THE ARTIST VIBE DICTIONARY

40 words artists use to explain a beat, translated for producers

"Make it more electrical." — every artist, at some point

A

aggressive but chill *adj.*
Means: Both. At the same time.
What you do: Turn the hats up and the 808 down. Or the other way. They'll love either.

airy *adj.*
Means: There should be less of something.
What you do: Delete one element. Any element.

B

bounce *v.*
Means: They want to nod their head without noticing.
What you do: Move the snare 10 ms late. Say it's swing.

bright *adj.*
Means: Add a high-shelf. Or they just had coffee.
What you do: +2 dB at 10 kHz, send it back, wait an hour.

C

cinematic *adj.*
Means: Strings. They mean strings.
What you do: Add strings. Then a riser. Then more strings.

cloudy *adj.*
Means: Reverb, but make it emotional.
What you do: Put the whole beat through a reverb at 40% wet.

cold *adj.*
Means: Minor key, high reverb, no warmth whatsoever.
What you do: Cut 200–400 Hz. Add bells.

crunchy *adj.*
Means: Saturation. Or chips. Ask.
What you do: Bitcrush the snare. If not that, offer chips.

D

darker *adj.*
Means: Remove the one happy note.
What you do: Find the major third. Kill it.

dusty *adj.*
Means: Sounds like it was found, not made.
What you do: Low-pass at 9 kHz, add vinyl crackle, call it a sample.

E

electrical *adj.*
Means: Something should buzz. Nobody knows what.
What you do: A saw synth with an LFO on the cutoff. Or a bug zapper.

expensive *adj.*
Means: Like a Grammy, but the beat costs $30.
What you do: Add a piano and fewer elements. Expensive things are quiet.

F

fire *adj.*

Means: Good. Or too loud. Mostly too loud.

What you do: Do nothing. It's already fire.

floaty *adj.*

Means: The drums are too strict.

What you do: Take the kick out of the intro. Pads in.

G

glossy *adj.*

Means: Shiny like a car ad.

What you do: Exciter on the master bus, a chorus on the lead, done.

H

hard *adj.*

Means: Louder. Always louder.

What you do: Clip the 808. Then clip the clipper.

hit different *v.*

Means: They liked it more the first time.

What you do: Play it again from the start. It will hit different.

L

like a Tuesday *phr.*

Means: Nobody knows.

What you do: Agree. Never ask.

like a movie but in a basement *phr.*

Means: Big ideas, small budget.

What you do: Strings through a phone speaker filter.

like you're in a car but the car is sad *phr.*

Means: Emotional, rolling, nighttime.

What you do: Sidechain the pads to the kick, minor key, 140 BPM.

liquid *adj.*

Means: Smooth transitions, no hard cuts.

What you do: Add filter sweeps between every section.

M

make it cry *phr.*

Means: Emotional melody, high pitch.

What you do: Pitch the lead an octave up. Add a vocal chop going "ooh".

make it slap *phr.*

Means: The kick must hurt.

What you do: Layer a clap under the kick. Physically slap something.

moody *adj.*

Means: The tempo is fine but the soul is sad.

What you do: Detune something by 10 cents.

more 2016 *phr.*
Means: Nostalgia, but specific.
What you do: Rolling hi-hats, flute, one tag at the start.

N

needs that thing *phr.*
Means: There is a thing. It isn't there.
What you do: Add a crash at bar 9. That's usually the thing.

O

open *adj.*
Means: Wider. Somehow.
What you do: Widen the pad to 140%. Never the bass.

outer space *adj.*
Means: Reverb from another galaxy.
What you do: Reverse reverb into every hook.

P

purple *adj.*
Means: Colour of the beat. Don't question colours.
What you do: Add a soft pluck with lots of delay. That's purple.

R

rich *adj.*
Means: More layers. Fewer frequencies fighting.
What you do: Stack the chord in three octaves, cut the low ones.

S

smoky *adj.*
Means: Jazz chords at 2 AM.
What you do: Seventh chords, rhodes, a little vinyl.

spooky *adj.*
Means: Halloween but serious.
What you do: Music box melody, detuned, minor key.

swing but don't change anything *phr.*
Means: Impossible request.
What you do: Change nothing. Say you added swing.

T

the same but different *phr.*
Means: The most common request in history.
What you do: Send the same beat with a new name.

thick *adj.*
Means: More low-mids.
What you do: Saturate the 808 until it has an opinion.

U

underwater *adj.*
Means: Low-pass filter, entire beat.
What you do: Automate a low-pass from 300 Hz up to full in the intro.

V

vibey *adj.*

Means: Unclear. Positive.

What you do: Add lo-fi on the master and turn it down 3 dB.

W

warm *adj.*

Means: Less high-end. Or more love.

What you do: Tape saturation and -2 dB at 8 kHz.

wavy *adj.*

Means: Things should move left and right.

What you do: Auto-pan the hats. Chorus on the keys.

wet *adj.*

Means: More reverb. Not the other thing.

What you do: Increase the reverb send. Keep it professional.