



Set-up guidelines for Fixed Spaces

How to plan and organize a permanent, dedicated make-a-thek area

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Summary

Designing a permanent make-a-thek inside a library requires more than allocating square meters to machines. It involves creating a structured yet flexible environment where textile practices, digital fabrication, sustainability, and learning coexist harmoniously.

From functional zoning to machine placement, from material organization to cleaning systems and integration with the surrounding library, every design choice contributes to shaping the identity of the space. This article outlines how to plan and organize a fixed, dedicated make-a-thek area that is efficient, sustainable, and welcoming.

HOW TO GUIDE

A permanent make-a-thek is not defined solely by its equipment. It is defined by how carefully its environment is designed.

Through thoughtful zoning, strategic machine placement, flexible infrastructure, sustainable material systems, clear maintenance strategies, and respectful integration into the library context, the space becomes more than a workshop - it becomes a living extension of the library's mission.

Structure the space through functional zoning

A permanent make-a-thek should be organized into clearly defined yet flexible areas. Even without rigid partitions, zoning helps users intuitively understand how the space works and where specific activities take place.

A well-balanced layout typically includes:

- **Design and planning area**
Large shared tables support drawing, pattern making, textile cutting, and conceptual work. This is where ideas are developed before moving to fabrication. The atmosphere should encourage concentration, exchange, and experimentation.
- **Machine area**
Dedicated workstations for sewing machines, vinyl cutters, and 3D printers form the technical core of the space. These stations should communicate clarity and accessibility, allowing both beginners and experienced users to work comfortably.
At the same time, not all machines need to have a fixed position: some equipment, such as sewing machines, can remain flexible and be moved or rearranged according to the activity format, number of participants, or available workspace..
- **Materials area**
Storage must be visible and organized. Textiles, filaments, vinyl, and reusable scraps should be easy to identify and access, reinforcing sustainable practices.

- **Documentation and inspiration area**

Books, material samples, prototypes, guides, and visual references connect making with research. This area strengthens the relationship between the makerspace and the library's educational mission.

Zoning can be achieved through furniture placement, lighting, shelving systems, and subtle spatial cues - maintaining openness while providing structure.

Quick Self-Check

- ☐ **Can a new user immediately understand where to start?**
- ☐ **Is each zone identifiable within 5 seconds?**
- ☐ **Can two different activities happen simultaneously without conflict?**
- ☐ **Is there a visible transition from planning → making → documenting?**

Plan machine layout strategically

In a fixed space, machine placement directly influences workflow efficiency and user safety. The machines should be easily accessible, well lit and arranged so that workstations do not interfere with one another.

Specific considerations should be done for each specific machines, for example:

- Sewing machines positioned in stable, low-noise areas to minimize vibration and maintain a focused atmosphere.
- The vinyl cutter located near computers and flat work surfaces to streamline digital preparation and material handling.
- 3D printers installed in ventilated areas with clear visual supervision to ensure safety during long print sessions.

Each workstation should provide sufficient circulation space to allow safe movement, material preparation, and collaborative observation.

A well-organized layout creates a natural progression from idea to prototype to finished object.

Design for flexibility within permanence

Even though the space is permanent, it must remain adaptable. The design and planning area should be able to support guided workshops, individual use and collaborative projects.

Flexibility can be achieved through:

- modular and mobile tables
- shelving units on wheels
- stackable seating
- accessible and reconfigurable power outlets

A fixed make-a-thek should evolve over time, accommodating new programs, new tools, and different group sizes without requiring structural changes. Flexibility within permanence ensures long-term relevance.

Organize materials through a circularity-focused approach

Material management is central to any makerspace, including a textile-oriented make-a-thek. A sustainable system thought for a textile-oriented space is built on three principles:

- visibility: materials are openly displayed and clearly labeled, encouraging informed and responsible choices.
- traceability: users understand what materials are available and, when possible, their origin - whether reclaimed, donated, or newly purchased.
- reuse: offcuts and leftovers are valued as resources. Dedicated containers for reusable scraps make sustainability an everyday practice.

To reach the three principles, some recommended strategies are:

- sorting textiles by type and origin
- separating new materials from reclaimed materials
- implementing simple color coding
- clearly labeling storage units

When material organization is intuitive, sustainable behavior becomes part of the spatial culture.

Embed order, cleaning, and maintenance into the layout

A well-designed make-a-thek space makes tidiness easy rather than optional. The spatial layout should support immediate cleaning after use, routine maintenance, shared responsibility among users.

Practical solutions include:

- workstations equipped with basic tool kits for small adjustments and repairs
- clearly marked cleaning areas with accessible supplies
- visual rules displayed through pictograms, diagrams, and checklists
- cabinets or drawers dedicated to delicate tools and equipment

When cleaning systems are visible and accessible, users are more likely to take ownership of the space. Maintenance becomes part of the learning process rather than an external obligation.

Integrate the makerspace into the library environment

Because the make-a-thek space is located inside a library, spatial integration is essential. Key considerations must include :

- noise control to preserve study areas
- visual harmony with the surrounding architecture
- the use of natural or recycled materials for furniture
- signage aligned with the library's visual identity

The space should feel:

- welcoming
- readable and easy to understand
- non-intimidating

A makerspace inside a library should not feel industrial or exclusive. Instead, it should communicate openness and accessibility, reinforcing the idea that making is part of contemporary literacy.

Before finalising your layout, test it with a small group of users. Let them walk through the space and observe where they hesitate, ask questions, or change direction. Adjust accordingly.



If you want more suggestion on how to start with a minimum space setting, see also the resource **“make-a-thek in a box. A physical and digital starter kit to start your make-a-thek journey, from communication and space planning to tools and activities.”**