# SEW YOUR OWN ZINE



*A Beginner's Guide to Printing, Folding, Punching and Pamphlet Stitching Your Own Zine*

THE black root PRESS

# LET'S MAKE SOMETHING

*There's something special about holding a book you made yourself.*

Zines have a long history of independent expression, creative experimentation, and communities making space for voices that might otherwise go unheard. You don't need a publisher's permission, expensive equipment, or professional training to make one. You just need something to say and a way to put it on paper.

Pamphlet stitching is one of the simplest ways to bind a handmade publication. It uses thread to hold folded pages together along their spine, creating a sturdy little book without glue or staples.

This guide starts with **printing your zine** in booklet order, then covers two binding approaches: **three-hole stitching**, great for beginners and smaller projects, and **five-hole stitching**, which provides additional support along the spine.

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Paper for your pages and cover
- A bookbinding or embroidery needle
- Thread (waxed linen, embroidery floss, or sturdy cotton)
- An awl or other suitable paper-punching tool
- A ruler and pencil
- A piece of scrap cardboard to protect your work surface
- Scissors
- Access to a printer (double-sided if possible)
- A bone folder (or the back of a spoon)

# PRINTING YOUR ZINE

*Print it in the right order.* Microsoft Word can arrange your pages in booklet order, so they read correctly once the sheets are folded and nested.

## SET UP BOOK FOLD IN WORD

1. Go to Layout › Margins › Custom Margins.
2. Under Pages, set Multiple pages to Book fold. Word switches to landscape and puts four pages on each sheet.
3. Set Sheets per booklet to All, so everything prints as one signature.
4. Add a gutter of about ¼″ so your text clears the fold and the stitches.
5. On the Paper tab, choose Letter. Folded, it makes a 5½″ × 8½″ booklet.

## PLAN YOUR PAGE COUNT

Each folded sheet holds four pages, so your total should be a multiple of four: 8, 12, 16. If you come up short, fill the gap with a blank page, a notes page, or a drawing.

# PRINTING, CONTINUED

PRINT IT

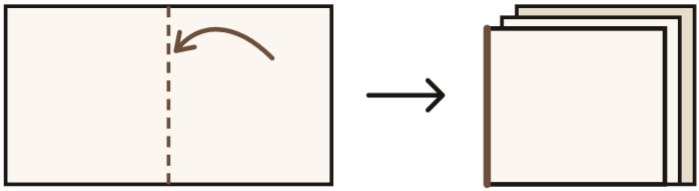
1. Open File › Print and choose Print on Both Sides.
2. Pick Flip on short edge, so the back of each sheet isn’t upside down.
3. Print one test sheet, fold it, and check the page order before printing the rest.

**No double-sided printer?** Choose Manually Print on Both Sides. Word prints the fronts first, then asks you to flip the stack and feed it back in.

*Once printed, fold your sheets, nest them, and you’re ready to punch and stitch.*

# FOLDING YOUR SHEETS

*Crisp folds, lined-up edges.* A careful fold is the backbone of your zine. It keeps your pages in order and gives your stitches a clean spine to sit in.




## FOLD AND NEST

1. Keep your printed sheets in the order they came out of the printer, with the cover sheet on top.
2. Fold one sheet at a time in half, short edge to short edge. Line up the corners before you press down.
3. Run a bone folder, or the back of a spoon, along the crease from the center outward.
4. Nest the folded sheets inside one another, keeping the cover sheet on the outside.
5. Tap the spine and edges on the table to line everything up, then flip through to check the page order.

### GOOD TO KNOW

- × Folding the whole stack at once softens the crease and pushes the inner pages out of line.
- × Heavier cover paper? Score the fold first by running a dull butter knife along a ruler.
- × Leave your sheets folded and nested for the next step: you'll punch through them together.

# CHOOSE YOUR STITCH

**THREE-HOLE**

*Simple. Strong. Beginner-friendly.*

Three holes along the folded spine and a single length of thread. Great for beginners and smaller projects.

**FIVE-HOLE**

*A little more stitching. A little more support.*

Five points of stitching instead of three. Useful for taller booklets, thicker single signatures, or a more prominent stitched look.

## MEASURE YOUR HOLES

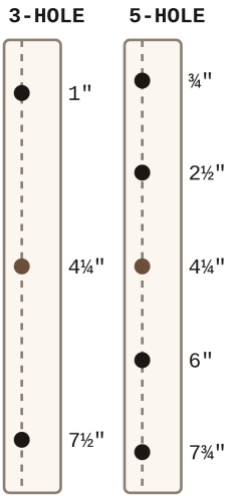
Measure down from the top of the fold. Symmetry matters most: keep the center hole centered and the others evenly spaced around it.

**THREE-HOLE**

| Booklet height | Top hole | Center hole | Bottom hole |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8½" | 1" | 4¼" | 7½" |
| 5½" | ¾" | 2¾" | 4¾" |
| 4¼" | ½" | 2⅛" | 3¾" |

**FIVE-HOLE**

| Hole | Letter 8½" spine | Ledger 11" spine |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | ¾" | 1" |
| 2 | 2½" | 3¼" |
| 3 (center) | 4¼" | 5½" |
| 4 | 6" | 7¾" |
| 5 | 7¾" | 10" |
| *Spacing* | *1¾"* | *2¾"* |




Letter, 8½" spine. Not to scale.

# PUNCHING YOUR HOLES

*Small, straight, right in the fold.* Neat holes make stitching easier and keep your thread snug. An awl does the job in a minute.

## USING AN AWL

1. Make a template: cut a strip of scrap paper as long as your spine, fold it in half, and mark your hole positions from page 6 on the crease.
2. Open your nested booklet to the center pages and lay it on scrap cardboard, the fold resting in a slight V.
3. Set the template in the center fold, lined up with the top edge. Hold it with your hand or a binder clip.
4. Push the awl straight down through each mark, keeping the point in the crease. Twist gently instead of forcing it.
5. Close the booklet and check the spine: every hole should sit right on the outside fold.

### GOOD TO KNOW

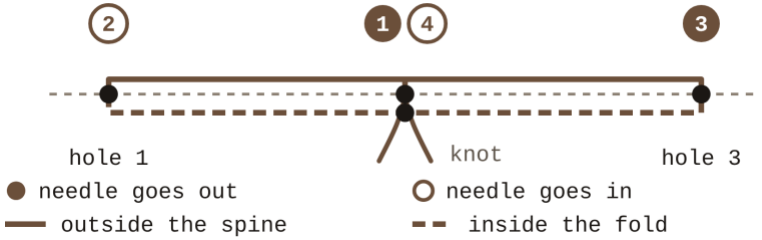
- Keep holes just big enough for your needle. Larger holes let the thread slip and weaken the paper.
- Punch all the sheets together so the holes line up.
- Keep your fingers clear of the awl's path.
- No awl? A push pin or a thick needle works for thin booklets.
- Save your template: it's reusable for your next zine.

# SEWING THE THREE-HOLE STITCH

Cut 20–24 inches of thread for an 8½-inch spine, thread your needle, and open your booklet to the center fold.

FOLLOW THIS SEQUENCE · 4 NEEDLE PASSES

**2 → 1 → 3 → 2**




1. **CENTER (2):** Push your needle from inside the booklet to the outside. Leave a 3–4-inch thread tail inside.
2. **TOP (1):** Bring your needle from outside to inside through the top hole.
3. **BOTTOM (3):** Travel along the inside fold and push your needle out through the bottom hole.
4. **CENTER (2):** Return through the center hole, bringing your needle back inside.

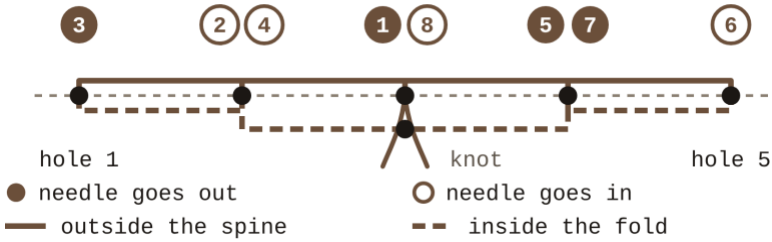
**Both thread ends are now inside. Turn to page 10 to tie off your binding.**

# SEWING THE FIVE-HOLE STITCH

Cut about 24 inches of thread for an 8½-inch spine (a few extra inches if you're just learning), thread your needle, and open your booklet to the center fold.

FOLLOW THIS SEQUENCE · 8 NEEDLE PASSES

3→2→1→2→4→5→4→3

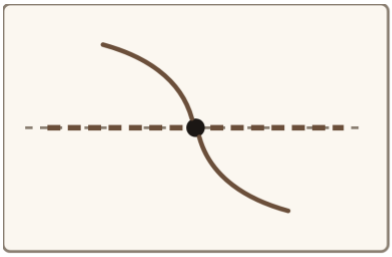



1. **CENTER (3):** Start inside the booklet and push your needle outward. Leave a 3–4-inch tail inside.
2. **HOLE 2:** Bring your needle from outside to inside.
3. **HOLE 1:** Push your needle from inside to outside.
4. **HOLE 2:** Return from outside to inside.
5. **HOLE 4:** Travel along the inside fold, passing hole 3, and push your needle outward through hole 4.
6. **HOLE 5:** Bring your needle from outside to inside.
7. **HOLE 4:** Return from inside to outside.
8. **CENTER (3):** Finish by bringing your needle back inside through the center hole.

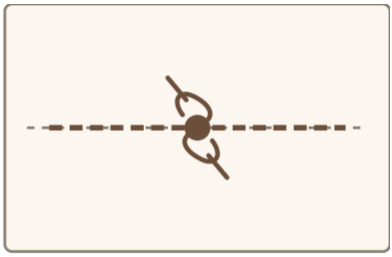
**Both thread ends are now inside. Turn to page 10 to tie off your binding.**

# FINISH YOUR BINDING

*Both stitches end the same way.* Your thread ends should now be inside the booklet at the center hole, one on each side of the long center stitch.



1 · ends on opposite sides



2 · double knot, trim

1. Check that both thread ends are inside the booklet at the center hole.
2. Position them on opposite sides of the long center stitch.
3. Tie a secure double knot around that stitch.
4. Trim the excess thread.

Keep your stitches snug, but don’t pull so tightly that the paper buckles or tears.

## CONGRATULATIONS! YOU’VE SEWN YOUR ZINE.

# TIPS, TRICKS & HAPPY ACCIDENTS

### YOUR PAGES DON'T LINE UP PERFECTLY?

That's normal! When sheets are folded and nested, the inner pages extend slightly farther than the outer pages. Bookbinders call this *creep*.

You can leave the edges as they are for a handmade look or carefully trim them with an appropriate paper cutter.

### YOUR THREAD KEEPS TANGLING?

Try shorter lengths of thread and pull the needle through slowly. Waxed thread helps prevent tangles and holds knots securely.

### YOUR PAPER IS TEARING?

Check the size of your holes and the tension of your thread. Avoid pulling your stitches too tight and consider using slightly heavier paper.

### YOUR ZINE WON'T CLOSE FLAT?

A thick stack of folded sheets naturally creates bulk at the spine. Try fewer sheets, thinner paper, or multiple signatures with a binding designed to join them together.

A FEW THINGS WORTH REMEMBERING

- × Don't pierce existing thread when passing through a hole again.
- × Experiment with thread colors, different papers, and cover materials.
- × Your first attempt doesn't need to be perfect.

# KEEP MAKING

# THINGS.

You don’t need permission to make art, tell stories, or put something meaningful into the world.

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