How to Prepare and Teach a Zentangle Beginner Class

Practical guide based on Katharina's workshop

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1. Intention of the class

- This class is about **sharing your personal way** of preparing and teaching a beginner Zentangle class.
- It is especially helpful if you **just finished your CZT seminar** and don't know where to start.
- The focus is on:
  - Creating a **safe, calm atmosphere**
  - Teaching the **8 basic steps of the Zentangle Method**
  - Helping students **experience** Zentangle rather than understand everything intellectually

2. Overall structure of the day (approx. 5 hours)

Instead of a strict timetable, work with a **flexible sequence**:

1. Welcome, housekeeping & short self-introduction
2. Participant introductions (structured & short)
3. Introduction to the Zentangle Method
4. Presentation of materials & class rules (quiet class, phones away)
5. **First beginner tile** (classic "Z-string" tile, ~1.5–2 hours) + mosaic & photos
6. Short review of the **8 steps**
7. **String exercise** on a worksheet
8. **Second tile – border tile** (focus on border tangles & retracing the line technique)
9. Optional **third / filler tile** (e.g. Bijou monotangle or Paradox monotangle) if there is time
10. Closing circle, outlook to other tiles & formats, resources, ways to stay connected

3. Opening the class

3.1. Housekeeping & safety

Right at the beginning, clearly explain:

- **Structure of the day**: when you plan breaks (e.g. lunch break + very short breaks after tiles)
- **Practical info**: toilets, where to put bags, drinks, etc.
- That the space is meant to feel **safe and calm**

This helps participants relax and arrive.

3.2. Introducing yourself

Prepare a few points:

- When you became a **Certified Zentangle Teacher (CZT)**
- How you discovered **Zentangle** and why it's meaningful to you
- What you stand for as a teacher (e.g. calm, playful, experimental)

Keep it short; people need just enough to **connect with you**, not your whole life story.

3.3. Round of introductions

To avoid endless sharing, **give a clear frame**:

Ask each participant to briefly share, for example:

- Name
- Where they live
- A simple third thing, e.g.
  - "What did you have for breakfast?"
  - or "How did you hear about Zentangle?"

Tell them that this is a **short** round, so everyone gets a chance without using half the workshop time.

4. Introducing the Zentangle Method

In simple words, explain:

- **Name**: "Zentangle" = **Zen + tangle**
- **Definition** (in your own voice, based on the official one):
  - An **easy-to-learn, relaxing and fun method**
  - Creating **beautiful images** by drawing **structured patterns (tangles)**
- It's:
  - **Non-representational** – it doesn't have to look like anything
  - Accessible: **anyone can learn it, one stroke at a time**

    - A way to **calm down**, be present, and enjoy the process
- Mention the **founders**: **Rick Roberts and Maria Thomas**

You may mention the idea of **“no mistakes”** – maybe briefly now, but you can also deepen it later while tangling.

5. Setting the “quiet class” frame & phones

Explain gently that this is a **quiet class**:

- People may naturally want to chat (especially if they know each other).
- Invite them to see **silence as a gift to themselves**:
    - “For these two or three hours, you can put daily life aside.”
- Ask them kindly to **put mobile phones away**, ideally out of sight.
- If someone starts talking a lot about everyday topics, kindly redirect:
    - “We can talk about that another time – right now, this is your Zentangle time.”

6. Presenting and explaining the materials

Show each item and **explain its purpose** so people feel confident and value the tools:

- **Tile**:
    - Original **Zentangle tiles** (e.g. 9×9 cm square tiles, Bijou, Zendala, 3Z, Phi, Opus, Apprentice, Renaissance, Translucen-Z etc.).
    - Explain why they’re called **“tiles”** and not just “paper” (they are small pieces of art you can put together in mosaics).
- **Micron pen (e.g. Pigma Micron 01, black)**
    - Very **dark archival ink**, made for fine lines
    - Emphasize that they are **high-quality tools**, to support the first step of the method: **Appreciation and gratitude**.
- **Graphite pencil**
    - Graphite for traditional **shading**
- **Tortillon**
    - Explain that it is **not a drawing tool**, but a **blending stump** to softly smudge graphite or charcoal.
    - Mention that pushing too hard on the very tip will crush it; it works best with **gentle, light pressure**.

This introduction already starts the first step of the Zentangle Method: **Appreciation of the materials and the moment.**

7. Helpful reminders during the whole class

Have a small **red box of reminders** on your teacher sheet and repeat them often:

- **Breathe** – invite participants regularly to take a deep breath.
- **Relax your hands** – they can gently shake out their hands or roll their wrists.
- **Hold the pen softly** – they don't need to grip it tightly.
- **Rotate the tile** – again and again remind them that they can turn the tile to find a more comfortable drawing direction.
- **Draw towards or away from yourself** – encourage them to notice what feels easiest.

These micro-reminders support **relaxation, body awareness and flow**.

8. The first tile – classic beginner "Z-string" tile

Goal:
Learn the **8 basic steps** of the Zentangle Method and a few key techniques.

Process (in essence):

1. **Appreciation & gratitude**
   - A short, quiet moment to arrive and appreciate the tools, the time, and each other.
2. **Corner dots**
   - Place a graphite dot in each corner of the square tile.
3. **Border**
   - Connect the dots with a light graphite line to form the frame.
4. **String**
   - Draw the classic **"C-shaped" string**, dividing the tile into a few sections.
5. **Tangles**
   n this tile, Katharina chooses tangles that introduce basic techniques, for example: Explain step by step, and remind them to **rotate the tile** for comfortable strokes.
   - **Static** – to show:
     - Even, parallel lines
     - **Aura-ing** (drawing an aura parallel to a line or shape)

        - Varying **line weight**
    - **Hollibaugh** – to demonstrate **"drawing behind"**:
        - Drawing bands that go over and under each other.
    - A simple **grid tangle** (she mentions *Forest*) – to show:
        - Working in a regular grid
        - Repeating a pattern inside each square.
6. **Shading**
    - Use graphite and a Tortillon to:
        - Add shadows under overlapping bands (Hollibaugh)
        - Create depth in grid tangles
    - Show how **little graphite** is enough and how to spread it softly.
7. **Initial & Sign**
    - Ask them to **sign the back** of the tile
    - On the front, invite them to add their personal **"chop"** – a small symbol like a signature.
8. **Appreciate**
    - Lay all tiles together as a **mosaic**.
    - Walk around the table together.
    - Encourage them to **appreciate each tile**, especially their own, without comparison.

Often this first tile takes **1.5 to 2 hours**, which is completely okay.

9. Reviewing the 8 steps

After the first tile (or after lunch), **show the 8 steps clearly again**:

- Print the **8 basic steps** on a sheet or board in your language.
- Quickly go through them:
    1. Appreciation & gratitude
    2. Corner dots
    3. Border
    4. String
    5. Tangle
    6. Shade
    7. Initial and chop
    8. Appreciate

Repeating the steps helps them remember that Zentangle is **a method, not just patterns**.

10. String exercise (worksheet)

Use a sheet with **many empty tile outlines** and guide students through a short, playful exercise:

- Show different ways to:
  - Place **corner dots** and borders (straight, curved, round)
  - Draw **strings**:
    - Soft curves
    - Strong S-curves
    - Simple diagonals
    - Inspired by **letters**: Z, N, double N, V, etc.
    - A string only in the center, or no border at all.

Purpose:

- To show that there are **endless possibilities** for strings.
- To help "**very mindy**" people see that a string doesn't have to be complicated to work well.
- To support people who automatically draw **overly complex strings** and then struggle.
- To open a conversation about **tangle types that don't easily fit into strict sections**:
  - **Border tangles**
  - **Blossoming / organic tangles**

Explain that some tangles work beautifully on a **blank tile without string** or with just a simple pencil line as guidance – but it's helpful to **first understand the classic method** before skipping steps.

Participants can take this sheet home as a **source of ideas** for future tiles.

11. Second tile – the "border tile"

Katharina often chooses a **border-focused tile** as the second tile.

Goals of this tile:

- Introduce **border tangles** that don't easily fit into one small section.
- Practice **weaving tangles together** more fluently.

- Teach the technique of **"redefine the line"** with a tangle like **'Nzeppel**.
- Repeat at least **one tangle from the first tile**, but as a **variation**, to show:
  - You can play with tangleations and **make a pattern your own**.

Example focus points:

- A border tangle running along the edge of the tile.
- A combination like **Flux** weaving into another motif.
- **'Nzeppel** as a perfect tangle to demonstrate **revisiting the same line** without drawing directly into the corners.

Because people are often more tired after lunch, plan **short micro-breaks** between steps.

12. Optional third / filler tiles

Come **well prepared**, even if you may not use everything:

- **Bijou monotangle**
  - Use a small **Bijou tile** (tiny square).
  - Draw just **one tangle** in different variations.
  - Great if you only have ~30 minutes left.
- **Paradox monotangle exercise**
  - Work with **Paradox** in a monotangle tile.
  - Emphasize direction, rhythm, and how drama can grow from simple repeated strokes.

You decide spontaneously which tile fits the **group's energy** and the remaining time.

13. Talking points during quiet tangling phases

When everyone is drawing quietly, you can **sprinkle in short explanations**:

- **Not representative**
  - The tile does **not have to look like anything**. It's not a picture of an object.
- **Flow & relaxation**
  - Talk briefly about being *"in the zone"* – fully focused and present.
- **Zentangle vs doodling or mandalas**
  - Zentangle is done **consciously, step by step**, following the method.
  - Doodling is more unconscious; Zentangle is an intentional practice.
- **No comparing**

    - Gently remind them **not to compare** with their neighbor.
    - Each tile is unique and valid.
- **Patterns as cultural heritage**
    - Explain that tangles are like **cultural patterns**, not trademarks.
    - Everyone may use them; it's simply kind to **mention the tangle creator's name** when you know it.
- **Tiles as experiments**
    - Invite them to view every tile as an **experiment**, not a test.
    - Suggest "homework":
        - One **very precise**, careful tile for quick, impatient people
        - One **intentionally fast and loose** tile for very perfectionist people
- **Terminology**
    - **Tile** vs paper
    - **String** – a pencil line that divides the tile into sections
    - **Tangle** (deconstructed pattern with step-out) vs general **pattern**
    - **Zentangle Inspired Art (ZIA)** – artwork inspired by Zentangle that doesn't follow all steps strictly
    - **CZT** – Certified Zentangle Teacher

These small pieces of information sink in best **while they tangle**, not in a long lecture at the start.

14. Closing the day

14.1. Closing round

End with a **short sharing circle**:

- Ask everyone to answer with **just one word** or a short phrase:
    - "How do you feel now?"
    - Answers might be "tired", "relaxed", "peaceful", "excited", etc.

14.2. Mosaics & inspiration

- Arrange all tiles in **mosaics** again, and let everyone take a look.
- Show a **wider collection of your own tiles**:
    - Different formats (Bijou, Zendala, 3Z, Phi, Apprentice, Renaissance, Opus, Translucen-Z…)
    - Different colors and projects
- This gives an **outlook** and shows how vast the Zentangle world is.

14.3. Resources & staying connected

- Briefly mention:
  - Where they can find **patterns** (websites, books).
  - Your **future gatherings / classes**.
  - How they can **stay in touch**:
    - e.g. mailing list or newsletter.

14.4. Optional handout

Katharina sometimes sends a **follow-up handout**, but notes that it's a lot of work and not necessary for every class.

Her handouts may include:

- A page with the **8 basic steps**
- A list of **links** (pattern sources, blogs, official Zentangle resources)
- Her own **step-outs** for the tangles used in class (sometimes with variations)
- Photos of some of the **tiles or mosaics** from the group

You can decide how much is sustainable for you, and keep in mind that Zentangle HQ encourages teachers not to give away **too much written material**, so that the **live experience** remains special.

15. How to prepare your own teacher documents (tile sheets & day overview)

Katharina works with two main types of preparation documents:

15.1. Day overview sheet

One page that shows the **whole day at a glance**:

- Sequence: introduction, tiles, exercises, breaks, closing
- Boxes with:
  - What to say during the **introduction** (housekeeping, quiet class, phones, your story)
  - The **red reminder box**: breathe, relax hands, rotate tile, etc.
  - A box with **Zentangle philosophies & concepts** you may mention during tangling (no mistakes, do not compare, cross-training, etc.).

She does **not** put strict times ("10:30 – 10:45") anymore, because she noticed groups move at very different speeds.

15.2. Tile sheets (one per tile)

For each tile that she teaches, she has **one A4 sheet** with:

- A **photo** of the finished tile at the top
- A **name** for the tile (e.g. “Beginner Tile – C String”, “Border Tile 1”, “3Z Sand-Mooka Tile”)
- **List of tangles** used, often in the **order** she teaches them
- A short description or sketch of the **string**
- **Materials** needed:
  - For the **students** (which tiles, pens, pencils, Tortillon, etc.)
  - For **herself** (extras, demo tools, board, poster of 8 steps)
- A “**Method**” section:
  - The **step-by-step** teaching sequence for that tile
  - Which pen to use when (e.g. “Micron 01 for lines, white charcoal pencil for highlights on Renaissance tile”)
  - Which techniques to highlight (drawing behind, aura-ing, revisiting the line, drama, etc.)
- A short **teaching focus** sentence:
  - e.g. “Goal: learn basic techniques and the 8 steps”
  - or “Goal: practice border tangles and revisiting the line with ‘Nzeppel’.”

She keeps all these sheets in a **folder**, so she can quickly:

- Reuse a tile in a new class
- Mix and match tiles for different workshops
- Add **Post-it notes** when she wants to swap one tangle or add a variation without rewriting the whole sheet.

16. Checklist for your own packing list

Katharina uses a simple checklist that can grow over time. Typical items:

- **For participants**
  - Class kits in **muslin drawstring bags** (tiles, Micron pen, pencil, Tortillon)
  - Your **business card** or a small personal note in each bag
  - Extra tiles (square, Bijou, Zendala, Apprentice, Renaissance, 3Z, Phi, Translucen-Z, Opus…)
  - Spare **Micron pens**, pencils, Tortillons
- **For you as teacher**

    - Printed **day overview** and **tile sheets**
    - Poster or printout of the **8 basic steps**
    - A **selection of your own tiles** to show
    - Registration list, name tags, pens for writing names
    - Technical equipment (if needed): laptop, projector or document camera, cables, charger
    - Camera or phone to photograph mosaics (if participants agree)
- **For the room**
    - Water, tea, maybe a simple snack (depending on context)
    - Tape or board to **display the 8 steps** or sample tiles

Before each class, she goes through the checklist and **ticks off what she really needs** for this specific workshop.