so it's highlighted blue.



6 Now click Play in the Transport window or press the Spacebar to listen to the click.

Make Beats and Compose without a MIDI Controller

You can make beats and compose in Pro Tools using just the mouse.

To create notes:

1 Close or move the Structure Essential plug-in window, then choose Window > Edit so you can see the Instrument track in the Edit window.

2 Click to select the Pencil tool (it's in the toolbar).



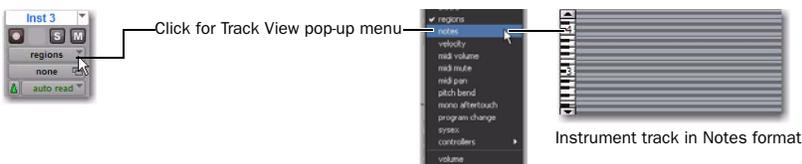
3 In the Edit window, select Grid from the Edit mode buttons.



Snap to Grid mode enabled

💡 *Make sure you have the Snap to Grid mode enabled. When you draw in your drum (and other) notes in Snap to Grid mode, they are in time.*

4 Click the Track View selector for the track and select the Notes format from the menu.



5 Now click in the main Instrument track to “pencil in” some notes.



The small horizontal bar created with each mouse click is a *MIDI note*. The location and length of each note determines when, and for how long, you’ll hear the sound.

6 When you’re ready to listen to the note pattern you created, change the Pencil tool to the Selector tool in the Toolbar, click in the track before your first notes, then press the Spacebar.

Edit a Note

In this example, we will lengthen a note.

To lengthen a MIDI note:

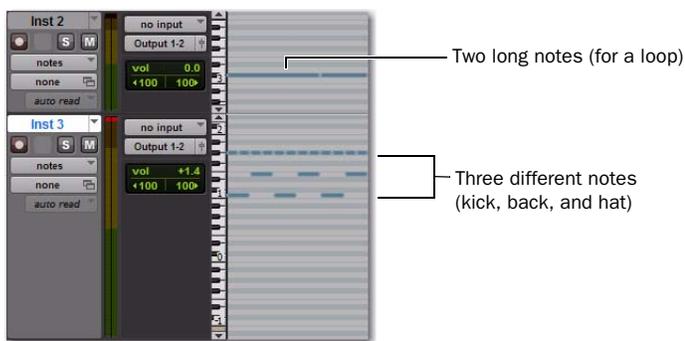
- 1 Repeat the steps to create a stereo Instrument track and insert Structure Essential on it (see “Using a Virtual Instrument” on page 9).
- 2 Choose a patch that you like.
- 3 Click to select the Trim tool (located in the toolbar across the top of the Edit window), and then use it in your Instrument track to click-and-drag the right edge of the MIDI note out to the right to make it longer. This leaves the note selected (highlighted).



4 Press the Spacebar to start playback, which will start from the current selection (in this case, the MIDI note we lengthened). You should hear the sound play for the duration of the MIDI note.

To compose a rhythm from scratch:

- 1 Repeat the steps to create a stereo Instrument track and insert Structure Essential on it (see “Using a Virtual Instrument” on page 9).
- 2 Choose a drum kit patch that you like.
- 3 Now, pencil some notes in on the new drums track. Here’s what our example session looks like after we added another Structure Essential track to the loop track we set up previously.



💡 See those greyed out notes on the on-screen keyboard that some patches have? Grey out notes have no sound associated with them.

4 To add a bass line, create another track, insert Structure Essential, then load a bass tone.

Mix and Change Your Sounds

Your Pro Tools M-Powered Essential system comes supplied with a wealth of plug-ins that you can use to change the sounds you've recorded. This section shows two examples of how to use plug-ins to process your sound. We're going to show you how to use compression on one track, then we'll apply reverb to a bunch of tracks. Lastly, to finish up our song, we'll apply a fade out to the ending.

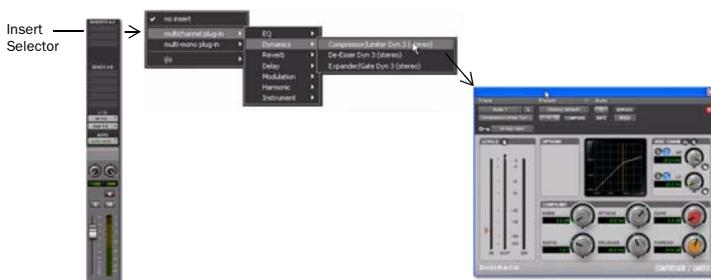
Compression

Compression is a way to smooth the dynamics of a track (make your soft and loud parts sound less uneven). It's one way to make a vocal sound more intimate.

To apply compression to a track:

1 Choose Window > Mix.

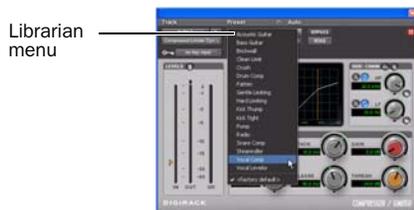
2 In the top part of the track, click the first Track Insert selector and choose Compressor/Limiter Dyn 3 (mono) from the Dynamics sub-menu. Pro Tools inserts the Dynamics 3 Compressor/Limiter plug-in on your track and opens its plug-in window.



Inserting a plug-in on an audio track

3 Press the Spacebar to start playback.

4 In the plug-in window, click the Librarian menu (shown below) and choose an available Settings File (preset) from the list.



5 Choose other presets and you can hear what their settings do to your sound. Try out different plug-ins to start learning about the different colors you have at your disposal. (The electronic *Essential Plug-ins Guide* is accessible from the Help menu, and it's a great place to learn more about EQ, delay (echo) and other types of effects.)

6 Press the Spacebar again to stop playback.

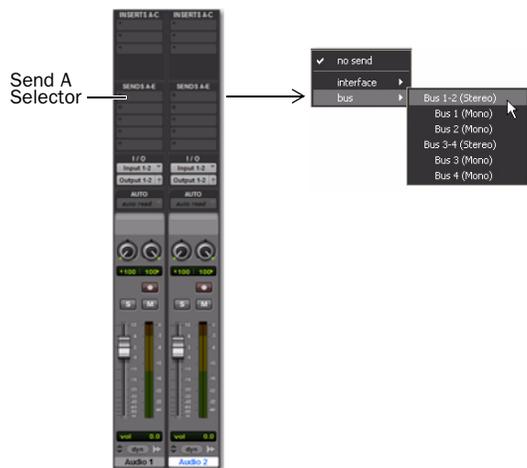
Reverb

Reverb is a great effect for vocals; it's what can make you sound like you're in a big concert hall. One of the best ways to incorporate reverb in your mix is in a "send-and-return" configuration. Send/return makes it easy to send multiple vocal tracks or instruments to and through the same single reverb effect.

To use reverb on one or more tracks:

1 Choose Window > Mix.

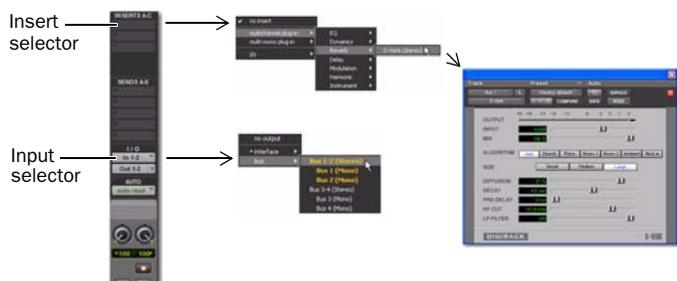
2 Click the Send selector on your vocal track as shown below and choose Bus 1-2.



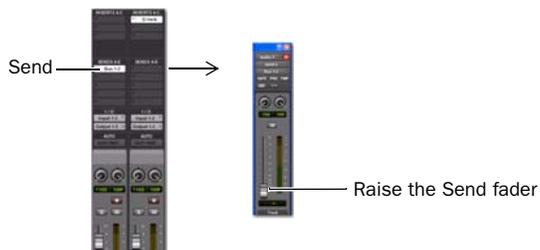
3 Choose Track > New, and set it to create 1 stereo Auxiliary Input track, then click Create.

4 On the new Auxiliary Input track you just added, do the following:

- Click the Track Insert selector and choose D-Verb from the Reverb sub-menu.
- or –
- Click the Track Input selector and choose Bus 1-2.



5 Click the Send assignment on your vocal track to open the Send Output window.



6 Press the Spacebar and slowly raise the small fader in the Send Output window. This adjusts how much of the vocal track you are sending to D-Verb.

7 Keep playing and listening, and check out different D-Verb settings. Repeat this section's basic instructions to try out a Delay, EQ, or other type of plug-in too.

To put the finishing touch on a song it's sometimes nice to go with the classic fade out. Here's an example of how to use *mix automation* to fade out a track. (There are many other ways to create fades described in the *Pro Tools Reference Guide*.)

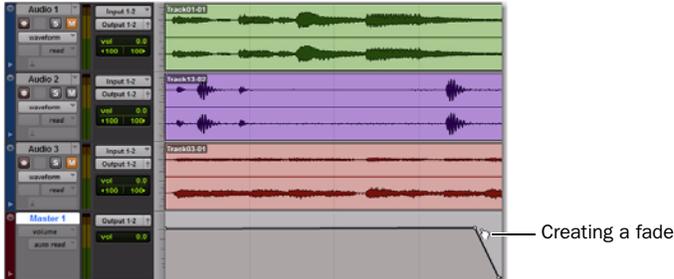
To do a fade out:

1 In order to do a fade out, add a Master track.

2 In the Master track, click with the Grabber tool (it's in the toolbar) at the place you'd like the fade to start. This creates a white dot or "breakpoint."



3 Click and drag down with the Grabber at some point later in time (after the first breakpoint).



4 Now click in the Master track to place the cursor where you want to audition your fade.

5 Press the Spacebar to hear the section and the results of your fade.

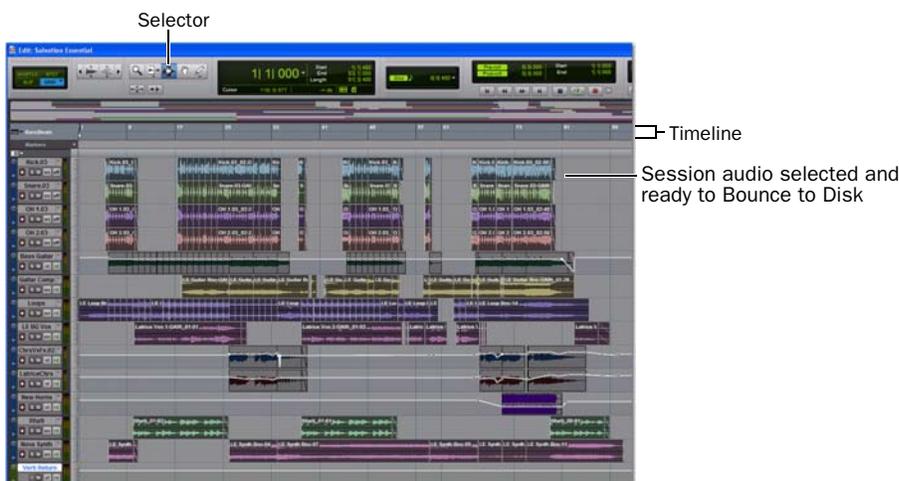
You can also edit breakpoint automation with many of the same tools we use to edit audio such as the Pencil, the Grabber, and the Trimmer. You can learn more about how to record and edit your control moves in the *Pro Tools Reference Guide*.

Get Your Music Out to the World

After you've finished recording and editing tracks in a Pro Tools session you're ready to *mix down*. In these last few pages you'll see how to do this using the Pro Tools Bounce to Disk feature to combine all the tracks that make up a session into a single "master" audio file. After the new audio file has been bounced to disk, you can burn it to a CD or convert it to MP3 using a CD burning application, like iTunes

To create a stereo master from a session:

1 Use the Selector to click-drag the length of the session in the Timeline (or on a track). If you make no selection, your entire session will bounce from start to finish.



2 Choose File > Bounce to > Disk.



3 In the Bounce Options dialog, do the following to create a CD-compatible 2-track of your audio:

- Choose Outputs 1–2 as the Bounce Source.
- Choose BWF (.WAV) for the File Type.
- Choose Stereo Interleaved for the Format.
- Choose 16 for the Resolution and 44.1 kHz for the Sample Rate.

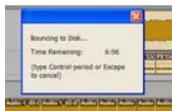
 *Digidesign also offers an MP3 Export Option that lets you bounce directly to MP3 format. Check the DigiStore on our website (www.digidesign.com), or contact your Digidesign dealer if you'd like more information. To learn more about the Bounce to Disk dialog, see the Pro Tools Reference Guide.*

4 Choose Convert after Bounce, and click Bounce.



Bounce options (shown set to create audio CD burnable tracks)

5 In the Save Bounce As dialog, name your bounce and pick where it should be saved, then click Save. Pro Tools begins bouncing to disk. Pro Tools bounces are done in real time, so you hear audio playback of your mix during the bounce process (you cannot adjust any Pro Tools controls during a bounce).



After Mixdown, Mastering

After the bounce is completed, you will have an audio file that you can convert to MP3 using most common CD burning software. Converting to MP3 lets you listen to it on your iPod, post on your site, or send via email. Or, use your burner software to write the file to an audio CD that can be played on standard CD players. Listening to a reference CD in an environment other than your studio is a time-tested, professional way to see how your mix translates to other systems or listening environments.

Learn More

We hope this quick introduction has inspired you to make music with Pro Tools. To learn more about any of the topics presented, start with the *Pro Tools Reference Guide*. Search for any terms you're curious about. You can also watch any of the video tutorials included with your package or online at the Digidesign website (www.digidesign.com).

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