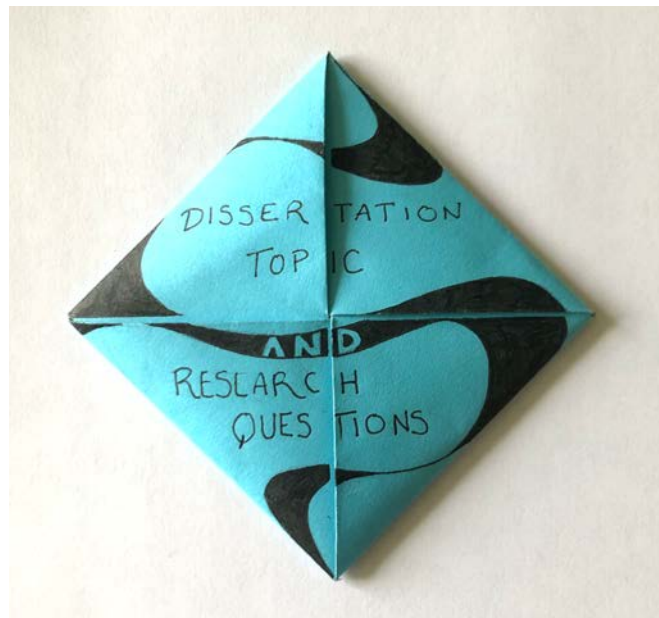


# A to zine: Making research digestible through paper craft



# Craft as reflective writing practice

*This guide focuses on how the practice of transposing work from one medium or genre to another can serve as a generative, reflective practice, particularly for writers working on long-term projects.*

How do you distill the key elements of a lengthy and complex piece of writing into an easily digestible snapshot? Whether aiming to translate research for non-specialist audiences or compose a project overview for one's own reference, summarizing and reflecting can be a useful exercise within the writing process.

Although often framed as a technical skill in academic contexts, writing can also be understood as a creative process. By adopting a craft-based approach, this activity encourages writers to utilize hands-on, creative approaches to reflect on and potentially reframe their works in process. In doing so, it emphasizes the usefulness of experimentation, the value of mid-process reflection, and the process of writing as an iterative and imperfect endeavor.

This exercise draws on a long history of zine-making and paper craft, adopting traditional forms such as the 8-page zine and the Victorian puzzle purse, along with Japanese self-closing boxes (*tato*) as its inspiration.<sup>1</sup> It is also informed by practices discussed in Season 5, episode 2 of the OWRC podcast, [Write for You](#), in which graduate writer and episode guest Sue describes finding inspiration in zines at a punk music show, and the process of creating her own zine based on her academic work.

## **The task:**

Create a zine or praxis puzzle that reflects your dissertation writing project, either in whole or in part.

## **The goal:**

This activity aims to facilitate analytical reflection on the dissertation text, prompting writers to clarify and distill complex ideas, practice genre translation skills, and build comfort with imperfection.

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<sup>1</sup> Additional information and resources on zines and Victorian puzzle purses can be found in the Resources & References sections: [zines](#); [Victorian puzzle purses and tato](#).

# How to: Folding and filling-in your paper craft

*This exercise aims to help writers engage and present their work in new ways by utilizing non-academic, craft-based formats to represent graduate research.*

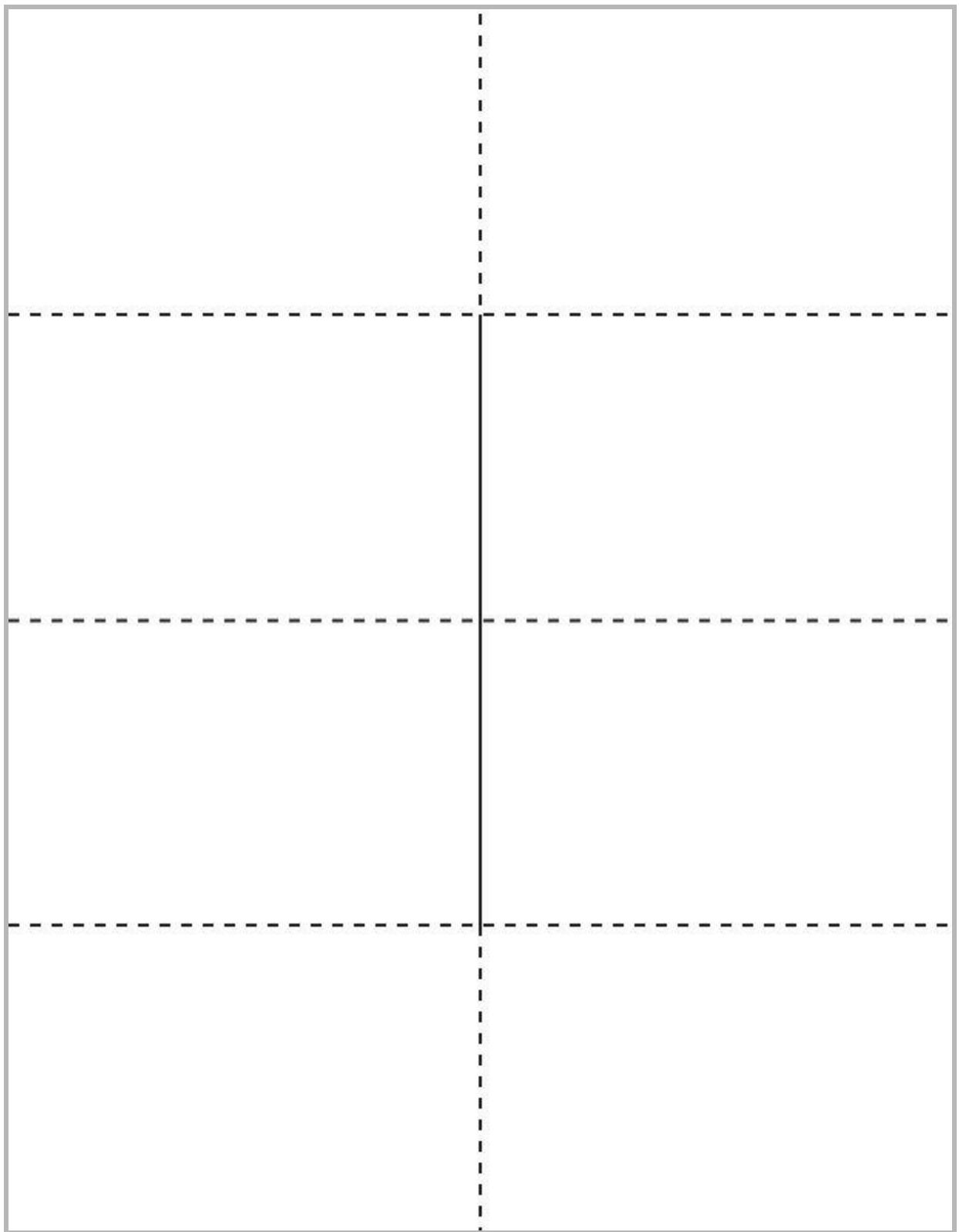
Experimenting with non-academic creative forms can offer writers a way of engaging with their work while deemphasizing implicit expectations of perfection. The following approaches can be applied with virtually any type of paper craft, and can be easily extrapolated to other ways of making or processes. This guide focus on two basic formats:

## **Option 1: Project zine**

Using a single sheet of paper, create an 8-page zine reflecting your project or dissertation outline.

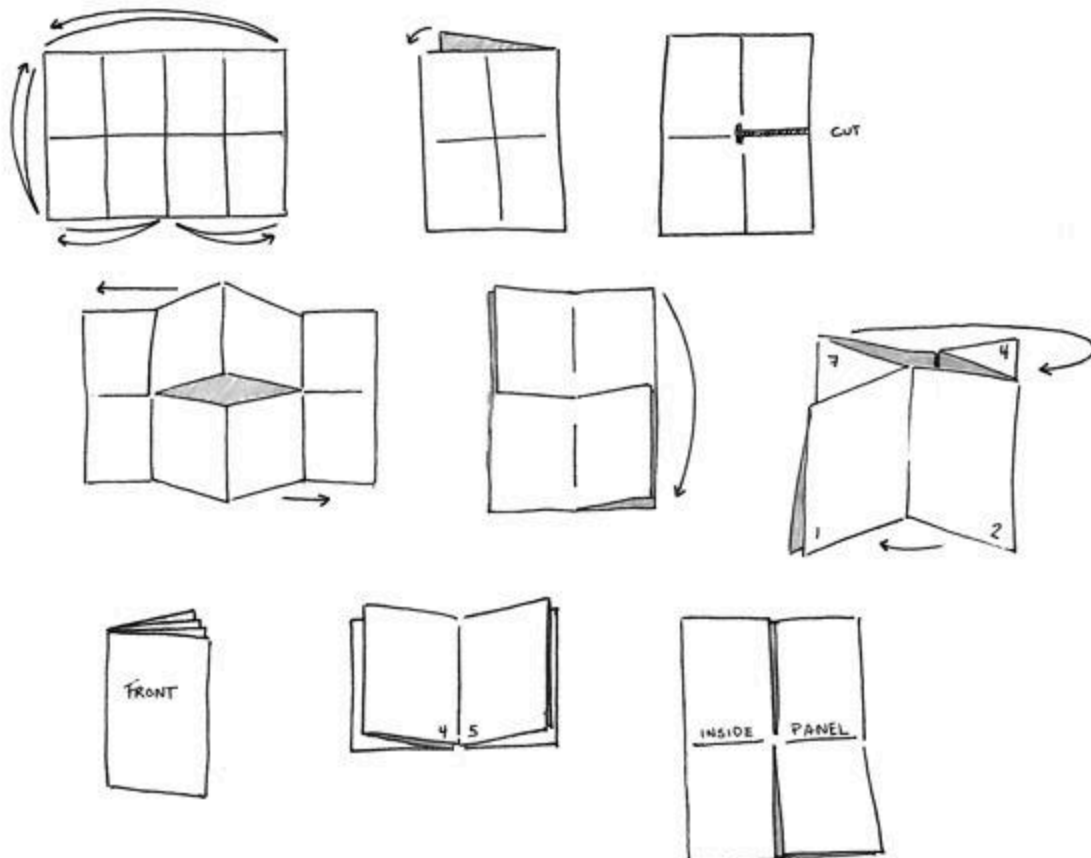
## **Option 2: Praxis puzzle**

Distill your dissertation or research project into a multi-layered folded puzzle.



## Creating your zine

1. **Choose a size.** Zines can be made in any size. When selecting the paper size you want to work with, consider the final page dimensions you would like to work with. This will be half of the shortest side of the starting sheet and a quarter of its longest side.
2. **Create the pages of your zine.** Fold the paper in half lengthwise and heightwise, creasing crisply. Repeat in the opposite direction as well to create flexibility in the fold. With the paper folded in half lengthwise, fold the edges opposite of the crease **in** to align with the crease, making sure not to overlap. Crease these new folds crisply, then repeat the previous steps, this time folding the edges opposite the crease **out** to align with the center crease.
3. **Cut.** With the paper still folded in half lengthwise, cut straight from the center crease inward, stopping at the next perpendicular intersection of crease lines..
4. **Fold your zine into its final form.** Lay the sheet out flat, fully unfolded. Pinch along the center crease on either side of the cut, pulling gently in opposite directions to produce a folded sheet half the length of the original paper. Then, fold the top half of the paper **behind** the bottom half. There should now be four “legs” extending from the center of the folded form. Holding one of these legs between index finger and thumb, sweep the remaining three legs toward the held leg in a circular motion. This will leave you with a folded booklet consisting of a front and back cover, six internal pages, and an inside panel the size of four individual pages. This interior panel can be opened up by lifting the bottom of pages 4 and 5 gently upward.
5. **Congratulations, you have created a blank zine!**



## Filling in your zine:

Zines are a versatile way of presenting information in a linear structure. There is no right or wrong way to compose a zine – the best approach is the one that conveys your ideas in a concise, accurate, and digestible way. Included below are sample frameworks, which writers are encouraged to adopt, adapt, or rework to best suit their goals, project, and style.

**Tip:** This fold pattern supports both portrait and landscape orientations.

### Approach 1: Page-by-page

Imagine your dissertation in miniature. What are the key points you want it to convey? Use each page to present a different key argument, takeaway, or piece of evidence. If you need a reference page, consider utilizing the back cover.

### Approach 2: The two-page spread

Readers of pictorial magazines will find this layout familiar. Instead of treating each page as a sequential unit, this approach utilizes the zine's ability to open and fold flat to produce three two-page spreads bookended by a front and back cover. This approach is well suited for writers utilizing figures, diagrams, or who would prefer to work with a larger presentation area. To maximize available space, this approach can also utilize the interior panel found by lifting the bottom of pages four and five to reveal a two-by-two-page spread.

### Approach 3: Continuous or carousel

This format adopts an ouroboros approach to the zine form. Rather than adopting a definitive beginning and ending page, it utilizes the flexibility of the fold pattern to allow readers to turn pages in a way similar to a spiral bound notebook. The result is a circular reading experience which allows writers to decline to specify a start or end page. This feature can be used as a rhetorical intervention, or to avoid imposing a defined structure on an otherwise flexible set of ideas.

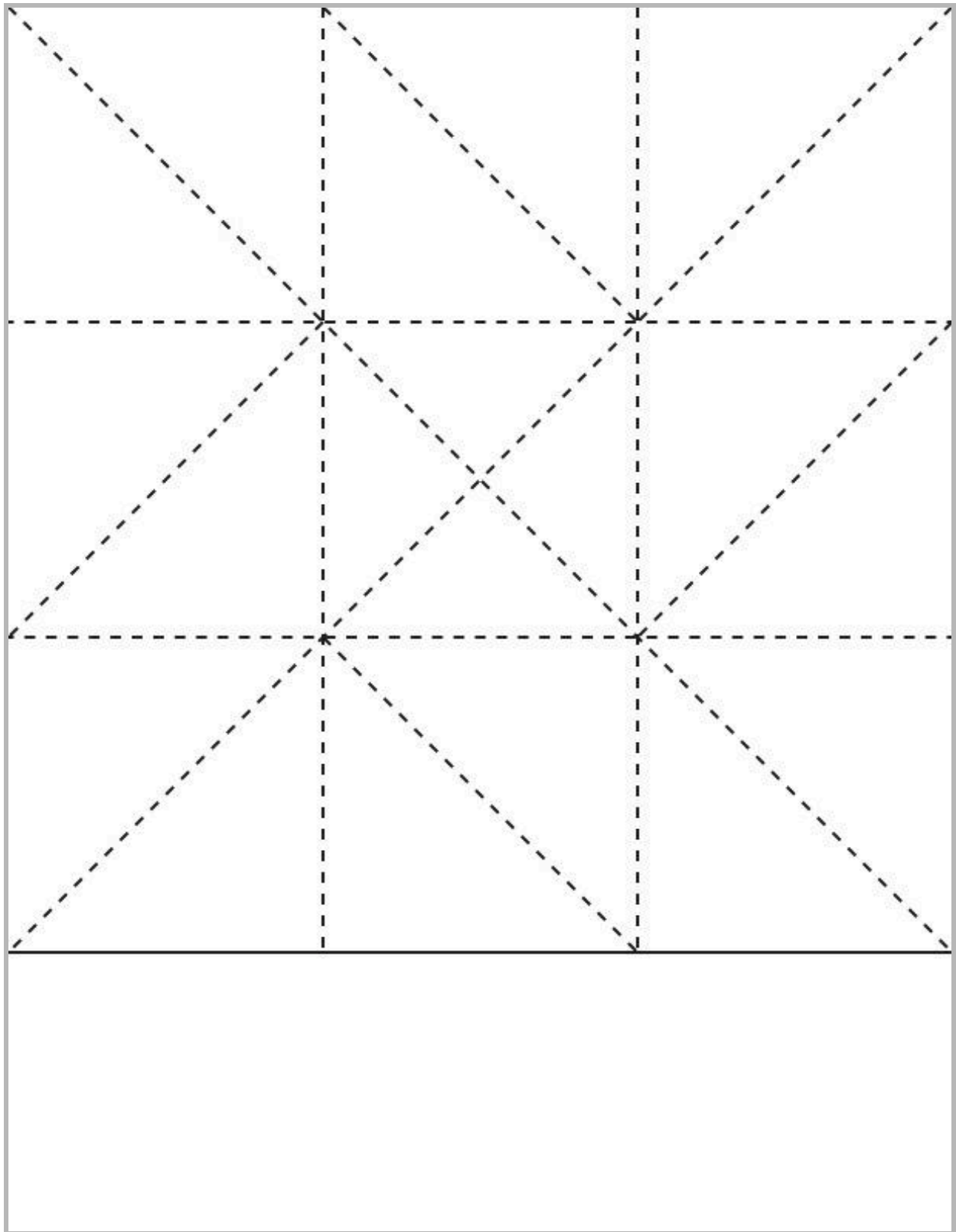
**Tip:** If you plan to use the inside panel, it can be helpful to create an external tab for the reader to use to open this interior space. If you do not plan to use the inside panel, you can create added stability to your zine by stapling along the central fold between pages 4 and 5.

FIELDS of SPECIALIZATION BACKGROUND AND/OR RESEARCH IMPACT

GOALS AND INTERVENTIONS

KEY EVIDENCE OR CONSIDERATIONS KEY POINTS AND TAKEAWAYS

PROJECT SUMMARY OR OUTLINE THESIS AND RESEARCH Qs





## Create your praxis puzzle

1. **Choose a size.** Praxis puzzles can be made in any size. When selecting the size of paper you want to work with, remember that the sheet **must** be square and should have dimensions that are easily and evenly divisible by three.

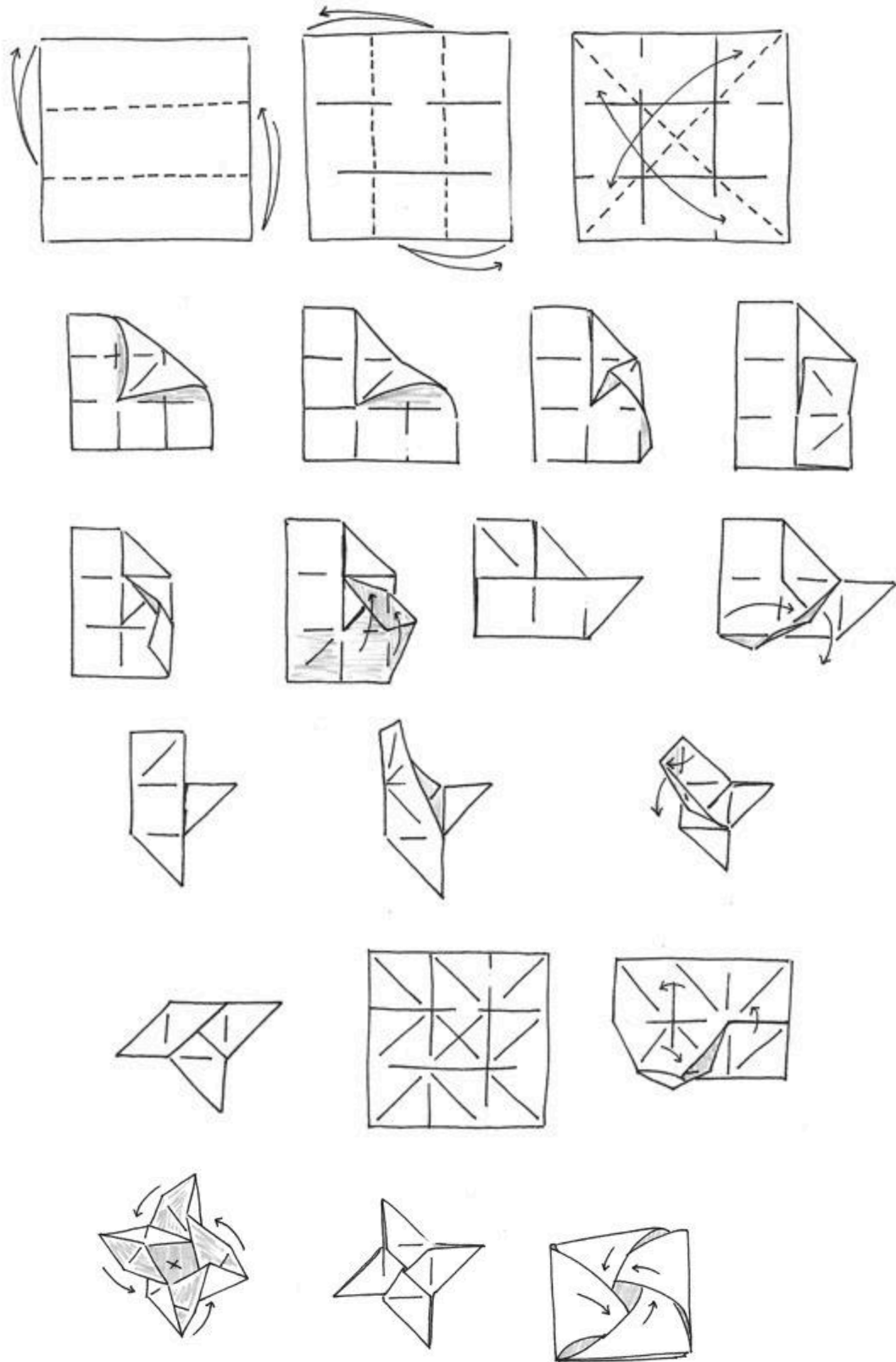
**Tip:** This is a fold-heavy craft, meaning it is easiest to make when using paper that is sturdy enough to avoid accidental tearing during the folding process, but thin enough that the layering of the paper during the folding process does not distort the puzzle or hinder its ability to fold down relatively easily.

2. **Create the fold infrastructure.**
  - a. Beginning with a square sheet, fold the sheet into thirds along the vertical and horizontal axes. Crease crisply, then unfold and refold in the opposite directions. This should leave you with a grid of nine equal squares.
  - b. Align the edges of two diagonally opposite corners of the sheet and crease crisply along the fold created. Repeat this in the opposite direction, such that the lines intersect, producing four 90 degree angles.
  - c. Using the diagonal lines as a guide, fold a parallel diagonal line across the middle square in the top row. Crease crisply. Holding the corner of the paper in alignment with the crease against which it is resting, fold the remaining paper in toward the center, creating a diagonal fold underneath two folded squares.

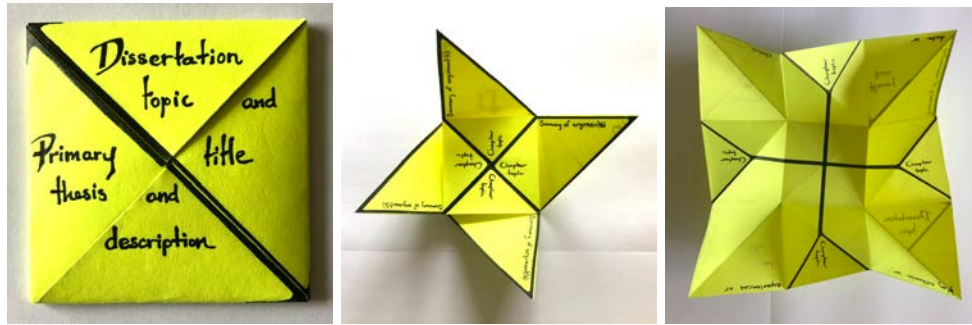
**Tip:** When working through these more complicated steps, illustrations on the following pages can be used as a helpful reference. Additional instructional material can also be found in the [“Resources & references about folded puzzle purses” section](#).

- d. Rotate the paper 90 degrees and repeat the steps in 2c rotating the paper 90 degrees with each repetition. This should result in a pinwheel shape on three sides.
  - e. Unfold the sheet and lay flat. The creases should resemble a continuous star pattern, but should not be symmetrical.
3. **Assemble the puzzle**
    - a. Fold the lower third of the paper nearest to you over the lowest horizontal crease, covering the middle third with the lower. One set of edge squares together, open the fold, allowing the paper to refold along the diagonal line created in 2c and 2d.
    - b. Gently repeat twice more.

- c. With the final side, tuck the edge of the paper underneath the folds in the center of the puzzle, allowing the paper to naturally follow the creases already created in previous steps. This may result in the already folded edges standing up. This is not a concern, but be sure not to disrupt the sequential layering created in steps 3a and 3b. Once the final edge is similarly positioned, apply gentle pressure on all sides, forcing the paper to fold in on itself in an interlocking fashion. This should produce a central square with triangular arms extending from each straight edge.
  - d. Finally, take the triangular pieces extending from the central square and fold over the top of the center square, aligning the lower straight edge of the arm with the edge of the square.
  - e. Repeat 3d three times more, folding each arm over the top of the other. This should leave one arm free floating, while the others have been layered into an interlocking arrangement.
  - f. Taking the tip of the top triangular piece, gently tuck the point under the adjacent arm until the top piece lies flat.
- 4. Congratulations, you have created your blank praxis puzzle!**



## Filling in your praxis puzzle:



*There is no incorrect way to fill in a praxis puzzle. As a reflexive tool, the praxis puzzle challenges writers-in-process to translate nuanced ideas into a tangible form while remaining concise, accurate, and digestible. Included below are sample frameworks, which writers are encouraged to adopt, adapt, or rework to best suit their goals, project, and style.*

**Tip:** A praxis puzzle has three overlapping layers – the exterior, middle, and interior. The top will have the least amount of space, while the interior will have the most.

### Approach 1: By field

**Exterior:** Use the exterior to present the topic and primary research question(s).

**Middle:** Articulate project motivations, goals, and/or contributions. On the extending wings, highlight key fields of expertise demonstrated in the research project, incorporating key authors or concepts associated with these fields as relevant.

**Interior:** Divide the interior into segments; use these to articulate future stages of research or outline to outline the dissertation or prospectus.

### Approach 2: By chapter

**Exterior:** Splitting the blank square into sections, establish the research topic, title, primary thesis, and/or project description as appropriate.

**Middle:** Use the natural segmentation created by the folds to split the interior square into sections, grouping or separating as applicable. On these, briefly identify current or prospective chapter topics. Use the adjoining wings to write out the summary of each chapter's expected or drafted argument(s).

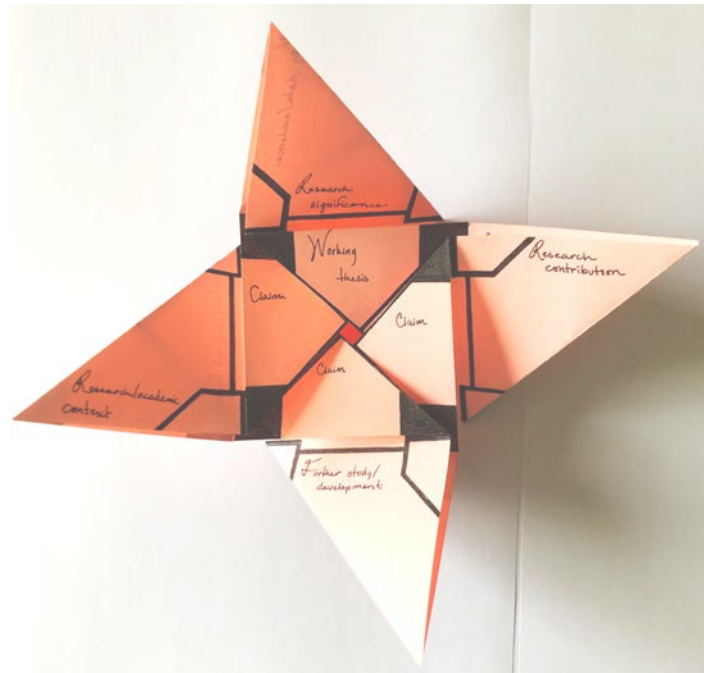
**Interior:** Summarize key evidence, field experiences, data, and/or claims that are important to the project. This detail can be reflective of the preceding layers, but can also be framed independently.

### Approach 3: By argument

**Exterior:** Articulate an overview of your project topic and contextualizing background; add the project's core research question and/or research goal as relevant.

**Middle:** In the center square, summarize your working thesis and primary claims or hypotheses. On the extending wings, present the project's expected significance, contribution, context, and/or potential outgrowths.

**Interior:** Summarize key evidence, grounding literature or authors, ongoing questions or concerns, and/or future steps or goals.



# Resources & references for zine-making

## State Library Victoria

### Ideas and inspiration for zine-making

- [Single sheet zine template](#)
- [Self-made: Zines and Artist Books](#)
- [B&W Template](#)

## Library of Congress

### Zines at the Library of Congress

- [How to Make a Zine](#)
- [Zine Collections at the Library](#)
- [Zine Publishers, Distros & Libraries](#)
- [Zine-making activity](#) (PDF)

## University of Puget Sound Collins Library

### All about zines

- [Background Sources](#)
- [Making Zines](#)
  - [Digital template](#) (on Canva)
  - [Digital template](#) (on Google Slides)
- [Citing Zines](#)

## Purdue University

### Loud on Paper Library Guide

## California Northstate University

## [An introductory guide to making zines](#)

- [8-page template](#)
- [16-page template](#)

## **Barnard College**

### [Zine Library](#)

- [How to make a zine](#)
- [5-minute time-lapse](#) of making a zine about Cherokee Nation sovereignty
- [Sample zine explaining zine construction](#)

## **Cornell University Library**

### [Zine 101](#)

## **Butler University**

### [Make zines](#)

### [Read zines](#)

### [Learn about zines](#)

# Resources & references about folded puzzle purses

## Origami Resource Center

[Valentine puzzle purses – overview](#)

[Self-closing boxes & tato](#)

## Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House

[The artistry & intrigue of puzzle purses](#)

## Royal Mail

[Stop-motion animation of folding a puzzle purse](#)

## The Metropolitan Museum of Art

[Historical example of a 19th century puzzle purse](#)

- [Unpacking a box of love](#) (article on historical, handmade valentine gifts)

## AccessArt

[Step-by-step activity guide for making a puzzle purse](#)

- Oriented toward K-12 teachers, but containing helpful information for all audiences.