

"i want to  
make a  
zine some  
day"

no offense, but

why haven't you?



PLEASE,  
JUST  
MAKE  
A ZINE!

by Wesley Sueker

If you're a zinester, you've probably heard something along the lines of "That's so cool, I've always wanted to try making zines." This zine will validate the inevitable frustration that comes from hearing that statement and not knowing how to respond.

If you're not a zinester, you've probably said something along the lines of "That's so cool, I've always wanted to try making zines." This zine will help you figure out what's holding you back, gtfover yourself and just do it.



"I WANT TO MAKE A ZINE SOMEDAY." NO OFFENSE, BUT WHY HAVEN'T YOU?

(a.k.a. sometimes I hate navigating conversations)

★ (a.k.a. please, just make a zine!!!) ★

Given that I make zines myself and that I work on my library's zine collection, I end up hearing something along those lines all the time. I think any creator has probably heard something similar about whatever their medium is. You say that you like painting or photography or making zines, and someone goes "That's so cool, I've always wanted to try that." I kinda hate that phrase, because what they really mean to say is:

>>> "I've always wanted to try that, but something has held me back, and I'm not interested in trying to figure out what that is." <<<

The line is always a conversation ender. Because there's no natural response to it. No matter what I say after that, I end up against a wall - because they have become the subject of the conversation (by saying "I've always wanted to try that"), but they don't really want to talk about themselves or their relationship with X. (I'm just going to refer to zinemaking from here on out, but it equally applies to any medium and probably any hobby).

### POP QUIZ

"I've always wanted to try that, but something has held me back, and I'm not interested in trying to figure out what that is."

What is the right response?

- A. How come?
- B. I really like it because...
- C. It's really fun, I hope you try it!

Option A is tempting. Because everyone likes to talk about themselves, right? And why would they say that if they didn't want to talk about it?

But it's a trap. Because whatever the real reason they haven't tried it out is, it's something that will be too personal to talk about with you. Very rarely will someone respond with "eh, the inspiration just hasn't struck me yet", or something equally casual that indicates they are comfortable with not having made a zine yet and confident that it will happen when they're ready.

The thing holding them back might be as simple as being overwhelmed and busy, not feeling like they have the bandwidth to try a new activity. You'd think there'd be no shame in that, but you forget that in capitalism, any moment you're not maximizing your time and pushing towards some goal is wasted. So now they've accidentally put themselves in the position of saying they have a goal (trying zinemaking) that they are not working towards (which under capitalism is a failure). You have reached the Personal Failure ending.

The thing holding them back might be something more complex, like a lack of self-esteem; I call this the "Inner Demons" ending. This will come out as something like "I don't think it'd turn out good", "I'm not really an artist", or even "I'm not creative enough". If you reach this point, you've already lost, because nothing you can say will change their mind without serious digging that's not gonna happen here. You could say "since when does a zine have to be good?", or "you don't have to be an artist to make a zine", or "that's ridiculous, you're super creative!". The best thing you can say at this point is just to call it what it is: "that sounds like negative self-talk to me". But no matter what, you're in deep now, and you're probably approaching therapist territory.

\* Note that they may also say "I don't know what to make a zine about" - beware! They are not looking for brainstorm ideas, nor are they seeking encouragement! This is their attempt at ending the conversation before reaching the Personal Failure ending or the Inner Demons ending!

So let's move on to Option B. This one is also tempting, and it's probably something you can get away with among good friends who actually care about you. And if you're willing to take the risk, you can sometimes end up with an okay conversation, as long as you make things sound interesting enough to hold their attention.

But in general, if they wanted to know what you liked about it, they would have asked. Following this path will typically get you short, meaningless responses like "that's nice", and the conversation will feel like being a teenager, trying to talk to your parents while they're cooking (or if you're one of those freaks who actually had parents that listened to you, imagine a distant uncle or something). At some point, you'll sense that they are bored with you, and unless your confidence is rock-solid, you'll probably feel pretty lonely.



The correct answer is Option C. Yes, it's a conversation ender, because they will not invite you to share what you find fun about it (again, if they cared, they would've done that from the start). And it's admittedly a little unsatisfying, but at least it's a neutral ending that doesn't make them feel bad or make you look self-centered.

Alright, alright, I know that if you analyze small talk enough it's all gonna sound ridiculous. I guess what feels frustrating in this instance is because I always get so excited! I think, "oh wow, this is a new zinester! Maybe we can swap ideas, maybe I can share some photocopying tips, maybe I can be the person who helps them break through that block and get their first zine to print!" Until I remember no, this is just small talk. They're just trying to be polite.

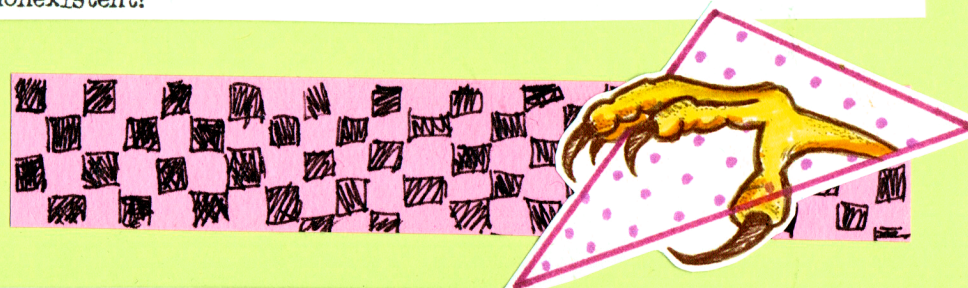
In fact, there are probably some people who really have no interest in making a zine of their own, but are trying to express that they respect and enjoy zines as a medium. To those people, I'd like to encourage you to just say that, because it opens up a whole realm of possibilities. I can now ask you what you like about them, what are some of the most memorable zines you've read, if you have any preferred genres. If you like the punk ethos, we can talk about punk bands and underground culture. If you like the DIY spirit, we can talk about other expressions of that spirit from clothes mending to gardening. Heck, if you just like the aesthetic, we can talk about aesthetics! But you can already see the difference - you have not shifted the conversation towards a subject that you don't actually want to talk about.

I dunno, I just miss the days when having one thing in common meant you're best friends, you know? And when "I've always wanted to try that" turned into "Let's do that together!" This is the trap of small talk - I'm always expecting it to turn into something more... real, but you can't get that sense of connection with everyone. I just wish people would be more straightforward sometimes!

As for the people who really do want to make zines, then let me ask you in this zine since it's probably never going to be appropriate for me to ask in conversation: why haven't you? Really, I want you to ask yourself this question. Because this is how you'll be able to either 1. make it happen, or 2. realize that you don't want to make it happen right now, which is totally fine!

Seriously, if the answer ends up being "eh, I haven't felt like it yet", that's great. That's the best. And then when you're talking with a zinester, you can say something like "I'm ready to pick up my sharpie and scissors when inspiration strikes me for my first zine." (And then continue the conversation by asking about their zines - it's only polite).

But if that's not the reason, then you've gotta figure out what is so you can kick that reason's ass! I admit I've been framing this whole thing in terms of something that annoys me, but really it's less annoyance and more frustration. I'm frustrated because it pains me to hear that someone feels unable to make a zine. I don't want anyone to be held back from something so enjoyable and liberating when they don't have to be! Especially when, unlike with many hobbies, the barrier to entry for zine-making is... well, nonexistent!



So here's a few reasons you might feel held back from zine making, and some reminders that those reasons are lying to you and you do have the power to kick those barriers in the ass:

"I don't know what to write about."

Here's a secret: that's not your real problem. Your real problem is that you don't think what you have to write about is worth putting into a zine. Because a zine can literally be a to-do list, or crumpled receipts from the bottom of your bag, or pages from your diary, or photos from your phone that were too blurry to put on Instagram. So zines don't require "inspiration", only the will to glue shit to paper and slap it on a photocopier. You know the great thing about zines? Their meaning is inherent to the medium. The medium contains all the meaning of being art because, by its very nature, it puts the power to say what is or isn't "printable" into your hands - and therefore allows for literally everything to be printable. A zine is worth existing because it's a zine, not because of the content!

I could just give you a list of prompts, or you could google one yourself, or you could take a prompt from the list above. But you don't need a prompt - you need someone telling you to gtfover yourself and just do it. So from me to you (with love): GTFOVER YOURSELF AND JUST DO IT!



"What if I don't like how it turns out?"

First off, I have some homework for you: write down every single thing that would make you hate how your zine turned out. I guarantee that for everything you could possibly put on that list, there's a zine out there that's already done it. Cause zines are pieces of shit. Every one of them. Amazing, beautiful pieces of shit, but shit nonetheless. They are because book beauty standards come from the traditional publishing industry, and there's no way that something that isn't professionally arranged will ever be considered anything less than bad by that industry. By making a zine, you've already failed, because you haven't made something that was deemed worth a publisher's time.

Ideas are always perfect in your head. It's the tragedy of the artist that no matter what, physical representations will never be as good as how you imagined something to be in your head. They can't be - the material world is flawed in a way the idealistic world is not. So hard as it is, you have to try to divorce yourself from the image in your head, because it's not real. It tries to trick you into thinking it is. And perhaps more than any other media, zines value what's finished infinitely more than ideas.

I'll leave you with that quote from Ratatouille: "The average piece of junk is probably more meaningful than our criticism designating it so". And that includes your own piece of junk AND your own criticism!

- 851')\*0U"IJ9&YP&(T#(1%\*Y)\&\$)? -  
- 2\$&\*0\_4{!"\*(#%>?!<\*\$U)(A)F\*U#) -

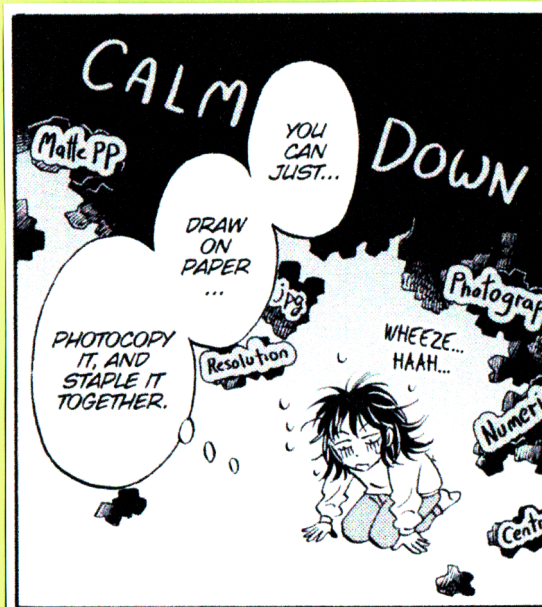
"What if it's not good enough to share it with other people?"

I mean, you can probably guess that I'm gonna insist that zines are always good enough to share with other people, because zines are worth sharing by nature. But I think your real problem is either 1. you derive the worth of your work by how its received, and/or 2. you don't feel like you have anyone to share it with who would "get" it. Problem 1 is a big one, and even though I can tell you that your creations are worth it for the action, not the outcome, it's hard to internalize.

So in the meantime, I have a solution for both problems: share it with me. Seriously! If you want to share your zine with someone, share it with me. I don't care how ugly or amateurish or whatever it is you're worried about! I will be thrilled at the mere fact that there is another new zinester in the world, and I will share that genuine enthusiasm and encouragement and probably offer some zines for trade and I will love your zine the way it deserves to be loved!

"But I don't know how to do it!"

Is that all? Why didn't you just say so?! There is so much help for you! I can help you! I can answer your questions as best I can, I can point you to tutorials and books! There really isn't even anything you have to "learn"! Probably the most complicated part of zinemaking is printing, but luckily shitty print jobs are part of the fun. A zine usually ends up looking way cooler when the print job is shit. And like I said, I can help you!



If you're still hung up for whatever reason, if you've emailed me at [twentytwozines@gmail.com](mailto:twentytwozines@gmail.com) and still feel stuck, if you need more structure, here's what you're gonna do:

1. Take two sheets of paper and fold them in half. Use cardstock if you have it so it can hold up to ink, that's the big secret.
2. Staple them together. You now have 8 pages with plenty of room.
3. Put shit on the pages. If you don't know what, make it about your cat - guaranteed winner. If you don't have a cat, get one.
4. Rip the staples out. No need to be gentle.
5. Slap that greasy pig on your library's copy machine. Get the librarian's help, we may not be the best with copy machines but we're a persistent bunch.
6. Give a copy to the librarian as a thank-you. You now have your first reader.
7. Email me at [twentytwozines@gmail.com](mailto:twentytwozines@gmail.com) (once again, that's [twentytwozines@gmail.com](mailto:twentytwozines@gmail.com)). You now have your second reader.
8. Rinse and repeat.

So you're all better, right? You're gonna make a zine now, right? If you're not... well, guess I can't force you. But can you at least stop dangling the "someday" in front of my face? I'm not strong enough! I can't stand when someone tells me that they -could- make a zine, but never will, and so I'll never get to read it! I want to read your zines! Please! Do it for a sad, zine-hungry boy!



A few resources to help you on your journey:

Whatcha Mean, What's a Zine? by Esther Pearl Watson and Mark Todd - This is the book that got me started way back when. There are lots of 101 books and even more 101 zines, but this one is my favorite for being really fun and good for inspiration.

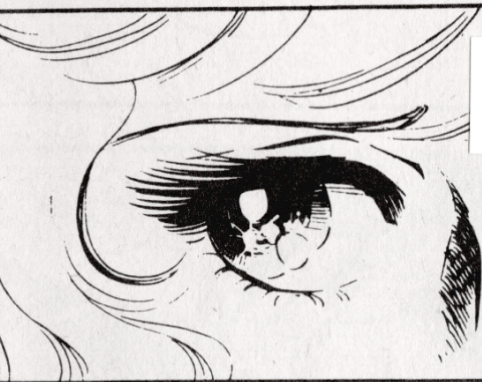
How to Make a Zine by Rona - A great article that goes into a little more of the nitty-gritty, getting creative inspiration, all that sort of thing. One of these days I want to make a video series on this but it's like, why bother, Rona's got everything!  
<https://thecreativeindependent.com/guides/how-to-make-a-zine/>

And ofc I'm happy to direct you to more; in the meantime I've always got zine stuff on my Youtube and Instagram:  
[youtube.com/@TwentyTwoZines](https://www.youtube.com/@TwentyTwoZines) & [instagram.com/TwentyTwoZines](https://www.instagram.com/TwentyTwoZines)

Special thanks to the lovely people who, after encountering this ~~self-important~~ lecture amazing and helpful advice, actually made a something and sent it to me!

Wren (The Anti-Zine), Sam (Ever Caffeinated Press), Jessica (Jessica By Night), Rosie (Newt Studio), & Kaijah!

And thanks to K for the idea/motivation to make this into a standalone zine ;)



This zine was originally part of the perzine Unfair Maiden #5 by Wesley Sueker (that's me).

Get this and lots more zines at  
the Twenty Two Zines distro:  
[twentytwozines.com](https://twentytwozines.com)

(P.S. Like all my zines, this zine is free to copy & distribute!)