

Teaching notes

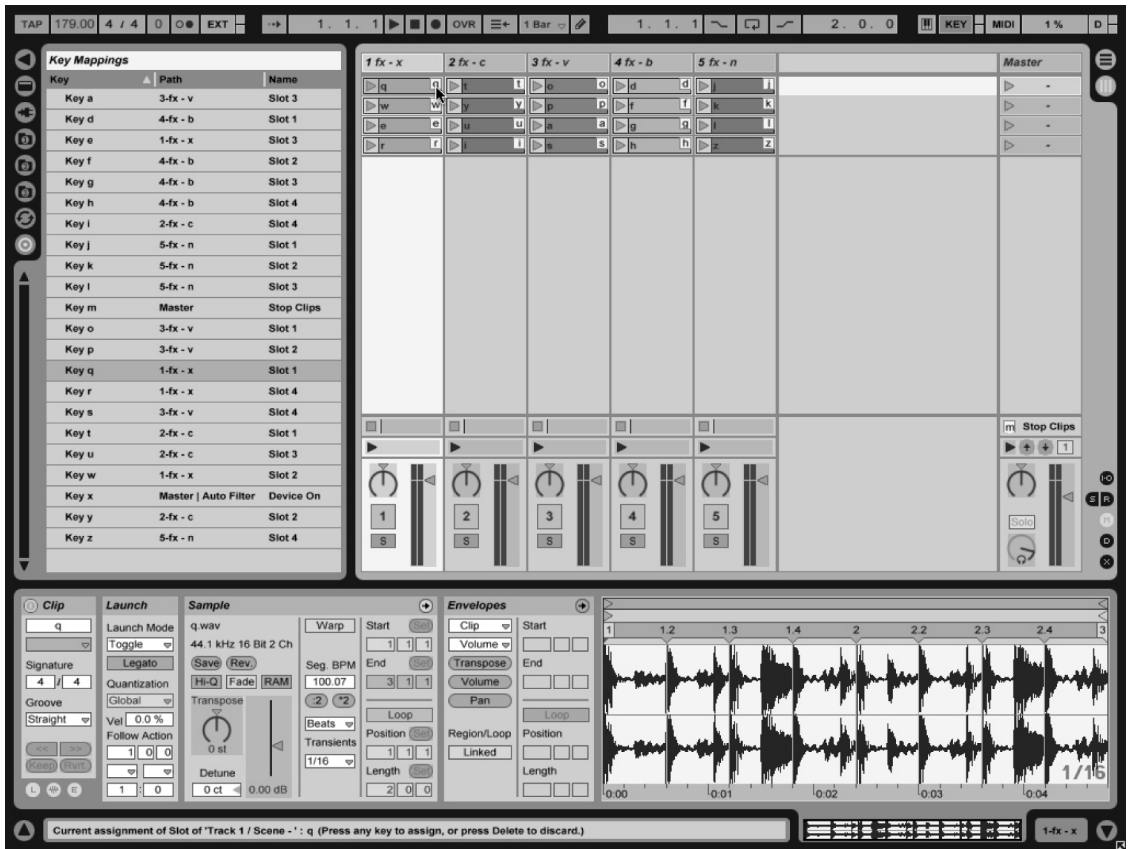


How to get somebody hooked on Live

If you want to get somebody hooked on Live, this is what to do (they'll thank you for it later):

- 1 Create an empty Live set, with five audio tracks. Work in the Session View. Set global quantization to 1 Bar.
- 2 Put one audio effect on each track ('fun' things like delays, not 'sensible' things like EQ), and an Auto Filter on the master track.
- 3 Drag'n'drop four audio clips into each track, and make sure they're nice bright colours.
- 4 The majority of clips should be set to loop, but include a couple of one-shots.
- 5 Enter Key Map Mode (cmd-k), and assign a different letter of the alphabet to trigger every clip. Label each clip with the letter that triggers it.
- 6 Set the launch mode of all clips to 'Toggle' in the Launch box (or set 'toggle' as the default in Preferences/Defaults).
- 7 Choose a one-shot – preferably a speech sample – and quantize it to 1/16ths, change its launch mode to Trigger, and disable looping for that clip.
- 8 Use Key Map Mode to assign letters to activate the effect on/off buttons.
- 9 Name each track with the letter necessary to fire that track's effect.
- 10 Hide the browser, in/outs, overview, sends, etc – clear the decks, and enter full screen mode (see the screen shot for a view of the overall set).

The key mapping allows beginners to get a groove going in the shortest possible time, and with the minimum of explanation. You can simply tell your students to begin pressing letters and observe what happens. Toggle Mode means you don't have to explain how to start/stop individual tracks, all they need is the spacebar to start/stop the entire set. With the one-bar global quantization, clips always come in on time, and the 1/16th quantization for selected one-shots adds that extra 'DJ scratching a record' vibe – tacky though it is, newcomers love that kind of thing, especially kids. I've used a template based on this format to introduce Live to all kinds of people – it creates a game-like environment, emphasising the fun and real-time control that Live offers. The next step is to explain more about the effects, the mixer (mainly why red level meters are a Bad Thing), tempo



Keyboard mapping

changes, and recording what they're doing; then viewing and editing it all in the Arrangement view.

Finally, add some transposition to the 1/16th clip – as your student constantly re-triggers the speech sample, get them to move the clip's Transpose knob up and down, they'll love it.

In the classroom with Live

I've taught Live to 'regular' school kids, kids with attention problems, adults with learning difficulties, prisoners, people in drug rehab, youth centres, students at risk of dropping out of college, and patients in secure psychiatric units. Live can seem complicated, but it's really down to how you introduce it to the students; taking time to set up a good Live demo file as discussed above will make all the difference. Remember to take advantage of Live's ability to hide interface elements, so you can focus the students' attention where you want it. Even on one-day courses, I've had kids jamming with clips and effects, recording their voices, then recording it and editing automation. The real-time control wins them over, especially once they start recording their own sounds. Kids love that old-school sampling stuff like recording a beat being banged out on a plastic chair, and using warp markers to lock it to a tight rhythm.



Completed set

Nothing beats Apple's GarageBand for drag'n'drop simplicity, if you want to show people how to build songs in a linear fashion, but Live has the advantage of the real-time performance elements as an attention-grabber, and then of course it goes on from there, to far deeper levels of creativity. This is also where Ableton's one-product philosophy pays off – people love to know that the friendly, colourful, software they're 'playing' with is used on stages, and in clubs, and in studios, and in movies, around the world. You might not think of yourself as a 'teacher', but with the right combination of Live knowledge, general musical experience, personality... you could have a lot to offer... and it's a two way thing; you learn a lot too.

I did a project recently where we had groups of kids in 4-day blocks. The kids worked in pairs, spending the first 2 days creating a song in Live, and the second 2 days remixing it. This gave us a chance to do things like working with tempo changes, and bouncing down 4-bar chunks of the original mix to a single track, then looping and mangling it. They also experimented with envelopes – drawing curves in empty tracks, and then pasting them onto parameters in other tracks (volume, tempo, effects levels, cut-off, etc), and listening to the quite random results. Quite 'conceptual', but also fun – and some great sounds came from it.

During another recent project, one of the 11-year olds mentioned that he could play guitar. I showed him a demo movie from the Ableton site about working with guitars, and we soon had him recording guitar loops, working with plug-ins, transposing down to create bass parts, and sharing the sounds with his fellow students: his first experience of recording guitars. It was a fantastic time in the class, with the other kids making suggestions about what he could play for them, and he was – of course – very excited and proud to be ‘used’ in this way.

Working in classrooms with Live will teach you more about it too, especially when you hear some of the great stuff that kids will come up with. It reminds you that there’s a lot of BS around electronic music – you start to realise how much of what you hear is really the software talking; how easy it is to be average with this kind of music, and how hard it is to be really good!

At the moment, most of my teaching work is conducted on a 1-to-1 basis, with DJs and musicians. Not everybody wants to sit through a pre-structured Live course in a group, but there are a lot of people who want one-day sessions covering very specific topics, such as configuring their new hardware synth with Live, or preparing a Live set for their first gig.

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