

A zine workshop facilitator's spine

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This zine (or self-published booklet, made for love & not profit) is a guide for workshop facilitators who are trying to be power-aware, reflective and intentional in their practice.

It is drawn up using the metaphor of a human nervous system, to explore how we can take care of ourselves & others while doing this work.

How can you have a spine & hold onto your values as a zine-maker, while facilitating a zine workshop?

It provides a set of questions we consider before, during & after a workshop to frame zine facilitation as relational practice grounded in care, play, & accountability. Flip this zine to read about the action research process that went into getting here.

PRINT INSTRUCTIONS

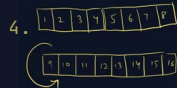


Print both pages front & back on an A3 sheet



Fold the sheet into 8 parts & cut along the horizontal centre line

3. fold at the dotted line on page 4 & join to page 5



fold into an accordion zine & flip to read the other side

Disclaimer! This isn't a rule book. It's an invitation to create your own guide, hopefully filled with medical metaphors, meant for unscientific use only.



Hi makers
of this
zine! Meow!



The Neck (Before the Workshop)

Your neck lets you nod, tilt, & say "no." Before a workshop, this part of your spine asks: *Does this collaboration feel right for me?*

In this section, we explore what we need from co-facilitators/commissioners/clients, participants, & ourselves before stepping into a project as facilitators.

These questions can sniff out if the people we're working with are individuals, institutions, organizations &/or brands jumping in to co-opt zine culture, "as a way to make a profit or to elevate their status, using diy [do it yourself] as an aesthetic or a stepping stone to 'making it' (Casio, 2019)."

Questions to ask your Commissioner/ Collaborator

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- 1 Why are we doing this, & what do we want to accomplish? – both tangible & emotional?
 - 2 What do we want to create? With what resources? Who will provide them?
 - 3 Who manages promotion & documentation? Before, during & after?
 - 4 How & when will I be compensated & can I have that in writing?
 - 5 How do we want to engage with each other & participants? – Timelines, communication modes & responsibilities?
 - 6 Who do we want to reach? Do we have the resources & training to genuinely meet our participant's needs?
 - 7 Who handles emergencies? Or cases of harassment toward facilitators or participants?
 - 8 How much room is there to improvise on the day?
 - 9 What is a satisfying outcome? How will we know if it works? How will we debrief?
 - 10 What is the **setting**? Does it align with the workshop's intentions?
- This includes the location, room setup, temperature, lighting, sound, color, wheelchair access, seating options, gender-neutral washrooms & ticket costs.*

After going through these questions, ask yourself:

Have you communicated to all your collaborators (includes venue partners & other stakeholders) the ethos of zine-making?

Does the workshop's theme & choice of methods excite you?
If not, do you have enough control to change things to make it so?

Do these conversations align with your values, ethics, & motivations?

Does it feel like a good fit, & do their actions match their words?

If yes, you have the foundation for a strong collaboration! If no, & you can afford to let the project go, say no. Your first vertebra, named Atlas, holds your head upright – but unlike Atlas in Greek mythology, you don't need to carry the world on your shoulders.

Communication with Participants

Unlike commissioners or co-facilitators, you rarely get a chance to have an open conversation with your participants. You do, however, communicate with them through your marketing materials &, if applicable, your sign-up form.

These are valuable tools to help participants understand what to expect, & how you can meet their needs. Some questions to consider when shaping this communication include:

- Who is welcome? How, by when & where can they sign up?
- What are their interests & motivations? What is expected of them at the workshop?
- What are their accessibility needs, & how can you meet them?
- What will happen with zines they create in the workshop?



Once you've communicated with everyone involved, remember to check in with yourself too. Make sure you feel ready when the time comes to facilitate this space. Care for your physical & mental health. Prepare a backup toolkit of activities & materials to draw on if the workshop energy feels different from what you expected. Doing so will help you stay grounded, & ready to take on your role as facilitator.

The Chest (During the Workshop)

Your chest holds your heart & lungs. It's where you breathe & regulate. During a workshop, this part of your spine reminds you to notice the rhythm of the room – what to inhale & exhale; when to protect the space & let it expand.

It's also a reminder that you can only control yourself & how you respond to what happens. A zine workshop is alive with people, dynamics, & unpredictable moments. We found it helpful to articulate this for ourselves, to be able to let go & breathe freely ourselves.

What You Can't Control

- Who shows up & how many people attend.
- What internal barriers participants bring with them.



- What they end up making (or not).
- How they're feeling that day & how they engage with one another and the workshop design.
- Other external elements like the weather, venue, and so on.

What You Can Control

- How you introduce zines: This medium has revolutionary, complicated & diverse histories, but simply making a zine isn't radical.
- How participants are invited into the space & how well-informed they are about zine making.
- What the ground rules are: Aim for a space that feels both safe & brave – one that allows for care as well as creative risk & accountability.
- How flexible you are when shifting plans based on the energy in the room.
- How many ways participants can engage, depending on their comfort levels & preferences.
- How the room is set up: The music, materials, layout, & overall energy.
- What your emotional response is to what happens in the room, & your capacity to hold space for different personalities.



- How you respond to power dynamics, & how you help balance engagement within participants in the group.
- How you use your time: Don't feel pressured to look "busy" just because you're being paid (or even if you're not) – presence matters more than presenting productivity.

The thoracic spine protects your heart & lungs. Its joints are tight enough to shield what matters, yet loose enough to let you breathe.

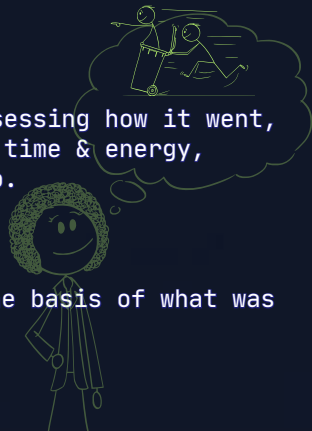
Facilitation for us is about creating enough structure for care, & enough looseness for play.

The Back (After the Workshop)

After a workshop, the heavy-lifting continues in assessing how it went, regaining your balance after (most likely) spending time & energy, flowing into the workshop, & then wrapping things up.

Questions to ask your Commissioner/Collaborator

- How did the workshop go? Debrief & evaluate on the basis of what was previously agreed upon.



- How are the outputs being documented, used & shared?
- How are we following up with the participants on feedback & why?

Check in with yourself

- How did the workshop feel? What parts were satisfying? Or not? Where did you feel goosebumps?
- What, if anything, would you do differently next time?
- How are you going to unwind, relax, or celebrate this moment?

The Sacrum (Values)

The five sacral vertebrae, at the bottom of your spine, fuse during fetal development. This means they don't move. The sacrum can be seen as the non-negotiables you bring as a facilitator. What are the underlying values you bring to any collaboration?

As you go through the whole cycle of before, during, after the workshop, make sure to hold these values close. These choices are anchors when things shift around you. Keep returning to them, they'll remind you why you're doing this work in the first place and what kind of facilitator you want to be. When in doubt, reach out to a zine friend, because it's all DiT (Do it Together) after all.

Fish Ask Questions (FAQs) about our research process

This is a zine workshop, not a school!!!!

Who are we?

Chetana Pai, Riya Behl & Shruti Singh are part of Zinedabaad, a collective founded in March 2020 to resist India's shrinking civic space for exercising our right to freedom of speech. They make zines & booklets, facilitate workshops, curate people-powered zine libraries & funnel these outputs into an ongoing research project on zine & self-publishing cultures.

Why did we make this zine?

Over the past two years, over 5,000 results for papers about "zines" have been published on Google Scholar, showing that zines & zine-work "are having their moment" (Jones, 2024: 408). Yet of these, we found only six papers directly engaging with zines & zine histories in India (Bagchi & Kuriakose, 2025; Bhatia, 2024; Horton, 2024; Mukherjee et al., 2023; Sandhu, 2020; Varghese & Tanupriya, 2024;). & even these fall into the trap Jones (2024) warns us against: they analyze the products of zine-making, the zines themselves, rather than the relational & activist process of co-creation. The act of making, sharing, & embracing a Do It Together (DiT) spirit of zine-ing, is what defines this medium for us. Workshops are where some of this magic happens.

What is this magical value of zine workshops?

Zine-making can equalise traditional power dynamics between a facilitator & participant because no one is an expert when it comes to zines. So when you attend a zine workshop, what is the role of the facilitator? We wanted to reflect on that question. How do we create spaces for freedom of expression through zine-making, while retaining the non-commercial, inclusive & anarchist values of this medium? Riya initiated this exploration as part of her Master's dissertation research, & invited Zinedabaad members to join.

When & why did we do this research?

Between April & August 2025, Chetana, Riya & Shruti designed a feminist, participatory, action research process to reflect on zine workshops. We made this zine together as part of this process to:

- address a conflict that arises when using action research methods in academic systems that usually expect a single author output;
- enable co-ownership of knowledge to protect the integrity of participatory values in systems that can unintentionally reproduce the very inequalities we aim to challenge;
- allow ourselves to create something to reflect on our ongoing practice;
- And hopefully, to create space for you, our peers, to contribute with feedback & support.

This zine was accepted for the Academizines! Special Issue in September 2025. We integrated peer-review feedback till it was published in January 2026.

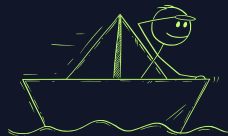
How did we do this research?

Participatory action research (PAR) is a family of methods, growing out of a constructivist epistemology, which views knowledge as something built by all of us, based on our multiple ways of making sense of the social world (Bryant, 2023). We felt this research approach aligned with how we view zines & the diverse possibilities of expression afforded in zine workshops. Since zines have, & continue to be used by fascists (Rogers, 2021) among diverse groups, it was important to define for ourselves what relations we seek to build through zine making & how.

PAR methods include co-operative inquiries, which involve working with people with similar concerns & interests to yourself in co-creating knowledge & developing new & creative ways of making transformative change (Heron & Reason, 2006). Shruti & Chetana were open to forming a co-inquiry group & co-designing questions we wanted to address.

What questions did we explore in our research?

- What can zine-making do?
- As facilitators, what do we value in zine workshops?
- What enables or hinders meaningful relationship-building in zine workshops?
- What do we need as a facilitator to sustain satisfying relationships with participants, collaborators, clients, & ourselves before, during, & after a workshop?



What was the specific nature of our methods?

Since we are facilitators, each of us took turns to design & facilitate a workshop that would explore our research questions. It followed two iterative & emergent cycles informed by a PAR Toolkit (Lloyd-Evans et. al, 2023). Each cycle included planning, action, & sense-making phases.

In our planning phase, we co-designed engagement protocols & narrowed down the scope of our research. We decided our source of knowledge would be lived experiences from one-off & in-person workshops we have facilitated individually in India, the UK & the Netherlands.

In our action phase, we reflected on these zine workshops through participatory, creative methods. For instance, we made comics to identify critical incidents or moments in past zine workshops we've facilitated that signalled satisfaction in or resistance to relationship-building with oneself or others. This method links anthropological theory on critical incidents with reflective practice (Emerson, 2007). As facilitators, these were moments where we felt goosebumps, panic or a gut feeling about something, which became important embodied markers of assessing what feels good & doesn't. They align with Reitz's (2016) approaches to analyze & communicate action research data without losing the intimate quality & texture of the experience.

We drew a series of locus of control diagrams to make sense of this knowledge we had surfaced, which is what led to creating this guide.

How did this process link back to our analytical themes & findings?

Our process began with trying to locate why the relational possibilities in a zine workshop matter to us, through the lens of power. For us, & scholars like Castro et al. (2025), zine workshops can queer time & slow it down. At the beginning of our workshops, we frame participation as an invitation. It is an experiment with freedom: a chance for people to decide how they wanted to spend their time while in a room full of art supplies, strangers, & a facilitator who is attempting to be their equal.

But freedom is inherently self-contradictory (Žižek, 2024). If asked whether they want to be free, most people would say “yes.” But in practice, what many desire is the appearance of freedom: to feel as though they are choosing, while relying on others to define the “right” choice (Žižek, 2024). In his study on liminality, zine-makers & communitas, Bryant (2023) highlights that the making of print zines is “a uniquely contradictory” process.

Building meaningful relationships in zine workshops, then, requires what Chetana called a “toolkit” of skills a facilitator must bring to a free space, which became a building block for our guide. Contemporary zine spaces, especially in Indian contexts, are not devoid of oppressive power structures & ideologies. Our first finding was to examine ways we as facilitators re-inforce these with our choices. Our guide acts, therefore, as a checklist for holding ourselves accountable to values of accessibility, autonomy, freedom of self-expression, play & inclusivity that we as zine-makers want to live by.

How can we have a spine in a country governed by fascist, right-wing populists, while facilitating a zine-workshop that is fundamentally a space for freedom of speech, expression & dissent?

Shifting the focus from the zine, as a product, to zine-ing as a process, is intentional. The relational practice of zine-ing gives "form to less hierarchical social relationships in the face of the instrumentalist, consumerist, & individualist orientations to the world (Radway, 2016: 6)."

It is a reflexive, collaborative, iterative, embodied, & a reciprocal relational practice rooted in anti-capitalist frameworks of making & sharing knowledge (Jones, 2024). Not all processes of zine-ing, however, are an anti-capitalist process of resistance. Now we ask ourselves, is the very format of a one-off zine workshop a consumable product, rather than a space to nourish meaningful relationships & coalitions? We have begun to include longer forms of engagement in our projects, & build out accountability mechanisms to address such concerns.

Our third finding emerged from reflecting on critical incidents in workshops, & devising an evaluatory metric for our role as facilitators. Did we create a space that felt free & shared power between others in the room to make together with care? Did we act in accordance with our own values as facilitators?



Did we respect our needs, while also showing up with honesty & care? These became our measures of satisfaction as facilitators, in addition to an ongoing list.

Our positionality & critique of this research process

The three of us are dominant-caste, privileged women with financial security. These factors give us the opportunities, among others, to facilitate zine-workshops outside our full-time roles, often for free or at minimal ticket costs. And give us the resources, time & flexibility to commit to such a research project.

Our co-inquiry process did not include people different from us, & that is a limitation. We are aware that our research design risks reproducing hierarchies of gatekeeping knowledge that zine-makers themselves have historically resisted. As neurodivergent, queer, able-bodied, native English speakers in the diaspora, we recognise these lived experiences affect our power within zine workshop spaces & beyond.

Our zine is, thus, designed as an ongoing & DiY guide because it will be different for different people. It is a starting point to reflect on how you might facilitate zine workshops. We hope you make your own guide of context-specific questions to ask, needs to meet & mess ups to work through. Do contact us at [zinedabaad\[dot\]collective\[at\]gmail\[dot\]com](mailto:zinedabaad[dot]collective[at]gmail[dot]com) if you would like to share your thoughts, ask questions & show us pictures of your cat.

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Reach out to us zinedabaad.collective@gmail.com or @zinedabaad on Instagram :)

