



03. START MAKING DRUM AND BASS



Start Making Drum & Bass

A Beginner's Guide to Producing Drum & Bass Without Getting Lost. Drum & Bass can feel intimidating, the drums are fast, the basslines are heavy, the mix needs to be clean, and professional tracks can seem impossible to recreate. But DnB is not magic. It is a system. Once you understand the basic ingredients, you can start building tracks without guessing. This guide will walk you through drums, bass, drops, arrangement, and more, step by step, sound by sound. The goal is simple: make something, finish it, and learn from it.



1

Build the Drums

Kick, snare, hats, breaks, and groove

2

Write the Bass

Sub, mid layers, and the Reese

3

Create the Drop

One clear idea with contrast and energy

4

Arrange the Track

Intro, build, drop, breakdown, outro

5

Finish Something

Export a rough version and move forward

Part 1: What Makes Drum & Bass Sound Like Drum & Bass?

Drum & Bass is built around a handful of core elements that work together to create its signature energy. Understanding these ingredients is your first step toward building tracks with intention rather than guessing. At its core, DnB is defined by a fast tempo, a strong breakbeat or drum groove, heavy sub bass, tension and release, and clean low-end control. Most producers feel the energy change every 8 or 16 bars, that rhythm of transformation is what keeps a DnB track alive from start to finish.

The Core Elements

- Fast tempo (160-180 BPM)
- Strong breakbeat or drum groove
- Heavy sub bass
- Bass movement and rhythm
- Tension and release
- Clean low-end control
- Energy changes every 8-16 bars

The Classic Track Structure

- Intro - Atmosphere, DJ space
- Build - Tension before the drop
- Drop 1 - Main drums, bass, hook
- Breakdown - Reset and breathe
- Build 2 - Tension returns
- Drop 2 - Variation or extra energy
- Outro - Clean exit

 A common starting BPM for beginners is **174 BPM**. It gives you the classic DnB speed without overthinking the tempo choice.

You do not need to overthink the tempo when you are starting out. 174 BPM is your friend. It sits right in the sweet spot of classic DnB energy, fast enough to feel urgent, controlled enough to let your drums breathe. Once you have built a few tracks at 174, you can begin experimenting with tempo as a creative choice rather than a technical unknown.

Part 2 & 3: Structure and the DnB Drum Foundation

Before sound design, before mixing, before anything else, you need structure and you need drums. A DnB track without a clear map feels like a loop. A DnB track without strong drums feels like it has no engine. These two foundations work together: the structure tells you where the energy goes, and the drums deliver it.

📌 **Exercise 1 - Build the Empty Arrangement:** Open your DAW. Set the tempo to 174 BPM. Create empty markers for: Intro, Build, Drop 1, Breakdown, Build 2, Drop 2, and Outro. Do not write music yet. Only create the structure. A finished track starts with a map, not with a perfect sound.



Kick

Creates movement. Places the groove in time and drives forward momentum in the pattern.



Snare

Creates impact. The most important hit in DnB, it must cut, feel strong, and lock in the backbeat.



Hi-Hats

Creates speed and motion. Hats give the groove its rapid feel without overwhelming the main hits.



Break Layer

Creates character. A sampled breakbeat adds texture, rawness, and the human feel DnB is known for.



Ghost Notes

Creates groove. Quiet drum hits that add rhythm and life without competing with the main snare.

✅ **Exercise 2 - Kick and Snare First:** Create a 2-bar loop at 174 BPM using only kick and snare. Loop it for 5 minutes and adjust until your head moves. Ask yourself: Does the snare hit hard enough? Does the kick create movement? If the kick and snare don't work alone, more layers won't fix the drums.

Part 4: Hi-Hats, Breaks, and Ghost Notes

Once your kick and snare groove is locked in, it is time to add speed and texture. This is where DnB drums come alive, but it is also where beginners most often go wrong. The instinct is to add everything loud and fast. The reality is that speed in DnB comes from restraint and hierarchy. Every element has a role, and the main snare always wins the fight for attention.

Hi-hats create motion by filling the space between your main hits. Breaks create character by adding the raw, sampled human feel that DnB has always been built on. Ghost notes create groove by slipping in quiet rhythmic detail that makes the listener feel something without being able to pinpoint exactly what. A ghost snare, a quiet kick shuffle, a small percussive tap, these are the details that separate a lifeless drum loop from one that moves people.

What Each Layer Does

Closed Hi-Hats

Fill space between hits and add rhythmic density without stealing focus.

Open Hi-Hats

Add accent and swing. Use sparingly, they draw the ear.

Break Layer

Sits under or alongside your programmed drums. Turn it down, it supports, not replaces.

Ghost Hits

Quiet, secondary hits, usually 10–20 dB below the main snare. Felt more than heard.

Exercise 3 – Add Movement Without Mess

Start with your kick and snare loop. Add closed hats, one breakbeat layer, and two or three ghost hits. Now turn the break layer down. The break should add movement, not destroy the main drums.

Check yourself:

- Can I still clearly hear the main snare?
- Are the hats too sharp or piercing?
- Is the break making the groove better?
- Is the drum loop exciting or just busy?



Common Mistake: Adding too many loud hats and breaks. Fast does not mean everything needs to be loud. DnB drums are fast, but they still need hierarchy. Main hits first. Texture second.

Part 5 & 6: Sub Bass and Bass Layers

The sub bass is the foundation of Drum & Bass. It is not there to impress producers. It is there to move air. A good sub bass is in key, clean, controlled, not too busy, and working with the kick. The sub usually lives very low in the frequency spectrum, which means if it is wrong, the whole mix can fall apart. Most beginners reach for the most exciting, distorted bass patch first. Resist that. Start with a simple sine wave or clean sub. First, make the low-end work. Then add character.

Exercise 4 – Root Note Sub: Choose a key (example: F minor). Create a simple sub bass using only the root note F. Make a rhythm that works with the kick. Then add one or two extra notes from the scale. Ask: Is the sub in key? Does it fight the kick? Is there enough silence? A simple sub that grooves is better than a complicated sub that muddies the track.

The Three-Layer Bass Approach

In many DnB tracks, the bass is not one sound, it is a system of layers working together. Each layer has a job. If a layer has no job, it should not be there. The secret is that these layers must sound good together, not just impressive on their own. Stacking big sounds does not create a big mix. Stacking complementary sounds does.

Sub Layer

The clean low-end foundation. Simple. Mono. Controlled. This is where the weight lives. Nothing fancy, just locked-in with the kick.

Mid Bass Layer

The character layer. Growls, Reese movement, distortion, tone, and personality. This is what listeners remember when they think of the bassline.

Top Texture Layer

Optional. Noise, grit, stereo width, or high-frequency movement. Quiet and supportive. Remove it and the bass should still work completely.

Exercise 5 – Three-Layer Bass Test: Create three bass tracks: sub, mid bass, and texture. Mute the texture, does the bass still work? Mute the mid bass, does the sub hold the track? Mute the sub, does the bass lose all its weight? Every bass layer needs a job. If it has no job, remove it.

Part 7 & 8: The Reese Bass and the Drums-Bass Relationship

The Reese bass is one of the most iconic sounds in Drum & Bass. It usually comes from detuned saw waves combined with filtering, distortion, chorus, or phasing. A Reese can sound dark, wide, dirty, smooth, aggressive, rolling, metallic, or emotional depending on how it is shaped. But no matter how you design it, a Reese should never destroy the sub. The low-end needs control, which means removing low frequencies from the Reese and letting a separate, clean sub handle the bottom.

Exercise 6 - Simple Reese Patch

Open a synth and start with two saw waves with slight detune. Add a low-pass filter, some distortion, and filter movement from automation or an LFO. Then cut low-end from the Reese layer and add a clean sub underneath. Ask yourself:

- Is the Reese too wide in the low-end?
- Is it fighting the sub?
- Does the movement match the groove?
- Is it interesting without being messy?

📌 A good DnB bass is not only heavy. It is **controlled**.

Kick vs. Sub: The Core Relationship

DnB is not drums plus bass, it is drums *with* bass. The kick and sub need to work together. When they hit at the same time with the same energy, they fight. You can fix this with:

- Better rhythm choices
- Shorter kick tail
- Shorter sub note length
- Sidechain compression
- Volume automation
- Choosing better samples

⚠️ Beginners often try to fix kick-sub conflict with mixing. Sometimes the real fix is arrangement, move the note, shorten it, or choose a better kick sample.

✅ **Exercise 7 - Kick vs. Sub Check:** Loop your drop. Mute everything except kick, snare, and sub. Listen quietly, then louder. Ask: Does the kick disappear? Does the sub swallow the kick? Is the sub too long? Adjust only rhythm and note length before reaching for any plugins. The cleanest mix often starts before mixing.

Part 9 & 10: Melodies, Atmosphere, and The Drop

Not every DnB track needs a big, soaring melody. But every track needs a vibe, a feeling that makes the listener want to stay. Melodic elements in DnB can range from lush pads and chord stabs to vocal chops, plucks, and atmospheric textures. The key rule in DnB melody writing is: space matters. If the bass is busy, keep the melody simple. If the drums are dense, leave room. If a vocal phrase is important, do not bury it under unnecessary synths. Less is almost always more when the low-end is already carrying so much weight.

- ✓ **Exercise 8 – One Melody, Three Roles:** Write a simple 4-note melody. Then create three versions: (1) Intro atmosphere : slow, filtered, lots of space. (2) Drop hook : short, rhythmic, more aggressive. (3) Background texture : quiet, delayed, supportive. The same musical idea can serve different sections. You don't always need a new melody. You need a new role.

Building the Drop

The drop is the main payoff of your track. But a drop is not just "everything loud." Power comes from contrast and focus, not from layering every sound you have. The most common beginner mistake is making the intro feel quiet and spacious, then making the drop feel crowded and overwhelming. Crowded does not mean powerful. A great drop has a strong drum groove, a clear bass idea, a controlled sub, and one main hook or phrase that the listener can actually hear and remember.

Strong Drum Groove

The drop needs to move. If the drums don't groove, the energy won't land no matter how heavy the bass is.

Clear Bass Idea

One memorable bassline or phrase that drives the section. Not five competing bass ideas, one strong one.

Controlled Sub

The sub must sit clean under everything. It provides power without muddying the mix.

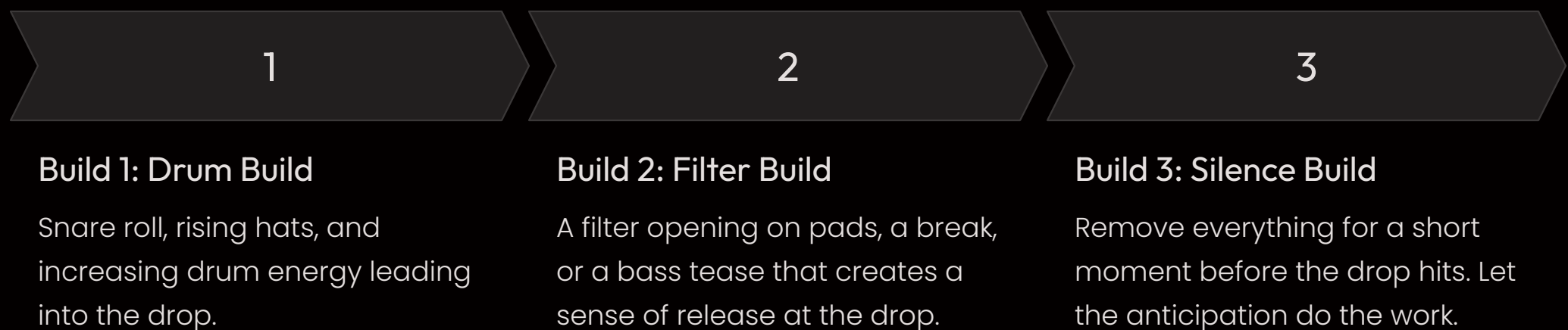
Energy Contrast

The drop must feel different from what came before. The build creates the anticipation, the drop delivers the release.

- i **Exercise 9 – The One-Idea Drop:** Build a 16-bar drop. You are allowed: drums, sub, one bass idea, one melodic or vocal idea, and FX. No unlimited layers. Ask: What is the main idea? Can I explain this drop in one sentence? If the drop has five main ideas, it has no main idea.

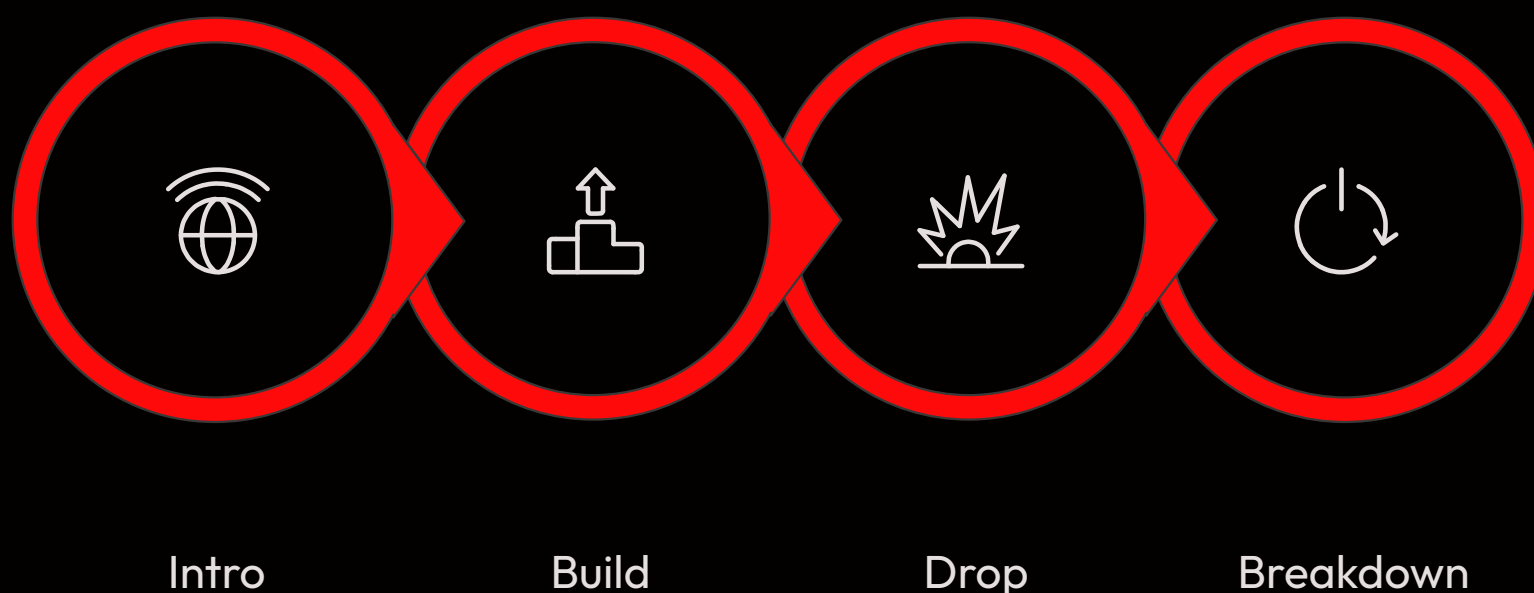
Part 11 & 12: Build-Ups, Transitions, and Arrangement

Build-ups create tension before the drop. They do not need to be complicated, flashy, or packed with every riser sound you own. A build-up can use drum rolls, rising pitch, filter opening, reverb tails, vocal phrases, FX, or even silence. The best transition is not always the biggest riser, sometimes the most powerful thing you can do is remove everything for a brief moment right before the drop hits. Silence before a drop can be stronger than any sound.



The 8-Bar Change Rule

A DnB track needs movement. Every 8 or 16 bars, something should change, but it does not need to be dramatic. Small changes keep the track alive without confusing the listener. The rule of thumb: if nothing changes, the track feels like a loop. If too much changes, the track feels confused. Balance repetition and variation by making deliberate, intentional choices about what evolves and what stays constant.



Arrangement is controlled evolution. Every change should feel like a natural step forward, not a random event. Use your 64-bar drop as a practice canvas, make one small change every 8 bars and listen to how the track transforms from a static loop into something that breathes and moves.

- ✓ **Exercise 10 & 11:** Create three build-ups into the same drop and listen to which one makes the drop hit hardest. Then create a 64-bar drop and make one small change every 8 bars, add a hat variation, change bass response, remove drums for one beat, bring in a new break layer. Arrangement is not improvisation. It is a plan.

Part 13, 14 & 15: Mixing, Common Mistakes, and Subgenres

DnB mixing can get complicated fast because there is so much happening at high speed. The key as a beginner is to resist the urge to mix too early. Build the song first. Then mix. Your priority order is always: kick and snare clarity, controlled sub, bass that doesn't mask the drums, hats that don't destroy the high-end, and headroom on the master. Loudness comes last, chase balance first.

-10	-16	-6
Kick / Snare Peak	Sub Bass Peak	Master Bus Target
Around -10 to -12 dBFS. Clear and punchy, not too hot.	Around -15 to -18 dBFS. Controlled and clean, not fighting the kick.	Around -6 to -3 dBFS before mastering. Leave headroom. Loud comes later.

Common Beginner Mistakes

- 1

Too Much Bass

Heavy bass is good. Uncontrolled bass makes the track sound smaller, not bigger.
- 2

Weak Snare

DnB needs a strong snare. If it doesn't cut, the drop loses all its impact.
- 3

Busy Drums, No Groove

Fast drums are not enough. The rhythm still needs bounce and purpose.
- 4

No Arrangement

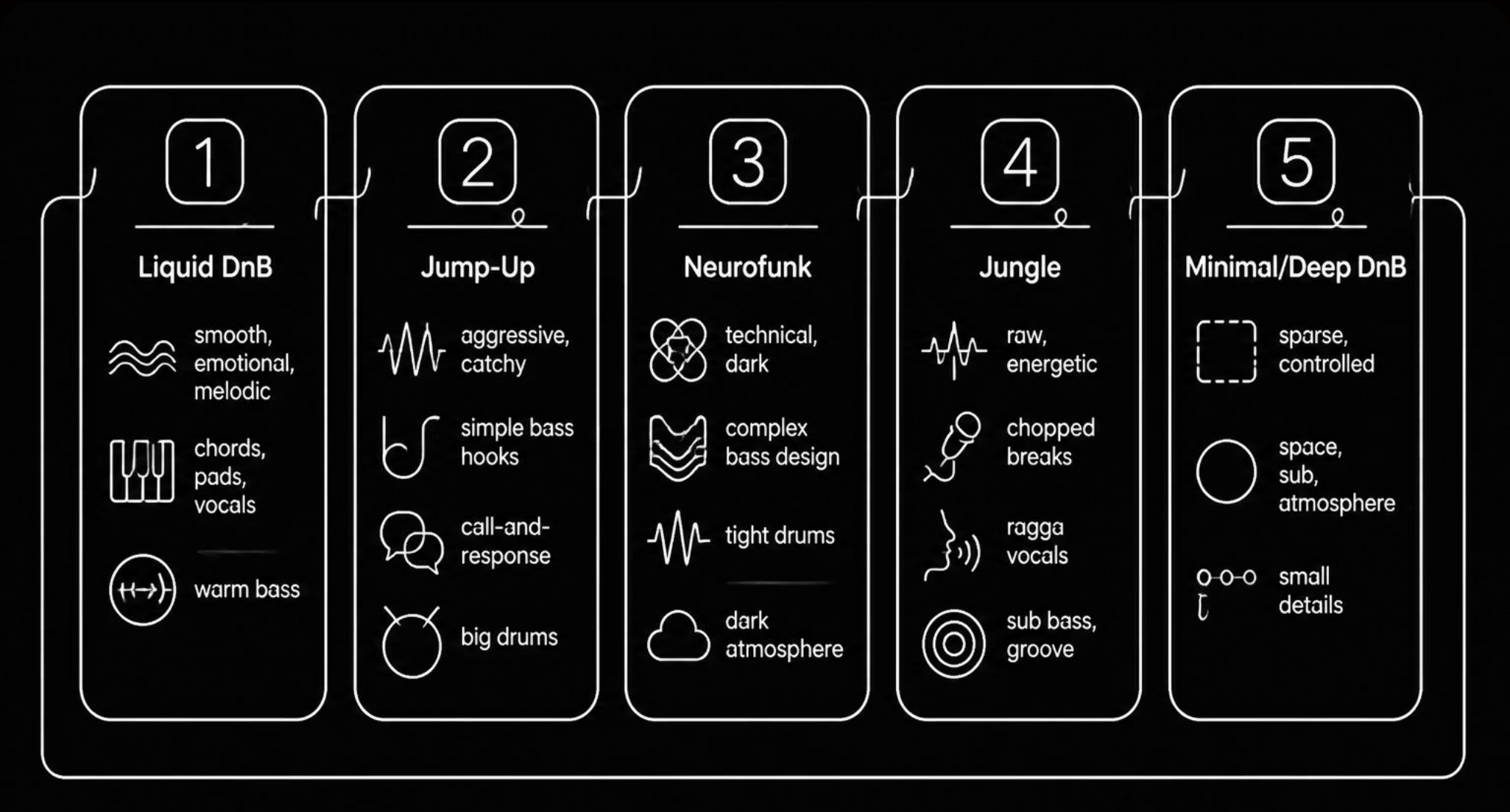
A 16-bar loop is not a track. You need clear sections with intention.
- 5

Mixing Too Early

Don't spend two hours mixing an 8-bar loop. Build the song first, then mix.

Beginner DnB Subgenre Guide

You don't need to master every style right away, but knowing what direction you're heading helps you make focused decisions about sound design, groove, and energy.



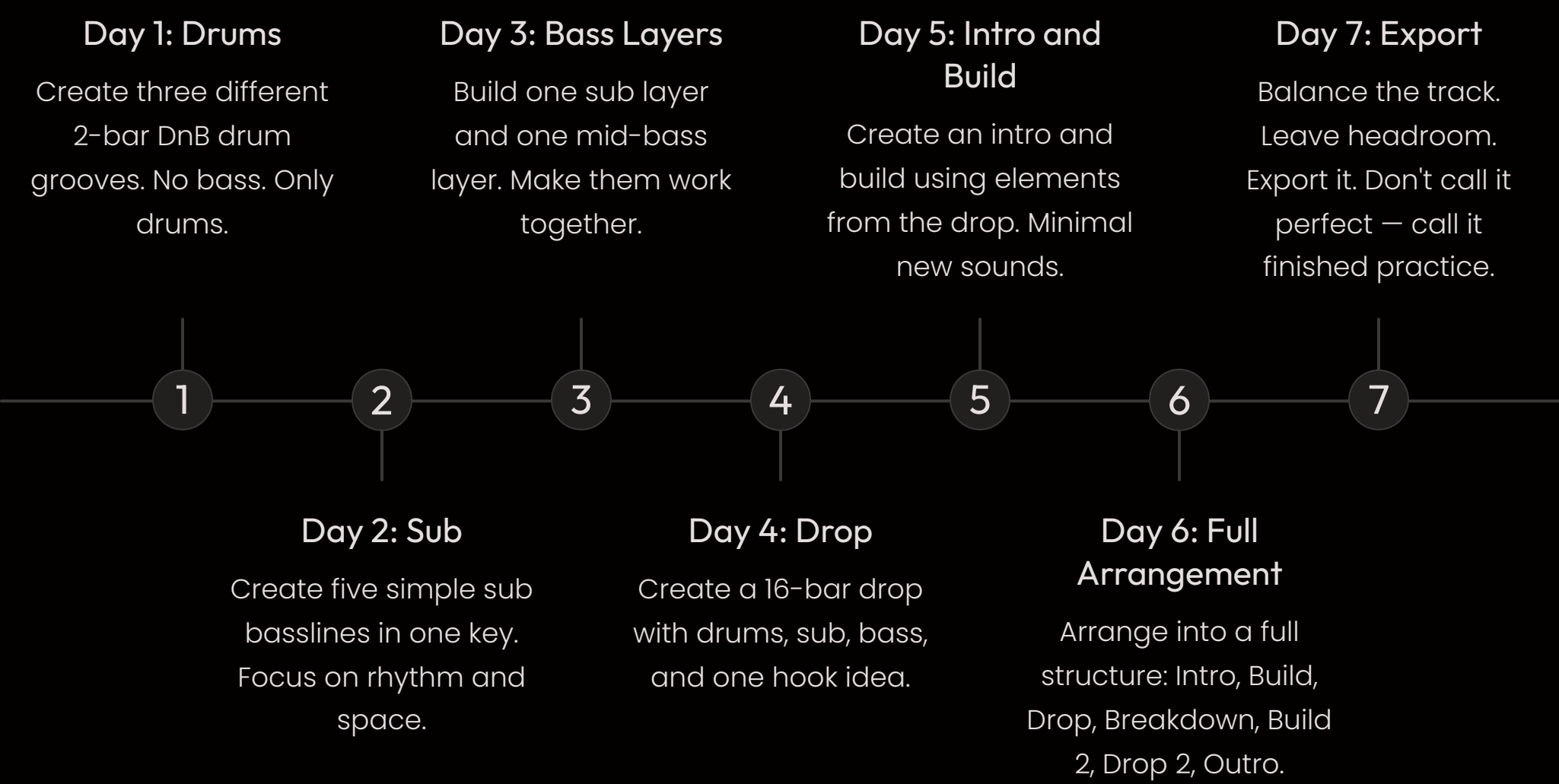
 Pick **one direction** for your first track. Do not try to make every subgenre at once. Liquid DnB or Jump-Up are the most beginner-friendly starting points.

The First DnB Track Formula and 7-Day Challenge

When you don't know where to start, follow the formula. It won't make your first track perfect, but it will make your first track finished. And finished is worth infinitely more than perfect when you're learning. Every step in this process builds a skill. Every finished track teaches you something that no tutorial can replace. The goal is not to make a DnB anthem on day one. The goal is to become the kind of producer who finishes DnB tracks.



The 7-Day Beginner DnB Challenge



Track one teaches drums. Track two teaches sub. Track three teaches bass movement. Track four teaches arrangement. Track five teaches mixing. Every finished track teaches something. Start simple. Make the drums move. Tune the sub. Control the bass. Create tension. Drop with purpose. Arrange the track. Export it. Then make another one.