



Managing Expectations and Rules

How to explain the make-a-thek as
a shared learning space, while setting clear rules,
principles and expectations

Summary

A make-a-thek space is a shared learning environment where people explore tools, machines, materials, repair, craft, digital fabrication and circular practices. It is not a service desk where staff produce objects for users.

For this reason, expectations need to be clear from the beginning. Users should understand what the space is, what kind of support they can receive, what they are expected to do themselves, and how they should care for shared tools, materials and other people's work.

This resource helps libraries and facilitators define the identity of their make-a-thek space, co-create rules and principles with staff and users, and communicate them through visible and customisable boards, posters and labels.

Definitions

Before setting rules, clarify the basic terms. This helps staff, users, partners and visitors understand the purpose of the space.

What is a makerspace?

A makerspace is a shared environment where people can access tools, machines, materials and knowledge to create, prototype, repair, experiment and learn by doing.

Makerspaces can include analogue tools, digital fabrication machines, textile equipment, electronics, craft tools, workshop areas and shared resources. Their purpose is not only to provide equipment, but to support learning, experimentation, collaboration and hands-on skills.

What is a make-a-thek space?

A make-a-thek space is a makerspace inside or connected to a library context. It combines making with the public, educational and civic role of libraries.

A make-a-thek space supports access to tools, machines, materials, knowledge and activities, with a specific focus on circularity, craft, digital fabrication, accessibility, inclusion and community learning.

It can be permanent, temporary, mobile, pop-up, small-scale or distributed across different rooms. What defines it is not only the equipment, but the way people are invited to learn, share, repair, reuse and take care of the space together.

What is not a make-a-thek space?

A make-a-thek space is not:

- a commercial fabrication service;
- a place where staff simply produce objects for users;
- a storage room for machines;
- a workshop that only experts can use;
- a space where materials and tools are consumed without responsibility;
- a space where users are passive recipients.

Key message

A make-a-thek is a shared learning space, not an on-demand service.

Managing expectations

Users may arrive with different ideas of what the space can offer. Some may expect a workshop, others a machine room, a repair service, a classroom, or a place where staff solve technical problems for them.

Clear expectations help avoid frustration.

Users can expect

- a welcoming place to learn and experiment;
- access to tools, machines and materials according to the local setup;
- basic guidance from staff or facilitators;
- information on how to use the space safely;
- beginner-friendly activities or entry points;
- support in understanding what is possible;
- opportunities to repair, reuse, prototype or create;
- a space where mistakes are part of learning.

Users should not expect

- staff to produce objects for them;
- immediate access to every machine without introduction or training;
- unlimited use of materials;
- guaranteed results at the first attempt;
- technical support beyond the team's capacity;
- permanent storage of personal objects without agreement;
- the space to work like a commercial service.

Useful sentences

We can help you learn how to make it, but we may not be able to make it for you.

You do not need to be an expert, but you are expected to take part in the process.

This is a space for learning by doing, not for ordering finished objects.

Rules and principles: what is the difference?

A make-a-thek space needs both rules and principles.

Rules

Rules define what users must do to keep the space safe, functional and respectful.

They are practical, clear and specific.

Examples:

- Follow safety instructions.
- Bring tools back where you found them.
- Clean your workspace after use.
- Ask before using machines you do not know.
- Label personal objects if you leave them temporarily.

Principles

Principles explain the values behind the space.

They help users understand not only what to do, but why it matters.

Examples:

- This is a shared learning space.
- Everyone can learn by doing.
- Materials should be used with care.
- Mistakes are part of the process.
- We respect people, tools and shared resources.
- Circularity starts from everyday choices.

Why use both?

Rules help manage behaviour.

Principles help create culture.

A good make-a-thek space needs both: clear practical instructions and a shared understanding of the values that guide the space.



→ for further insight into the core values of
make-a-thek, see also  [the Manifesto](#)

Co-create the rules and principles

Rules work better when people understand why they exist. Whenever possible, create or review them with staff, facilitators, regular users and community members.

This does not mean that every rule is negotiable. Safety rules, legal requirements and staff responsibilities must remain clear. However, users can help define how the space should be shared, cared for and communicated.

Co-design activity: “How do we share this space?”

Time: 30–60 minutes

Materials: sticky notes; markers; wall or board; examples of rules and principles; printed layout of the space, optional.

Step 1 — Start from real situations

Ask participants:

- *What makes a shared making space work well?*
- *What could make it unsafe?*
- *What could make it confusing for new users?*
- *What could create conflict between users?*
- *What creates too much work for staff?*
- *What should everyone do after using tools or materials?*
- *What should happen to objects left in the space?*
- *What values should guide the space?*

Step 2 — Turn problems into clear actions

Instead of: **People always leave things everywhere.**

Write: **Bring tools back where you found them.**

Instead of: **Users think we will do everything for them.**

Write: **Ask for guidance, then try it yourself.**

Instead of: **The space gets messy after workshops.**

Write: **Clean your workspace before leaving.**

Step 4 — Select the essentials

Choose a small number of core rules and principles. Too many messages are hard to remember.

Suggested rules

Take inspiration and adapt these rules to your local context

1. Follow safety instructions

Use tools and machines only when you know how to use them, or when a facilitator is present.

2. Ask before using unfamiliar machines

If you are not sure, ask first.

3. Bring tools back where you found them

Shared tools only work if everyone can find them.

4. Clean your workspace

Leave tables, tools and floors ready for the next person.

5. Use materials responsibly

Take only what you need. Keep leftovers sorted so they can be reused.

6. Label personal objects

If you leave something temporarily, add your name, contact and date.

7. Respect booking times

Leave time and space for other users.

8. Report problems

If something breaks, is missing or feels unsafe, tell a staff member or facilitator.

9. Leave it better than you found it

This is the simplest rule for a collective space.

Rules for personal objects and unfinished work

Shared spaces often accumulate unfinished projects and unlabelled objects. This needs a clear rule.

To do

- Define whether users can leave unfinished work.
 - Create a specific temporary storage area.
 - Ask users to label all personal objects.
 - Set a maximum storage time.
 - Define what happens to unlabelled or abandoned items.
 - Communicate the rule clearly.
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Create a Rules and Principles Board

A board helps make expectations visible in the space. It should be short, clear and easy to update. It can be printed as a poster, displayed on a wall, placed near the entrance, or used as a modular board with removable cards.

What the board should include

- name of the space, and short definition of the make-a-thek;
- 5–8 practical rules;
- icons or visual elements;
- contact point and note that rules can be reviewed with the community.

Use a clear tone

The tone of rules matters. They should be friendly, direct and realistic. **Prefer short sentences, action verbs, simple words, positive wording when possible, clear consequences, visual support.**

Examples

Take your materials with you, or store them in the temporary storage area.

Ask a facilitator before using machines you have not been introduced to.

Unlabelled objects may be moved or removed after the agreed storage time.

Suggested board structure

Adapt the Rules Manifesto you find below!



Space Rules

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Funded by
the European Union



make-a-thek is an exciting project funded by the European Union. Together, we're setting up creative maker spaces in public libraries to explore circular fashion, traditional crafts, and local innovation.

SPACE RULES

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And then?

Make rules visible where they apply

One general board is useful, but some rules should also appear directly where people need them.

Connect rules to onboarding

Rules should be introduced when users first enter the space, not only displayed on a wall.

Simple onboarding script

Welcome to the make-a-thek. This is a shared learning space where you can explore tools, machines and materials. We are here to support you, but the aim is for you to take part in the process and learn by doing. Please follow the safety rules, ask before using unfamiliar tools, put things back where you found them, and leave the space ready for the next person.

Review and update

Rules and principles should evolve with the space. Invite users to suggest improvements, and update the rules when needed!

Review when

the space opens; new machines are added; new user groups arrive; recurring problems appear; staff capacity changes; activities become more regular; safety issues emerge; users give feedback.

Ask

- *Are the rules clear?*
- *Are they visible enough?*
- *Are they too many?*
- *Which rules are ignored?*
- *Which expectations are still unclear?*
- *Do users understand that this is not a service?*
- *What needs to be changed on the board?*