

## How to Make a Zine?

<http://www.roquestates.com/kit.zines.html>

"Zines are publications done for the love of doing them, not to make a profit or a living. Most zines are photocopied. Some are printed offset like a magazine but with a print run of hundreds or possibly thousands instead of hundreds of thousands or more. In a zine, you might find typos, misspelled words, improper grammar and brilliant or radical or just plain honest ideas that simply aren't allowed in Time, Newsweek or People Magazine."

-A Reader's Guide to the Underground Press

Making and reading zines is a hugely enjoyable part of my life. So why was I so cynical when I was approached to run a workshop on how to make zines and do political graffiti for the last Media Circus? The conversation went like this: 'Can you run a how-to workshop on DIY media, like political graffiti and zines?' 'No.' I said 'DIY. You just do it yourself. I'm sure people can figure out how.'

I admit there was no need to be so rude (sorry Andrew), but I stand by the general sentiment. I don't think a lack of know-how stops anyone from making a zine or writing on walls. But other things do.

This article is about spreading the idea of zinemaking, not teaching people how to make them. The most popular justification for zinemaking is a kind of anti-corporate political one: that zines are a place where people can expound brave political ideas and challenge 'the dominant paradigm' free from the control of bigger media forces. This is true, but not all zines are so overtly political and it's not only the political ones that are important. In fact, the content of a zine is never the most important thing; just making zines is an amazing and useful process. In zines, people share stories about their lives, develop critical perspectives and vent their angst. They move their readers to relate to other people, feel sad, think, get angry, get bored or have an orgasm. Zines give people a forum to discuss their shared obsessions.

In a society that expects us to be content with the joys of consumerism, wage slavery and nuclear familydom, just printing home made satire about political issues that bother you and distributing them to your friends is worthy. Plus it gives you a feeling of having actually made something.

I don't always buy into the big arguments about self-publishing saving the world, but I do think that zine-making can have really positive effects on people and can sustain communities who don't have (or need) bigger forums for their ideas. For all those reasons, I think the practice of zine-making should be spread far and wide, beyond the reaches of the (sometimes narrow) communities it takes place in. So, how to do this? Why don't more people make zines?

Exposure is probably the most obvious factor: if you've never seen or heard of zines you're less likely to make one (although there are cases where people have amazingly come up with the idea of photocopying and distributing their stuff all by their little selves). Confidence, access to materials, and language skills are probably some other factors.

Most 'how to make a zine' guides are incredibly patronising-as if people really can't figure out by looking at a zine that you can just photocopy yr stuff, fold it, and staple it. The guide in New Pollution (published as part of the Loud festival) even instructed you in how to collate your photocopies: put all your pages in sequential order on a table and pick them up one by one. Duh.

The important thing, if you care about other people making zines, is not to insult them but to show them that they can make zines and that it's a great thing to do.

Some ideas I've come across include:

- Getting zines out to somewhere other than a few activist demos
- Zine-makers have conducted workshops in schools and factories, collated the material of young people who live in squats, left their zines on buses and in railway stations.
- Talking about zines and the benefits they provide both to communities and individual zine-makers.
- Encouraging people who have ideas or art or something to make a zine and share their stuff can work really well.
- Zines in libraries and libraries of zines are both great ways to expose people to a whole range of material.

This has been a strange answer to the 'how to make a zine' question I was originally posed. In case you wanted some more concrete answers, here's a few tips.

#### The basics

- Obvious stuff. Anything you want to print is okay: comics, stories, photos, potato prints, copies of your sticker collection. Having said this, it's sometimes good to think about finding the right audience for your work, making things legible, and trying to say something original.
- Trade zines with other zinesters! If you're doing this by mail rather than face-to-face it's best to write first, or accept that they might not send you a zine if they don't like yours, or if it seems like an unfair deal-like 2 pages for a book, etc. Or they might just be lazy about replying.
- Include a note and strange gifts when writing to strangers.
- Write (or call) and give feedback to people whose zines you read, it's depressing and discouraging to feel like you're sending your work out into a vacuum.

#### Photocopying/Printing

- Scamming photocopying is better than paying for it (but I guess you could have figured that out). Try your student union or school office, workplaces, etc.
- Patronize local xerox machine shops and make friends with xerox machine operators
- If you want your art to look old school (only black and white,) chose the Text or Basic option on the photocopier. For grey as well as black and white (better photos etc.) choose a Photo or High Quality option.
- Screenprinting covers is a cheap way to get colour and visual awesomeness.
- If you want to get a really pro finish or make thousands you might be better off getting offset printing. Call around for lots of quotes and get someone helpful.