5 Decide how many sheets of paper you want your notebook to include, taking into account that a large book (i.e., cereal box size) looks odd with less than 20 pages, and a small book (think bandage box) looks pretty portly with more than 50 pages. For an average-sized book, use about 60 pages.

6 Hand the front and back covers and the paper that goes in between to the person behind the counter at the copy store and ask him/her to bind it for you.

Alternatively, bind it yourself, following the instructions provided with your binding machine. (If you opt for the latter, don’t force matters; if your book is too big, remove some sheets and try again. Also, make sure that all your sheets are facing the same way—i.e. clean side up—before you start poking holes in them. After you’ve punched the necessary holes in the paper and covers, thread your wire binding through, cut the wire to length, and crimp the edges a little so they don’t cut your crafty little hands.)

Notes: If you only intend to assemble, say, a dozen or so notebooks per year, your best bet is to visit your local copy store or mega office store and pay to have them bound. If, on the other hand, you really want to crank these notebooks out, then you might want to spring for a binding machine and double-loop wire binding. In that case, you’ll also need to have some wire cutters and needle-nose pliers handy.

Instructions

1 Using your utility knife, roughly cut two pieces of cardboard for use as the front and back covers.

2 Slide the front cover into the paper cutter and trim it down to the desired size, taking care to trim inside any corner creases.

3 Using a pencil, lightly trace the measurements of the trimmed front cover to the inside of the back cover.

4 Slide the back cover into the paper cutter and trim it so that it is the same size as the front cover. (Don’t panic if they’re not exactly the same size; no one will notice or care.)

Materials

- Cardboard (think cereal boxes, beer cases, etc.)
- Paper (Any type will do, but obviously use only that are otherwise destined for the trash can be best)
- Paper cutter (Get one with a cutting length of about 15 in.)
- Utility knife
- Binding machine
- Double-loop wire binding
- Wire cutters
- Needle-nose pliers

Optional

- Binding machine
- Double-loop wire binding
- Wire cutters
- Needle-nose pliers

Designer: Michael Dittman

When college writing professor Michael Dittman discovered that the paper his students so conscientiously tossed in recycling bins on campus ultimately was dumped along with the rest of the trash, he did what any pinko dumpster-diving tree-hugger would do. He launched a paper-rescue operation, gathering up the discarded sheets and binding them clean-side-up into notebooks bound with cardboard from such items as cereal boxes, beer cases, and the like.