

Zines 101 – A Quick Guide to Zines

What is a zine?

A zine (pronounced “zeen,” like “magazine”) is a self-published, small circulation, non-commercial booklet or magazine, usually produced by one person or a few individuals. Zines come in all shapes, sizes, topics, and formats. Most zines are photocopied, but they can also be printed offset, like a magazine or newspaper. Zines range from handwritten and sloppy to cut-and-paste (text pasted on top of background images) to artsy with handmade touches to produced on a computer with a professional looking layout. Zines may incorporate screenprinting, linoleum cuts, and hand-stitched bindings. Most zines have print runs of a couple dozen to a few hundred copies.

In a zine, you might find typos, improper grammar, and brilliant or radical or just plain honest ideas that you don't normally see in *Time*, *Newsweek*, or *People*. A zine can be about whatever subject its creator decides upon, or it may contain a variety of subjects and writing styles within the same issue. Zines can include personal essays, political discussions, fiction, craft or do-it-yourself advice, articles about music or movies, comics, poetry, reviews – anything under the sun, really. Zines are personal and idiosyncratic. The best thing about zines is this: There are no rules.

Where can I find zines?

Zines and other underground publications are hard to find or unavailable in stores, although you may be able to find zines in some libraries or at independent bookstores (especially in larger cities). The best way to find out about zines is through word of mouth and networking. There are several publications that review zines, giving ordering information for the zine as part of their review. There are also several online communities where zine publishers network and promote their zines. A few of these are listed at the end of this handout.

The best way to get a copy of a zine is to order it directly from the publisher, who will mail it to you. The asking price of a zine is usually a couple of dollars, to cover costs for printing and mailing. You should check with the publisher for his/her preferred method of payment, which may be cash, stamps, or PayPal. If you are sending cash in the mail you should always hide it well by concealing bills in sheets of paper. Zine publishers usually do not accept checks as payment. Some publishers may also be willing to trade a copy of their zine for a copy of yours.

Another common way to buy zines is through a distro (a zine distributor). Zine distros are usually managed by one person or a small group of people. They buy zines from publishers at a discount and then resell them. Many distros have online catalogs. Buying from a distro is a good way to get several zines at one time. Zine distros may also accept check, online, or credit card orders. Keep in mind, however, that zine publishers (who are usually losing money anyway) get a much smaller cut when you buy their zine from a store or distro.

Why publish a zine?

To see your work in print. To share what you created. To encourage others to be creative. To find and connect with other people who have similar interests. To get mail. To make new friends. To create the publication you always wished existed. To share information. To educate. To change people's minds. To teach yourself something new. To get something off your chest. To make yourself a better writer or artist. The reasons for publishing a zine are as diverse and unique as the individuals who create zines.

How do I make a zine?

There is no “wrong” way to make a zine. Your zine can be anything you want it to be; it can look any way you want it to look; it can include anything you want it to include.

There are several ways to approach making a zine. A good place to start is to think about what you want your zine to contain. You may want to read other zines first, to see what other people are doing. You may want to decide on the look and feel of your zine first – what size will it be, will it be handwritten or made using a computer – because that can affect how you proceed. Or you may want to jump in and start writing or drawing, and then decide on the look of the zine based on the content.

Depending on how you decide to design your zine, you may need access to some of these supplies: Sharpies, pens, pencils, typewriter or computer with a word processing program, scissors, glue stick, Exacto knife, scanner, ruler, clip art, tape, paper trimmer, stapler. Most likely you will need access to a photocopier.

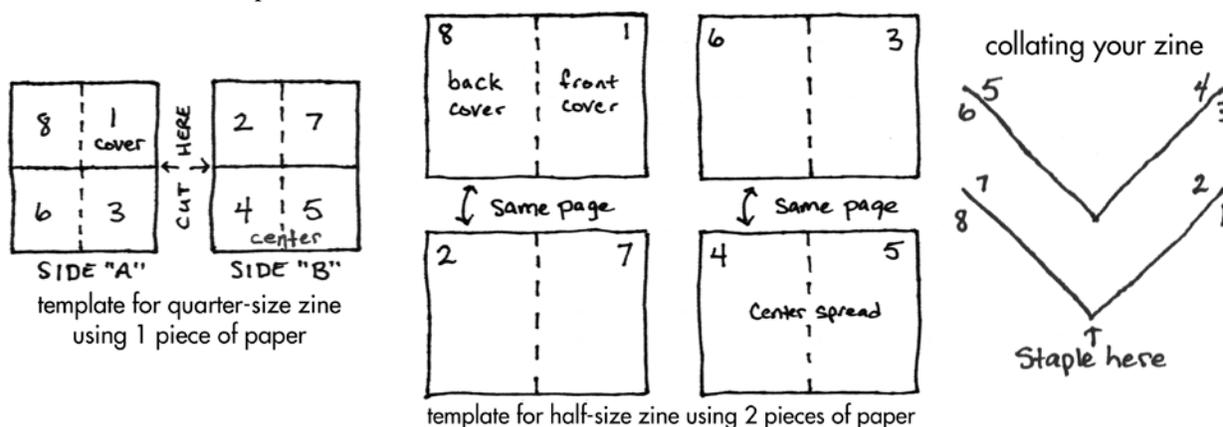
A few tips on making your zine:

- Give yourself a half-inch margin around the edges of the paper, to avoid having text or images cut off by the photocopier. Page numbers are also helpful (both to your readers *and* to you – when you start collating).
- Black and white originals with bold lines turn out best on a photocopier. Color pictures, text on top of a colored background, or intricate shading may not turn out well, depending on the quality of the copier.
- Be sure to give yourself time to edit your work. Don't be afraid to step back from your zine for a little bit. Give it room to breath so that you'll be happy with the finished product. Once you are really satisfied, then print it.
- The more you do yourself, the cheaper things get. Shop around and explore options; find the best quality for your time and money.

- A zine can be a great place to explore and express your feelings and to say things that you have always wanted to say, but once something is printed and distributed, there is no way to recall it. There is always the possibility that every person you know could see what you have printed. You should believe in and be able to stand up for what you print. The person who creates the publication is ultimately responsible for everything printed.
- Don't forget to include contact information! However, you should consider getting a post office box for correspondence and a separate email address for your online correspondence. The world is a dangerous place, and it is a good idea to protect your privacy. A pen name can help, but if you are making money off your publication and will be accepting checks, that can get tricky.

While you are creating your zine, you will need to plan the layout. The total number of pages you'll need to plan content for depends on the size of your zine. If you're creating a full-size zine (8½" x 11" printed on both sides), your page count needs to be divisible by 2. If you are creating a half-size, or digest size, zine (8½" x 11" folded in half), the page count needs to be divisible by 4. Each piece of paper will have four page segments – two pages on each side, with a margin (blank space) in the middle. Cut this in half and you've got a mini-size, or quarter-size, zine (in other words, eight page segments on each full-size sheet of paper).

Here are a few zine templates, to illustrate:



Once your zine is finished, head to the photocopier. For small-scale zines, photocopying is usually the most economical way to go. Some machines can collate your copies for you; otherwise, you'll have to collate by hand. After making your copies, you can fold and staple (or use other binding methods). Then you're ready to distribute your zine!

What do I do with my zine after it's published?

Now that your zine has been published, you need to get readers. One way to find readers is to send your zine to publications and websites that review zines. A few of the more popular ones are listed here. Be sure to include your contact information and the price you're charging.

- Broken Pencil, PO Box 203, Stn P, Toronto ON, M5S 2S7, Canada, www.brokenpencil.com
- Xerography Debt, Davida Gypsy Breier, PO Box 11064, Baltimore MD 21212, www.leekinginc.com

You can also promote your zine in a variety of online communities, such as:

- We Make Zines, <http://wemakezines.ning.com>
- Many zinesters also sell their zines on Etsy.com.

You may want to send your zine to one or more distros for consideration. Be sure to visit the distro's website or contact the distro's owner to see what kinds of zines they sell, whether they're currently taking new zines, and requirements or other details. A good list of distros, with links to their websites, can be found at ZineWiki (www.zinewiki.com).

Where can I find more information?

Stolen Sharpie Revolution is a do it yourself (DIY) guide to zines and zine publishing, including tips about photocopying, binding, layout, zine etiquette, dealing with distros, etc. Available from Portland Button Works (www.portlandbuttonworks.com), more info & resource listings at www.stolensharpierrevolution.org.

ZineWiki, www.zinewiki.com, is an open source encyclopedia about zines, zine distros, and other related topics.

Zine World's website, www.undergroundpress.org, has event listings, a list of zine libraries and infoshops, how-to articles, and links to many other resources.

Zinebook, www.zinebook.com, has articles on zine history, legal issues, how-to advice, and more.