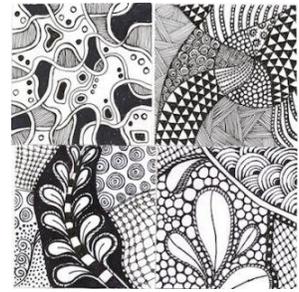


# ZENTANGLE®



Zentangle® is known to many artists and craftivistas as a way to create structured designs through drawing various patterns. Sometimes mistakenly called “Zendoodling” or “tangle doodling,” Zentangling or tangling is actually a formalized process that defines itself as something other than mere doodling because of its theory and approach. Rick Roberts and Mary Thomas [[www.zentangle.com](http://www.zentangle.com)] are the originators of the trademarked Zentangle method. Basically, it’s a specific way to draw images, most often in black pen on white paper. Zentangle has become an international phenomenon that now has applications in stress reduction, education, therapy and even motivational training.

Zentangle itself may be relatively new, but the basic principles involved are as old as the history of art. It includes ritual [a core practice in ancient and contemporary arts] and mirrors the symbols, designs and patterns of numerous cultures [Mayan, Maori, Celtic, and American Indian, for example] from ancient through present times. And like “doodling” it is based on a human behavior in which one refrains from planning and allows lines and shapes to unintentionally emerge.

There are numerous books on the formal method of Zentangle that will help you get started; these books provide numerous designs and show you how to create various patterns, step-by-step. Or simply search the Internet [especially Pinterest] to find instructions and inspiration for designs—then make up your own once you practice a few patterns. You really only need a few materials to create your designs: a pencil [used to mark out guidelines and to shade areas of designs], a black pen [Micron® pens are recommended, but you can also use the ubiquitous extra fine Sharpie® pen], and heavy white drawing paper or cardstock. The traditional practice of Zentangling uses 3 ½ inch square tiles made of special paper, but you can cut your own choice of paper into squares or completely “break the rules” and tangle on whatever type of paper you want to. If your children want to Zentangle along with you, they will find it easier to draw larger designs with bigger pens such as a fine point Sharpie® or large felt pens.

Why am I interested in Zentangle? While the process may look intricate, it is a deceptively simple pathway to relaxation and inner focus. In fact, proponents of the practice note that it has multiple benefits including calming an anxious mind, increasing self-confidence, and cultivating moment-to-moment awareness in a similar way as mindfulness meditation. Here are some other benefits:

**It's Self-Soothing.** Repetitive creative work, in and of itself, can be calming and self-soothing. In fact, some of the preliminary research on the Zentangle process indicates that engagement in the process has measurable relaxation benefits. This is particularly true if you accept this process as one with no expected outcome other than the enjoyment of putting the pen to paper and staying open to whatever emerges.

**It's Simple.** Zentangle art only requires a black pen and paper; you can do it just about anywhere. I can attest to the fact that any airplane flight goes by more pleasurably when I am tangling. Look for things you can tangle on like business card, coasters and even newspapers [tangle right over the printed pages].

**It Teaches How to Own Mistakes.** Using a pen on paper requires that you risk making mistakes; in fact, most tangle art has at least some misplaced lines which cannot be erased. Tangling teaches you how to incorporate what seem like “mistakes” into the overall pattern of the design. It's a great metaphor for everyday life—nothing is ever perfect, but how you adjust to imperfections [mistakes or the unexpected] in life is what really matters.

**It Reinforces “Aimlessness.”** Many Zentangle enthusiasts highlight the tangle doodle process as a form of mindfulness. I like to think of tangling as a form of "creative aimlessness." Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh observes that we need to cultivate aimlessness in life rather than continually striving to be “number one.” For example, when we practice walking meditation, we are not trying to arrive anywhere in particular; in fact, if we stay focused on the future, we lose the joy of our steps in the here and now. The same is true of the process of tangling. If we get caught up in judgment and deliberation, we are not in the here and now. But if we simply enjoy the creative process, we can enjoy every single moment of it and that is ultimately what any creative expression offers us. Zentangle teaches us not to rush and to take good care of ourselves in the present moment—after all, the present moment is all there is.

Keep Calm and Zentangle On,

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