The Fifths — User Manual

The Fifths Chord Progression Player · version 2.4.1 · nol sounds · Reason 14 or later

The Fifths is a **Player** for Reason. Placed above an instrument, it invents chord progressions and plays them for you: you choose the key and the mood, it suggests the progression, you fine-tune it.



One-minute start

1. Create an instrument in the rack (a synth, say), then — **with that device selected** — create The Fifths: it lands above it, in the player area.
2. Press **Run**, bottom left — or start Reason's transport: the progression plays on its own, in the rhythm of the step sequencer at the bottom of the panel.
3. Want something else? Click the round ↻ button on the right of the chord row: a new progression is drawn in the same key. The ↻ button on the right of the grid draws a new rhythm.
4. To play the chords from your keyboard instead, set **Play** to **Trigger**: every note you play fires the next chord of the progression.

Everything else in this manual is fine-tuning.

The panel

The circle of fifths sits in the middle, with the KEY and ADVENTURE settings on its left and PLAY, CHORDS and INTENSITY on its right. The chord row runs across the panel below it, and the step sequencer fills the bottom.

Colour carries meaning on this panel: every key has its own colour, taken from its place on the circle of fifths — C red, G orange, D yellow, and so on round the wheel to F pink. A relative minor shares the colour of its major (A minor is red, like C). The chord row uses the same colours, so a progression that stays close to home keeps to a few neighbouring colours, and an adventurous one lights up the whole wheel.

The **On** button, top left, switches the player on. Switched off, it simply passes through whatever you play on the keyboard, unchanged — handy for comparing. The panel then goes quiet: the menus and values are hidden, the displays are cleared and the circle reads **DEVICE TURNED OFF**; the knobs and the Octave selector stay where they are.

The **Run** button, bottom left of the settings, starts and stops the player on its own in Auto mode, the default (see PLAY below). Its play triangle lights up green while the player is running.

When Reason's **Bypass All** is on for the players, the panel looks the same as when switched off, and the circle reads **DEVICE BYPASSED**: the player generates nothing.

KEY — the key

Control	What it does
Key	The tonic, from C to B. Everything else follows it.
Mode	Major, Minor, Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian. The mode colours the whole thing: Dorian sounds softer than a plain minor, Lydian brighter than a plain major, Mixolydian bluesier.
Length	How many chords the progression has, from 2 to 8. Click the value and drag up or down to change it.

Changing Key or Mode **transposes the existing progression** instead of replacing it: the chord sequence keeps its logic, it simply changes colour.

PROGRESSION — the chord row

The strip along the bottom shows your chords, one per cell: the name (C, Am, Fmaj7…) with the roman numeral below it (I, vi, IV…), and a bar of the chord's colour on top. The cell of the sounding chord fills with that colour.

- ↻ **button (right)**: generates a new progression.
- **Click a cell**: selects it (underlined in white). That is the step that will receive whatever chord you pick on the circle of fifths.
- **Click the bottom-right corner of a cell**: adds or removes a **padlock**. A locked chord survives regeneration — keep the first and the last, and let the middle churn.
- **Right-click a cell**: sets the richness of that one chord (see CHORDS below).

Cells beyond **Length** are greyed out: they keep their contents, they are simply not played.

CIRCLE OF FIFTHS

The circle does two jobs: showing and choosing.

- The **outer** ring holds the major chords, the **inner** ring their relative minors, each in its colour. Chords that belong to the key are bright, the others dark. The tonic has a ring inside its cell, the sounding chord turns white with a halo of its colour, and the chord of the selected step is drawn larger.
- The white lines trace the **path** of your progression: the closer two chords sit on the circle, the smoother the move between them.
- The centre shows the current chord, in its colour; when stopped, the key.
- **Click a cell** to drop that chord into the selected step of the row. The selection then moves on by itself, so you can write a whole progression in a few clicks.

ADVENTURE — how daring the generator is

The **Adventure** knob decides how bold the generated progressions are. It only applies when you regenerate.

Value	What you get
0–30 %	Chords of the key only, classic moves.
30–70 %	Secondary dominants and borrowed chords: colours that "call" the next chord.
70–100 %	Modulations to neighbouring then distant keys, and tritone substitutions.

Closed Loop (on by default): the progression starts on the tonic and returns to it through a cadence, so it loops seamlessly. Switch it off for harmony that drifts — each regeneration then continues from the last chord of the previous one.

CHORDS — chord richness and octave

- **Color**: **Triads** (three notes), **7ths** (seventh chords) or **9ths** (ninth chords). The sevenths and ninths used are the ones belonging to the key, so the result stays in tune with no further setting.
- **Octave**: the octave the notes are played in, from −2 to +2 octaves. Click a value to select it, or drag along the selector: low on the left, high on the right — and the same way up in the automation lane, where +2 is at the top.

You can also **pin the richness of one particular chord**, by right-clicking its cell in the row:

Choice	Effect
Global	The step follows the Color setting. This is the default.
Triad, **7th**, **9th**	The step keeps that richness whatever Color does.

A pinned step carries a small **3**, **7** or **9** in its top corner. This is the simple way to save the colour for one chord — a ninth on the dominant only, for instance.

Notes are voiced automatically so that each chord moves as little as possible from the previous one: the sequence sounds connected without you having to do anything about it.

PLAY — how the chords are played

Control	What it does
Play	**Auto** (the default): the player runs on its own, locked to Reason's transport. **Trigger**: every note you play fires the next chord, held for as long as you hold the key.
Rate	In Auto, how long each chord lasts: 1 beat, 2 beats, 1 bar or 2 bars (listed as "Chord Rate" in the automation and Remote menus).
Pattern	In Auto, the rhythmic figure (below).
Intensity	How hard the notes are played, accents included.

The patterns:

Pattern	What you hear
Held	The chord held, once per chord change.
Quarters	The chord on every beat.
Offbeats	The chord on the offbeats.
Bass+Chord	The bass held, the upper voices on every beat.
Oompah	Bass and chord alternating, like a stride accompaniment.
Arp Up	The notes one at a time, from the bass upwards.
Sequencer	Your own grid decides (next section). This is the default.

In Auto, playback follows the loops and jumps of Reason's sequencer. Start the song in the middle of a chord, jump to another bar or loop back, and the chord (or note) that should be sounding at that point is played at once for what is left of it, instead of waiting for the next one. When the transport stops, everything goes silent.

Run lets Auto mode play without Reason's transport, like the Run button of a drum machine:

- Reason stopped: **Run** starts the progression (and the grid) from the top, at the song tempo, until you press **Run** again or click Stop. Handy for trying patterns and settings without playing the song.
- Reason playing: **Run** pauses the player, and a second press brings it back in time with the song.

The Run button is greyed out in Trigger mode, where there is nothing to run, and while the player is off or bypassed. It can be assigned to a control surface (Remote), but it cannot be automated.

SEQUENCER — your own rhythm

With **Pattern** on **Sequencer** — the default — the grid at the bottom of the panel takes over from the ready-made patterns. It runs on its own clock, independently of chord changes — a short grid repeats on every chord, a long one runs across several.

A new player starts with a one-bar accompaniment of 16 sixteenths: the chord on the downbeat, the bass on beat 3, the chord again on beat 4, and the upper voices in between, off the beat. Change it, generate another, or load a ready-made pattern into it.

With another pattern, the grid is not played: it reads **SET PATTERN TO SEQUENCER** and its settings are hidden. Choosing **Sequencer** in the Pattern menu also switches Play to **Auto**. If Play is set back to Trigger (by automation, say), the grid reads **SET PLAY TO AUTO**. Your grid is kept either way, and comes back as soon as it is played again.

The settings, on the left:

- **Steps**: the length of the grid, 1 to 32 steps. Click the value and drag up or down to change it.
- **Res**: how long a step lasts, from 1/4 to 1/32, triplets included (1/8T, 1/16T).
- **Density**: how full the generator aims to make the grid.
- The round ↻ button, right of the grid, **generates a rhythm**.

The grid: three lanes stacked, one column per step:

Lane	What it shows	What you can do
Top	What the step plays: **C** chord, **B** bass, **U** upper voices, **1**–**6** a single note	Click to switch on or off, **drag** to paint several steps
Middle	How hard the note is played (bar)	Click or drag at the height you want
Bottom	Length: 25, 50, 75, 100 % of the step, then **tie**	Repeated clicks cycle through these values

A **tie** continues the note of the previous step instead of striking it again: that is how you hold a chord across several steps. It is drawn as a small bridge towards the column on its left.

Right-clicking a column opens a menu: what the step plays (Chord, Bass, Upper voices, Note 1 to 6), **Lock** to protect it from the generator, and **Load Pattern** to load one of the six ready-made patterns into the grid and edit it from there.

Generation, when you click ↻: it places notes according to **Density**, favouring strong beats. Below 35 % it holds chords on the strong beats using ties; above that it fills in eighths and sixteenths and adds single notes, which gives an arpeggio effect. Locked steps never move. The grid's ↻ does not touch the progression, and the progression's ↻ does not touch the grid.

The sounding step is underlined in white; steps beyond **Steps** are greyed out.

A few ways to use it

- **Finding ideas**: set Adventure around 50 %, click ↻ until a sequence appeals to you, lock the chords you want to keep, click again to refresh the rest.
- **Dressing up a progression you already know**: write it by clicking on the circle of fifths, then pick a pattern and an intensity.
- **Building your own groove**: select the Sequencer pattern, use **Load Pattern › Oompah** as a starting point, then move the steps and lengths around.
- **Recording the result**: the notes produced are real MIDI notes. Reason can capture them onto a track (Direct Record, or "Send To Track" in the device menu) so you can edit them by hand afterwards.
- **A/B with and without**: the **On** button switches the player off without removing it from the rack; you then play the instrument directly.
- **Changing things along the song**: the settings that change what you hear can be automated in Reason's sequencer (right-click › Edit Automation): On, Key, Mode, Length, Play mode, Rate, Pattern, Chord colour, Intensity, Octave, and the sequencer's Steps and Res. Switch to the relative minor for the bridge, move to Offbeats for the chorus, raise the intensity towards the end… Adventure, Closed Loop and Density only act when you click ↻, so they are not automatable; neither are the chords of the row, which you edit on the device.

What gets saved

The song keeps everything: key, mode, settings, progression, locks, per-step colours and the sequencer grid. The **On** switch is saved in the song too, but not in patches. Run is never saved: a song always opens stopped.