Make a Pocket-Sized Staple-Free Zine

One ordinary sheet, eight readable pages, four columns, two rows and one centre slit

These are original printable digital plans for adult paper crafts. Dimensions are calculated; every finished size is nominal. Paper thickness, printer scaling, adhesive, cutting accuracy and folding technique can change the fit. There has been no physical printing, cutting, folding, gluing, fit test or durability test. Work at a clear table, keep sharp edges and wet adhesive away from children, and use only materials and adhesives that are suitable for the intended craft according to their labels. Keep food, flame, heat and electrical loads away from these objects.

One sheet becomes an eight-page booklet

A zine is a small publication you can make and share without a commercial printer. This particular zine begins with one ordinary sheet of paper printed on ONE side. After carefully placed creases and one short centre slit, the sheet folds into a pocket-sized booklet with eight faces, including its front and back covers. It needs no staples, thread, glue or purchased binding equipment. The goal is a readable sequence of short notes and drawings that survives the transition from a flat layout to a folded booklet.

This project has a specific distinction from the three-card set and the sewn notebook elsewhere in the MAKE collection. A greeting card opens once and carries a short message; a pamphlet-stitched notebook holds a separate signature together with thread. The one-sheet zine is both its own pages and its own binding. Because the sheet is cut only at a centre slit, it can be unfolded again as a reproducible print master, but repeated folding and unfolding may fatigue the paper. It is not a child toy, a protective document cover or a claim of measured durability.

For an A4 landscape sheet, each of the eight rectangular panels is nominally 74.25 mm wide by 105 mm high, the quarter of 297 mm by the half of 210 mm. For US Letter landscape, each panel is 69.85 mm wide by 107.95 mm high, since the full sheet is 279.4 by 215.9 mm. These are mathematical page geometry values; real home printers usually leave an unprintable margin. Nothing should depend on ink reaching a sheet edge.

Read the original one-sheet imposition map

Look at your opened sheet in landscape orientation, with its longer edge horizontal. The original page master marks three vertical fold divisions at one-quarter, one-half and three-quarters of the paper width, together with one horizontal fold at half the paper height. The grid is four columns across and two rows down. The only intended CUT runs horizontally along the half-height crease, between the one-quarter and three-quarter vertical folds. The outer perimeter is the intact sheet edge; do NOT cut the outer eight rectangles apart.

Page numbers have a precise arrangement before folding. Across the TOP row, read left to right: 5, 4, 3, 2; these four labels and any future artwork on those panels are rotated 180 degrees on the open flat sheet. Across the BOTTOM row, read left to right: 6, 7, 8, 1; these are upright on the flat sheet. Page 1 will be the front cover and page 8 the back cover. The template has numbered page labels rather than prewritten stories, so the content remains yours. Do not rotate the entire upper row to make it easier to read while flat; it is supposed to be upside down.

A4 cut coordinates are x = 74.25 through 222.75 mm at y = 105 mm, measured from the sheet lower-left in landscape view. Letter cut coordinates are x = 69.85 through 209.55 mm at y = 107.95 mm. The cut extends 148.5 mm on A4 or 139.7 mm on Letter: exactly the two middle panel widths. The grid itself fits the sheet because it is defined from the actual selected page size. A 50 mm calibration bar appears INSIDE a safe panel area on the original proof so it can be compared with a ruler; an incorrect bar reading means the printer scaled the artwork.

Prepare a safe paper trial and plan its message

Start with plain low-cost A4 or Letter copier paper; around 80–100 gsm is a reasonable exploratory range, not a verified product rating. You need ordinary scissors, a pencil, an ordinary millimetre ruler and a smooth blunt object for gently sharpening folds. Avoid heavy laminated paper: it can crack and resist the central collapse. Choose the printer sheet that matches the PDF file. Do not choose Fit, Shrink to printable area or a browser zoom percentage as a substitute for Actual Size / 100%. Adobe Acrobat describes Actual Size as unscaled and warns that content outside the printable region may be cropped.

Plan a short idea for each page. One example is a tiny neighbourhood field guide: front cover title on page 1, a map note on page 2, an interesting detail on pages 3–4, a small sketch on page 5, two observations on pages 6–7, and a date or credit line on page 8. Another idea is a sequence of seven original drawings and a cover. Keep each panel very simple: an entire paragraph in ordinary body size will look crowded on a page barely 70 mm wide. When in doubt, enlarge the heading and leave space.

Print only your own words, original drawings, properly licensed work, or material you have permission to reproduce. If a zine is meant for public circulation, avoid including private addresses, phone numbers, identifiable photographs of people without permission, or another person’s confidential note. A zine can be expressive without becoming an accidental publication of someone else’s information. The Library of Congress zine workshop notes how easy distribution makes privacy precautions important.

Fold, make the slit and collapse into a zine

1. Open the A4 or US Letter PDF master at Actual Size and print one side of one expendable page. Confirm the entire numbered eight-panel guide is visible. Measure its 50 mm scale bar with a real ruler, and note the reading before proceeding.

2. Place the printed sheet FACE DOWN on a clean flat surface with its long direction running left to right. Fold in half along the long horizontal centre line, bringing the top long edge to the bottom long edge. Crease lightly; unfold again. Avoid making a second offset centre crease.

3. Fold in half across the short direction, bringing the left short edge to the right short edge. Crease and reopen, leaving a vertical midpoint fold.

4. Make the vertical quarter folds by bringing each short outer edge to the vertical midpoint crease like closing a pair of doors. Crease, then open the page completely. Count four columns and two rows: there should be eight rectangular panel spaces.

5. Fold SHORT EDGE to SHORT EDGE, leaving the sheet doubled at its vertical midpoint crease x = W/2. The folded edge is now vertical. Find the existing HORIZONTAL half-height crease y = H/2 crossing this folded edge. This horizontal crease is the path for the centre slit, not a line perpendicular to it. Keep the vertical quarter-fold stop visible before using scissors.

6. With the folded centre edge facing you, insert scissors at its intersection with the horizontal half-height crease. Cut HORIZONTALLY along that crease through both layers, from x = W/2 toward the next quarter crease x = W/4 in the doubled half; stop there. When unfolded, the mirror-image cuts form one continuous horizontal slit from x = W/4 to x = 3W/4 at y = H/2. Never cut along the vertical centre fold or extend the slit to an outside sheet edge.

7. Open the sheet completely and inspect the slit. It must pass through the two inner panels only, leaving all four outer panel columns joined. If the cut accidentally reaches an outside edge, remake a new sheet rather than securing the accident with staples or tape.

8. Fold once more along the long horizontal centre so the printed faces remain on the outside of the folded strip. Hold the two short ends; push them toward each other slowly. The centre slit opens into a diamond or cross-shaped opening.

9. Continue pushing until the slit opens enough for the four double leaves to swivel around the centre. Turn the leaves until the page labelled 1 becomes the outward front and page 8 lies at the back. Collapse the remaining leaves into a single small stack without tearing the centre.

10. Flip through from front to back. The intended reading order is 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, all right-way-up. If a page appears upside down, unfold the disposable proof and compare the TOP/BOTTOM imposition map before printing any final art.

11. Gently sharpen the assembled spine with a blunt fold tool on a protected table. Do not burnish against a sharp edge or try to force thick board into the same route.

12. With your pencil, add one original short phrase or visual idea to each panel. The reference master already carries page numbers; for a final edition you may redraw the eight panel contents in their correct rotated positions, and then confirm a new proof before making copies.

What can go wrong, and how to record it

If the centre will not open into a cross, inspect the cut length before applying force. The slit is not a long exterior cut and is not a vertical cut. Its correct location is the horizontal half-height line between the two inner vertical quarter divisions. A full-sheet cut, a misaligned quarter fold, or a cut made along the wrong crease changes the topology of the form.

If front cover and back cover land in the wrong positions, compare the flat map: BOTTOM row 6 / 7 / 8 / 1 upright; TOP row 5 / 4 / 3 / 2 rotated upside down. Some alternative folding paths start on another panel, so deliberately turn the collapsed leaves until 1 sits outside. First test with numbered dummy pages, then replace the numbers with your message. This prevents wasting drawings when the page orientation is confusing.

If a page gets smaller than expected, check the actual print scaling. A4 quarter widths are 297 ÷ 4 = 74.25 mm; Letter quarter widths are 279.4 ÷ 4 = 69.85 mm. When the document was printed reduced, a 50 mm bar might measure only 48 mm, meaning a scale factor of 48/50 = 0.96. That is an error of 4%, not an acceptable alternate paper size for these diagrams. Reprint or work from a correctly measured sheet.

A fold-only zine can be flattened as a master for copying; it is not an archival preservation box, water-resistant notebook or suitable enclosure for valuables. If you wish to distribute many, retain a clean original digital file rather than refolding one physical copy repeatedly. The publishing team has calculated these folds from standard page geometry and drawn an original guide, but has not printed, cut, assembled, cycled or independently durability-tested a physical zine.

Make your content distinct and share responsibly

For a short illustrated subject, map one idea to one face. Page 1 names the project. Pages 2–3 introduce the scene, pages 4–5 present two details that belong together, pages 6–7 bring the sequence to a conclusion, and page 8 can carry a creator credit or simple invitation to make a reader's own zine. If text flows across a spread, remember that panels that lie adjacent on the opened flat master are not always consecutive in the finished booklet.

A good pocket zine is deliberately small. If the text cannot fit at a readable size, split it into two original projects or use the pamphlet-stitch notebook format in F037 instead. Do not shrink type until it is barely legible. A tiny booklet that someone can actually follow is more useful than a miniaturised full article.

For any revised layout, print a new numbered dummy, fold it, check reading order, and record that result for your own materials. The original guide does not guarantee that any home printer, paper grain or cutting tolerance will produce a precise physical fit. Treat the digital file as a starting pattern and your actual print as something the maker must check.

References, attribution and truthful limits

NASA/Smithsonian Chandra X-ray Observatory, Putting Together Your Zine, https://chandra.harvard.edu/make/images/Zine_folding.pdf . Consulted for conventional one-sheet cut/fold sequence and page orientation; this guide's instruction wording and vector graphics are newly created, not reproduced from the source.

BMCC Zine Library, How to Make a Zine, https://openlab.bmcc.cuny.edu/bmcc-zine-library/how-to-make-a-zine/ . Provides background on using a folded blank before filling it with original content.

Adobe Acrobat Help, Adjust page size for printing PDFs, https://helpx.adobe.com/acrobat/desktop/print-documents/set-up-and-print-pdfs/page-size.html . Consulted only for Actual Size versus Fit printing, not as an endorsement of this particular layout.

The eight-panel proof, numbered imposition, vector fold/cut diagrams, manuscript, cover and maker record are original Steadleaf Press teaching assets. No third-party PDF template, image or drawing has been copied into the publication. No real printed sheet, slit, fold, glue, repeat-cycle or user readability trial has been performed by the publishing team.

Printable diagrams and build record follow on the next pages.

TOP / ROTATED

5

TOP / ROTATED

4

TOP / ROTATED

3

TOP / ROTATED

2

CUT ONLY THIS MIDDLE SPAN

6

BOTTOM

7

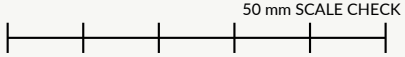
BOTTOM

8

BACK

1

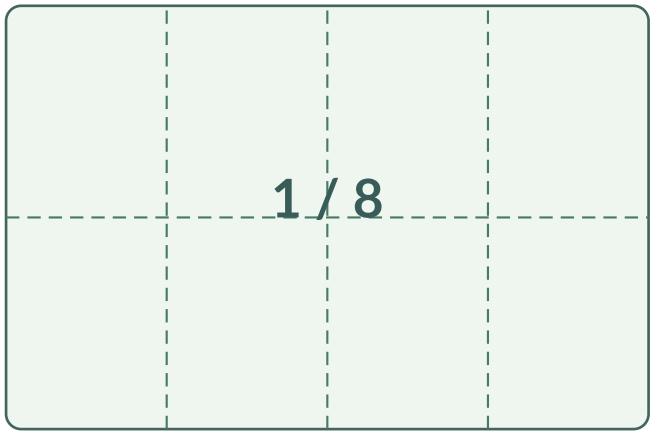
FRONT



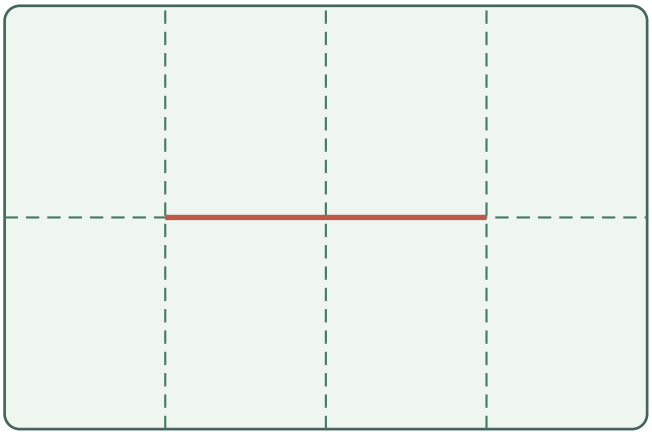
STP-MAKE-F036 / CUT + FOLD ROUTE

Original diagram: fold long axis, short axis and quarter lines, then slit only the middle half.

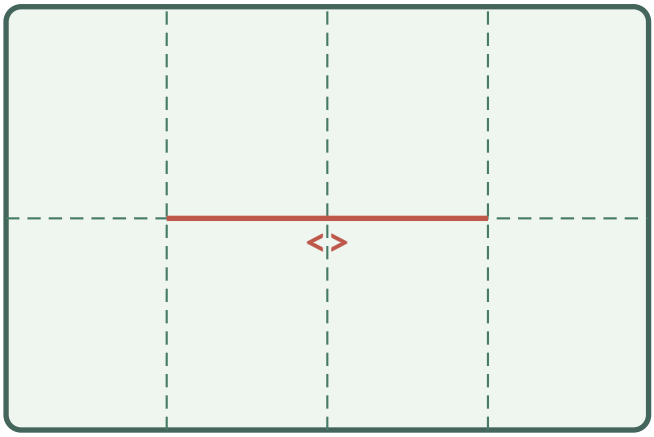
1. CREASE GRID



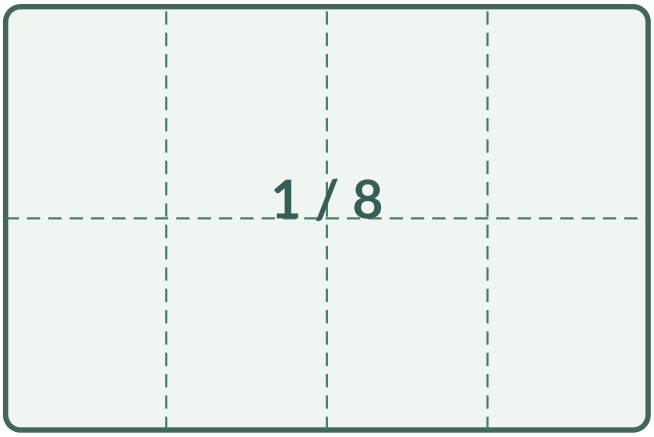
2. CUT MIDDLE ONLY



3. PUSH ENDS TOGETHER

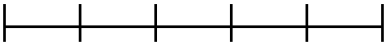


4. COLLAPSE, READ 1-8



A4 sheet: quarter width 74.25 mm, half-height 105 mm. Letter: quarter width 69.85 mm, half-height 107.95 mm. Imposition: TOP 5/4/3/2 upside down; BOTTOM 6/7/8/1 upright.

50 mm SCALE CHECK - measure with a ruler; must equal 50 mm



STP-MAKE-F036 / MAKER RECORD / PAGE 1

Write your own readings and decisions; no physical trial was performed by Steadleaf Press.

A4 or Letter sheet and actual dimensions

50 mm calibration bar measured by reader

Top row 5/4/3/2 rotated; bottom row 6/7/8/1 upright

Horizontal centre slit: exactly two middle panels

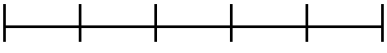
Folding and final 1-to-8 reading order

Chosen original message and visual approach

Observed trouble, remedy or NOT TESTED

Record an actual observation only if you perform it yourself.

50 mm SCALE CHECK - measure with a ruler; must equal 50 mm



STP-MAKE-F036 / MAKER RECORD / PAGE 2

Write your own readings and decisions; no physical trial was performed by Steadleaf Press.

What changed from the full-size original?

How was each score/cut location measured?

Where did the paper bind, crack, wrinkle or slip?

What would you change for the next copy?

Date, version and initials

Safety or handling concern noticed by reader

Record an actual observation only if you perform it yourself.

50 mm SCALE CHECK - measure with a ruler; must equal 50 mm

