

## WORKING WITH PADS AND LEADS

*“You have to be very aware that as soon as you start layering, you are also clogging up your mix... the more frequencies you add, the fuller your mix becomes.”*

—Armin van Buuren

### SUBCHAPTERS

- Layer Your Way to Huge Leads
- Keep Your Mix Clean
- Keep Your Leads and Vocals Out of Each Other's Way
- Pads Are Crucial (Even When You Don't Notice Them)
- Get Creative With Your Plug-Ins

### CHAPTER REVIEW

Most of the melodic and harmonic heavy lifting in a trance track is done with pads and leads. Pads are sustained, atmospheric sounds that sit more in the background of a track and usually play chords. Leads are more present, cutting sounds that usually play the main melody. Armin shows how he builds fuller, more complex-sounding pads and leads by layering—stacking multiple tracks of soft synths playing the same notes on top of each other. It's important to remember to use your EQ when you're layering synths or your mix will get clogged up fast. Use a frequency analyzer, or listen for what you think are the most important frequencies in the pad or lead sound you're using, and roll off as much of the rest as you can.

When working with pads it's important to consider how they interact with the rest of your track. Usually leads will fight with vocals for the same part of the frequency spectrum. Filtering out the top end of your leads, like Armin does in “You Are,” can leave room for vocal elements to shine through. Be intentional with your mix and let listeners know where to focus.

### EXPLORE THE PLUG-INS

Armin uses the following plug-ins in this lesson:

- [Nexus 2](#)
- [Sylenth1](#)
- [FabFilter Saturn](#)
- [ValhallaRoom](#)
- [ArtsAcoustic Reverb](#)
- [Dimension Expander](#)

### LEARN MORE

- What is distortion and how does it work? Learn more [here](#).
- Armin often discusses the “transients” of a given sound. Transients are high-amplitude, short-duration sounds at the beginning of musical waveforms—the “attack” in other words. Transients are the key to making things sound crisp, clear, and impactful. EQing and proper compression can both help make your transients stand out better.
- Learn more about EQ and how to use it [here](#).

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### ASSIGNMENT

- Build on your melodies from the previous chapter by layering your leads and pads. EQ your sounds so they stay out of each others' way in the mix. Listen for the transients of your leads. Are they hitting you hard enough? Play around with the EQ and compression to see if you can bring them out more. Share your layered sketches in [The Hub](#).