JUMP INTO

Sewing

For Beginners • 6 Modern Projects
From Tools to Techniques

LEE CHAPPELL MONROE

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C&T PUBLISHING

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my mother, who I affectionately call The Guru. She gave me life and made it better by teaching me to sew. Every page of this book is influenced by her brilliant ability with needle and thread.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I've been creating my entire life and there are so many people who've taught me, inspired me, and cheered me on along the way. I create because of you. Thank you to all my friends and family who have contributed to my stitching life. I've learned from you. And a special thank-you to my students; you are the brightest spot in my stitching world.

CONTENTS

Introduction

Welcome to the wonderful world of sewing! I started stitching at a young age and it's a skill that comes in handy quite often. It's satisfying to make your own creations and helpful to have the know-how to properly sew on a button. Whether you want pillows to match your couch, a bag to gift to a friend, or the perfect teacher thank you, you'll find that sewing knowledge will open a lot of doors.

This book will introduce you to the basics of all things sewing. You'll learn about the tools you need, the techniques to master, and then you'll make six projects to build on your foundation of knowledge. It is a how-to guide for those new to machine sewing, but also a resource for experienced sewists. You will be ready to explore other avenues of sewing once you learn these basics; from home decor, to garments, to quilting, to handwork. The options are endless.

There is more than one right way to do many things, but there are also ways that will lead to greater success. Successful sewing is often in the details, so you'll find helpful tips throughout the book to guide your focus. I always say that I want it to look handmade not homemade!

With each project, you will apply different techniques. Working through them in order is a great way to learn about applying the tools and techniques. The projects increase in difficulty, but don't build on one another. Choose the project that appeals to you to start, but know that the last project is more challenging than the first. Once you've worked through them all, you will have learned the practical skills outlined in this book. I recommend you read the book in its entirety prior to stitching.

Build your confidence, and then create your own project ideas! You can add depth to a zipper pouch by combining the Back-to-School Pencil Pouch project (page 41) with a squared corner (see Squaring a Corner, page 24). Or make your own straps (see Making Straps, page 29) for Kitty's Book Bag (page 35), so you can use a coordinating fabric. Get the ideas flowing!

METRIC CONVERSIONS

The metric measurements in this book follow standard conversion practices for sewing and soft crafts. The metric equivalents are often rounded off for ease of use. If you need more exact measurements, there are a number of amazing online converters.

TOOLS AND SUPPLIES

Meet the Sewing Machine

Anatomy of a Sewing Machine

The sewing machine is your most-used (and treasured!) tool. While there are differences among brands and within brands, the same general components work similarly.

1 The **Hand Wheel** moves the needle up and down. It is best to turn the wheel towards you. Only turn it away from you if necessary.

2 The **Bobbin Winder** is the location for placing the bobbin when it is being wound.

3 The thread is placed on the **Spool Holder**.

4 The **Stitch Indicator** displays the stitch you are sewing, i.e., straight or zigzag.

5 The **Stitch Width and Length Indicator** displays the width and length of the stitch. The width is left to right and the length is the distance front to back; each stitch has a default that you can then adjust.

6 The **Speed Indicator** controls the speed of the needle and feed dogs.

7 Thread travels through the **Tension Discs** on the way to the needle. Changing the tension causes the discs to tighten or loosen.

8 The **Take-Up Lever** moves up and down as you stitch pulling the thread from the spool through the tension discs.

9 The **Tension Dial** sets how loose or tight the tension discs are.

10 The **Presser Foot** holds the fabric to the feed dogs.

11 The **Stitch Plate** is the metal plate below the needle and presser foot; it covers the bobbin area and is marked with seam allowance guidelines.

12 The **Feed Dogs** move the fabric under the needle and presser foot.

13 The **Disengage Feed Dogs Switch/Button** lowers the feed dogs to allow for free motion under the needle and presser foot so the sewist moves the fabric.

14 The **Bobbin** provides the bottom thread and can be located on the top, front, or side *(vintage machines)* of the machine. Each style has pros and cons. A top loader allows the sewist to see how much bobbin remains, while the front loader has the straightest stitch.

15 The **Foot Pedal** makes the machine stitch. It can also be used to control the speed.

Adjusting Tension

For the majority of fabrics, most machines will not require you to adjust the tension. If you find that your stitches are not balanced, make slight adjustments until your stitch is balanced. If your upper thread is too tight and the bobbin thread can be seen on the top, decrease the tension. If your upper thread is too loose and can be seen on the bottom, increase the tension. Balanced tension looks the same on the top and bottom and is the ideal stitch.
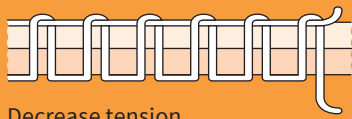
Decrease tension
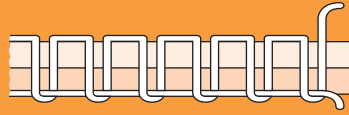
Increase tension
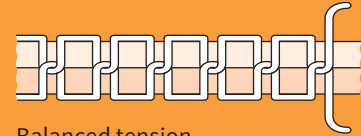
Balanced tension

Ideal stitch

Features

Consider and prioritize the features you will actually use. A good basic machine will include straight stitch, zigzag, and reverse. There are many bonus features you may want: needle threader, automatic buttonhole, automatic cutter, automatic presser foot up/down, a needle up/needle down option, decorative stitches or machine embroidery. Consider the ones you will frequently use and the price you are paying for that feature.

Presser Feet

Some presser feet will come with your machine. A machine will typically have a general-purpose foot, a zipper foot, and a small selection of specialty feet. Specialty presser feet offer an enhanced sewing experience to specific stitches or applications. A popular specialty foot is the walking foot, which works as a second set of feed dogs to better grip and move thick or layered fabric. As you grow your skills, you will expand on the presser feet you own and use.

Name Your Bestie

Naming your sewing machine is a fun tradition! Plus, it's nice to say, "Come on, Marta!" when I need her to stitch through a thick fabric or finish a seam before the bobbin runs out. My current machine, Marta, joins a long line of BERNINAs, including Bert, Bert II, Macy, Pippi, and Gene. I also have Lulee, the vintage featherweight named for my grandmother. What name will you choose?

Using Your Machine

The Manual is Your Friend

Read your manual. I have been sewing for years and every time I get a new machine, I read the manual cover to cover. I learn something new each time! Seriously, read your manual. Each machine will have its own method of winding a bobbin, threading, and fixing errors. The manual will answer a lot of questions specific to your machine.

Your manual should always be nearby. If you take a class, take your manual. An experienced sewist or teacher can better help you if you have your manual. Manuals are often available online.

Common Issues

• Always make sure the presser foot is up when threading the machine. This opens the tension discs and allows the thread to travel freely while threading.

• Cross-wound thread can be on a vertical or horizontal spool holder. Straight wound thread must be on a vertical spool holder. See more on Threads (page 10).

• If your thread is breaking, the 2 best fixes are a new needle or a thread stand that can be set further from the machine. You may not have the correct needle. See more on Needles (page 13). The thread stand is separate from your machine and allows the thread a longer distance from spool to needle, which helps to even out the tension, preventing breakage.

• Remove the dust from your machine with a brush whenever you change the bobbin. A clean up can solve a lot of problems. Never use canned air or anything that blows into the machine, including your breath. It causes the dust to build up and adds moisture inside the machine.

• If the thread is bunching up and looking like a bird nest on the bottom, the problem is likely the threading on the top of your machine. If the bird nest is on top, the problem likely is with the bobbin. It's the opposite of what you'd expect.

• Hold the thread tails to the back when you begin stitching. The tails are the top and bobbin threads; your machine will stitch better at the beginning if you hold onto the tails.

• The wrong needle, a blunt needle, or a needle that is not fully inserted into the machine often causes skipped stitches. See more on Needles (page 13). A skipped stitch is exactly what it sounds like; the machine failed to make a stitch and there is an extra long stitch. If you get skipped stitches, you can sew over the seam again; it does not need to be removed unless it needs to be aesthetically pleasing, such as Top Stitching (page 21).

• Take care to have the correct bobbin. Bobbins can look similar but be slightly different heights or diameters.

🖼️ Listen to My Grandmother

Gaga really knew how to keep the machine happy. If the machine was being finicky, she said to re-thread, then pull out the bobbin and re-thread that. If that didn't solve it, change your needle. Most of the time, one of these three steps will fix the problem and have you backstitching up a storm!

Fabric

The fabric options can seem endless. Instead of feeling overwhelmed, look at them as endless opportunities! There is a lot to consider when choosing fabric, but you'll develop favorites over time. Fabric content can vary from natural cotton and linen to synthetic polyester and rayon. Once you find something you love sewing with, you can buy different colors and prints for new creations. I use the same brands and types of fabric over and over.

What Is a Selvage?

The selvage of fabric is thicker and coarser than the body of the fabric. With printed fabric, it is the area the gripper holds during the printing process. With woven fabric, it is the edge that forms as the fabric is woven. Printed selvages provide information on the fiber content, designer, and ink colors used in printing. Woven fabrics offer the opportunity to use a beautiful fringed edge on your project.

Types of Fabric

Lawn/Voile

Tightly woven small threads give it a soft feel and gentle drape. It makes a lovely bag lining in addition to being a popular garment fabric. Lawn has thicker thread than voile but they are similarly soft with higher thread counts than quilting cotton. It is often made with cotton, but can be produced with other materials.

Woven

Different colors of thread are woven to create a design. Plaid and gingham are often woven. Shot cottons use one thread color for *weft* and a different color for *warp* which creates an iridescent quality to the fabric. (For weft and warp, see Straight Grain Versus Bias, page 10.) The threads are yarn dyed so that the color is applied to the thread/yarn before the fabric is woven.

Quilting Cotton

These are made from cotton and typically a medium weight fabric. Designs are printed onto the fabric after it is woven.

Flannel

Similar to quilting cotton, it has a fuzzy soft finish and looser weave.

Felted Wool

The wool is heated and washed to create a felt made of wool. Felt does not ravel and provides a clean edge that does not need to be concealed.

Corduroy

This popular garment fabric has a soft texture and durability that makes it also popular for home decor and bag making. Wale count is an indicator of thickness of the cords (wales); the higher the number, the smaller the wale. Most corduroy is made from cotton.

Denim

Denim comes in almost every shade of blue, as well as other colors, and a wide range of weights. It is a popular choice for garments and bags. Typically it is cotton, but it can be a blend.

Velvet

This plush fabric is used in home decor, bag making, and garment sewing. Fiber content can vary, but typically includes a synthetic fiber. Velvet can be challenging to stitch with, so it's not recommended for your first project.

Canvas

Canvas is a thicker woven fabric, often made with cotton or a cotton blend. It has more body making it an ideal bag sewing fabric.

> ## Stretch it Out
>
> Knit, Ponte, nylon, and other stretchy fabric are ideal for garment sewing. While these fabrics have wonderful qualities, they don't work well for the projects in this book. You will use different needles and oftentimes a serger or overlocker in lieu of a sewing machine for a project using stretch fabric. Stretchy stitching is a different world.

Things to Consider When Choosing Fabric

Width

Fabric typically comes on a bolt that is 45″–60″ (110–150cm) wide. Quilting cotton is typically 45″ (110cm) wide. Cotton voile and lawn are typically 54″ (140cm). Home decor, canvas, and sturdier substrates are often 60″ (150cm). There is not an industry standard and you'll find plenty of exceptions. The yardages in this book are based on 42″ (107cm) -wide fabric, because the usable area is narrower than the complete width. The phrase "width of fabric" refers to this. It will often appear in patterns as width of fabric or abbreviated "WOF."

Quality

Cost can be an indicator of quality but it can also be an indicator of expensive content. Silk is more expensive than cotton, but that doesn't mean it is better for your project. A look-through test can be an indicator of quality. If you're looking for a quilting cotton that is medium weight, it shouldn't be see-through.

🖼️ Follow the Pattern

The first time you make a project from a pattern, follow the fabric suggestions of the pattern writer. The sample they made to test the pattern is a great indicator of what fabric will work well.

Touch Test

Consider the drape and fabric content when you are selecting your fabric. This is my biggest factor when choosing fabric. If you don't like how it feels now, you won't like it after you've spent time making it into something else. No color or design can outweigh a failed touch test! If it feels slippery when you touch it, it will feel like sewing water on the machine.

Directionality

If a fabric has a design or print, it can be directional. If the motif, such as wildlife needs to be right side up, you'll need to consider this when cutting. Some graphic prints are directional but look attractive in both directions; you will want to take care to cut your pieces in the same direction. Fabric that is directional can sometimes require additional yardage.

Drape

It is exactly what it sounds like. How the fabric drapes and moves is an indicator of how it will drape and move once you sew it into something. Thinner fabrics have more drape, while heavier fabrics have more body and are boxy.

Thread Count

Thread count tells you the threads per inch. However, all threads are not created equal. The thread for lawn fabric is fine, while the thread for quilting cotton is thicker. It can be a good indicator of how thin or heavy a fabric is; however, unless the threads are similarly sized, it's not apples to apples.

PREWASHING

Consider both the fabric content and the finished project when deciding whether or not to pre-wash. Rayon, linen, and cotton can shrink so prewashing is recommended. If it's a project you'll want to wash often, then prewashing is also recommended. If I plan to wash my finished project, I always prewash. Dye-trapping sheets are available in the laundry aisle and will collect dye before it can bleed onto other fabrics in the wash.

Straight Grain Versus Bias

Straight of grain refers to following along the threads that make up the fabric. The thread that runs left to right is called the **weft**. This is easy to remember because weft rhymes with left. The **warp** runs up and down parallel to the selvage. **Bias** is the 45° angle from straight of grain.
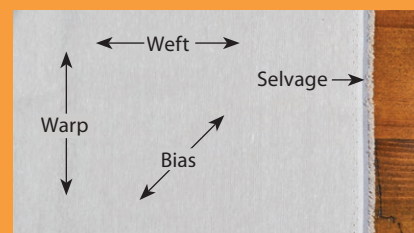
Threads

Let's kick this off by saying that thread labels are not standard and can be confusing to even an experienced sewist. Find a few threads that are available to you locally and stick to them. I've highlighted a great set as a starting point. While I have a drawer full of thread, I rely on the same types over and over, just changing the color. The touch test is a valuable resource when selecting thread!

Go-To Threads (see chart, next page)

How to Read the Thread Label

Most threads will be labeled with weight and ply in addition to fiber content. If this information is missing from the label, consult the manufacturer's website.

Weight

The weight of thread is a mathematical formula based on the weight of the content and the number of meters in that weight. While it is more likely to be consistent within a brand, it is not consistent across brands. The most commonly used thread is 50-weight. One brand of 50-weight may feel different from another brand of 50-weight. A cotton 50-weight will feel different from a polyester 50-weight.

Sewing machine thread is typically between 12-weight and 100-weight. A smaller number indicates a thicker thread, with 12-weight being the thickest and 100-weight being the thinnest. This is the opposite of sewing machine needle sizes.

2-ply versus 3-ply thread

Ply

The ply tells you how many individual threads are wrapped together to form the thread. A 2-ply thread is made of 2 strands, while a 3-ply thread is made of 3 strands and so on.

GO-TO THREADS

TYPE OF THREAD	SIZE/PLY	FIBER CONTENT/QUALITIES	APPLICATIONS
YLI Silk	100-wt. 1-ply	Silk • Thin and strong • Optimal for hand stitching • Sinks into fabric and disappears • Not recommended for fine fabric (it's too strong and can cut the fabric)	Hand stitching Hidden stitching
WonderFil InvisiFil	100-wt. 2-ply	Cottonized Polyester • Made with polyester but behaves like cotton • Can be finer than cotton thread because of strength of polyester • Minimal stretch	Inexpensive substitute for silk Hand stitching Hidden stitching
Isacord Embroidery	40-wt.	Polyester • Has a bit of stretch • Ideal for garment construction • Necessary for fabric with stretch • Beautiful sheen	Machine embroidery Decorative stitching
Gütermann Sew-All	50-wt. 3-ply		All purpose
Aurifil Mako *	50-wt. 2-ply	Mercerized Cotton • Treated to produce less lint • Holds color better than standard cotton thread	All purpose
Aurifil Mako **	40-wt. 2-ply		All purpose Great for large bag construction
Mettler Silk Finish	50-wt. 3-ply		All purpose
WonderFil Spagetti	12-wt. 3-ply		Top stitching

This thread was used for the projects in this book, except the Carryall Tote.
*** This thread was used for the Carryall Tote (page 44).**

Things to Consider when Choosing Thread

Color

Most of the time, a neutral is the best option. Having a light, medium and dark in both tans and grays will cover most thread needs. If you're topstitching, you can find a color match to blend in or use a contrasting neutral. If you're color matching, a slightly lighter thread will blend better than a slightly darker thread.

Colorfast

Colorfast means that the color will not fade from time or regular washing.

Matching Fibers

If the fabric is a natural fiber, such as linen or cotton, use a natural fiber thread such as cotton. If using polyester fabric, use polyester thread. The fibers will have similar qualities and stretch. I match fibers 99% of the time and cotton is my go-to.

Coating

Thread with a wax coating should not be used in a sewing machine. This is only intended for hand stitching.

CROSS-WOUND VERSUS STRAIGHT-WOUND THREAD

Cross-wound thread has an X design to the way the thread is on the spool. Straight wound thread is wound in straight lines around the spool.

Is It Too Old?

Thread does not improve with age. It can become brittle after many years. While your grandmother's stash is a great place to find vintage scissors, old thread should not be used. I do a pull test; if I can break it easily with my hands, I toss it. Save the cute wooden spool though!

Needles

Most sewing machine needles work in all sewing machines. There are few exceptions. Many sewing machine branded needles are made by large needle brands, so don't focus on the brand, focus on the size and needle type. The most frequently used needle for general sewing needle is size 80/12 universal; it is a good default to keep on your machine. I use an 80/12 microtex/sharp most of the time. Needle size will be determined by thread size, and to a lesser degree, fabric weight and type. The thread will lie in the groove of the needle. The groove size enlarges as the needle size enlarges. The higher the number, the larger the needle is. This is the opposite of thread and hand-sewing needles.

NEEDLE SIZES BASED ON FABRIC

NEEDLE SIZE *	THREAD/FABRIC WEIGHT	FABRIC TYPE
60/8, 65/9, 70/10,	Fine	Silk, Voile, Lawn
75/11, 80/12, 90/14,	Medium	Quilting Cotton, Linen
100/16, 110/18, 120/19	Heavy	Canvas

The European system is 60–120; the United States system is 8–19.

GO-TO NEEDLES

TYPE OF NEEDLE	QUALITIES
Sharp/Microtex	• Designed for precision on tightly woven fabric. • Sharp tip pierces the fabric cleanly for neat stitching.
Universal	• If a sharp and a stretch ballpoint needle had a baby, it would be a universal. • Designed to work for most stitching situations. • Ideal if you don't want to change your needle often.
Topstitch	• Best for thicker threads when topstitching.
Jeans	• Similar to a topstitch needle. • Reinforced to prevent needle breakage.
Leather	• Made to stitch real leather by puncturing a hole in the leather for the thread. • Never use for synthetic or imitation leather.
Metallic	• Prevents the needle from shredding the metallic thread.
Double Needle	• Stitches 2 parallel rows from 2 spools of thread.

Needle Tips

You need a fresh needle after 6–8 hours of sewing. I change mine after any large project or 2–4 small projects. It's an inexpensive fix for a lot of problems. If you don't remember the last time you changed the needle, it is time!

Take care to insert the needle fully into the machine and tighten the screw. Most machines have the flat edge to the back, but some vintage models are different.

Interfacings and Stabilizers

Interfacing is designed to add stability to a project while still maintaining the feel of the fabric. Stabilizer is rigid and has paperlike qualities. Typically, stabilizer is removed from the finished project and common in projects like machine embroidery. Interfacing remains in the finished project.

Both interfacing and stabilizers come in various weights, from light to heavy. Interfacing can be sew-in, 1-sided fusible, or 2-sided fusible.

GO-TO INTERFACING AND STABILIZERS

INTERFACING/ STABILIZER	QUALITIES AND APPLICATIONS
Pellon SF101 Shape-Flex (20″/50cm WOF)	• All weight fabrics to add a bit of body while keeping fabric qualities
Pellon Fusible Fleece (45″/110cm WOF)	• Adds loft and body while keeping a fabric quality • Exterior of a Bag, Bag Straps, Small Pouches
Pellon Thermolam Plus (45″/110cm WOF)	• Adds loft and body while keeping a fabric quality • A softer version of Fusible Fleece • Exterior of a Bag, Bag Straps
Pellon Stitch-N-Tear (20″/50cm WOF)	• Use for Buttonholes if no interfacing is already on the project • Adds stability during stitching, removed after

🌸 Use Fabric as Interfacing

Thicker fabric, such as denim or canvas can work as interfacing. Check the fabric content to be sure it's something you want. Treat the fabric like a sew-in interfacing. Stitching the exterior fabric to the canvas/denim helps it to hold together. Don't throw those jeans out; save them for your next bag!

Tips for Ironing Interfacing to Fabric

• Follow the directions provided by the manufacturer for time, temperature, and dampness. The directions are available online.

• Cutting the interfacing exactly the same size as the fabric piece and then pressing does not work well. It tends to shift causing glue to transfer to the pressing surface and iron.

Try one of these methods instead.

1. Cut the interfacing minus one seam allowance.

2. Center the interfacing on the fabric and press. This prevents glue from getting on the iron and the interfacing will be missing on only half of the fabric within the seam allowance.

Another way to protect the iron is to use the tip of the iron and press the interfacing to the fabric only in the middle of the piece, leaving the edges loose. Finish cutting the piece through both layers, and then press the interfacing fully to the fabric. This method works well for pattern shapes that have irregular edges. It also provides interfacing-free scraps.

Tools and Notions

Must-Haves

1 **Clover Flower Head Pins** are ideal for medium- to heavy-weight fabric. The thicker shaft resists bending as it travels through multiple layers, working well with interfaced fabric.

2 **Clover Wonder Clips** can be used in place of pins on heavier fabrics and bulkier seams.

3 **Clover Seam Ripper** is for seam removal. See Seam Ripping (page 21).

4 **Dritz Seam Gauge** allows for short measurement. The slide can mark a seam allowance for reference. The pointed tip can be used as a point turner.

5 **Snips** are small scissors perfect to cut thread.

6 **Gingher Knife Edge Scissors** cut clean edges; they are ideal for longer passes of cutting.

7 **OLFA Splash Rotary Cutter** is sturdy and has an easy change blade.

8 **OLFA 6″ × 24″ (15.2 × 61cm) Acrylic Ruler** is frosted to stick to fabric and prevent slippage. It is clearly marked and easy to read.

9 **Point turner** helps to push out corners.

10 **Measuring tape** allows for easy measuring along curves.

11 **Bohin Hand Sewing Assortment Pack** offers a variety of hand-stitching needles.

12 **Oliso Pro 1600 Smart Iron** offers an automatic lift for easier ironing

13 **June Tailor Cut and Press** serves as both cutting surface and pressing surface. It is also a great tool for travel.

Marking Tools

Clover Water Soluble White Pencil marks on darker fabric and erases with water.

Clover Chaco Liner comes in multiple colors and can be brushed or washed away.

Dritz Home Dual Marking Pen offers one ink that vanishes in 24 hours and another that is water soluble.

FriXion pens come in a wide range of easy to see colors and widths. They erase with heat, but come back if cooled. There is a faint wax halo that remains at room temperature so they are best for the back of the project or seam allowances.
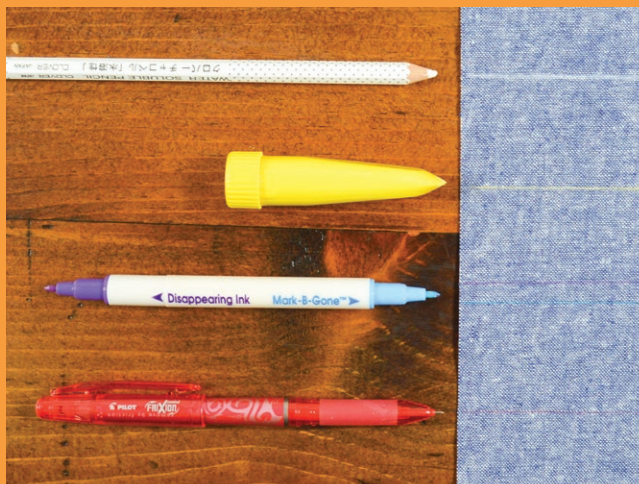
Always test removing the marking on a scrap from your project prior to use.

Nice-to-Haves

1 **OLFA 18″ × 24″ (45.7 × 61cm) Cutting Mat** allows for enough room to cut most projects. Must be stored flat out of the direct sun and away from heat sources.

2 **Karen Kay Buckley Serrated Perfect Scissors** cut fabric into shapes. Serrated edges hold the fabric for easier curve cutting.

3 **Fray Check** treats a seam to prevent fraying; used for buttonhole stitches.

4 **June Tailor Starch Savvy** adds body to the fabric.

5 **StylistsSprayers.com Spray Water Bottle** sprays a fine mist of water and is a great companion for ironing.

6 **Buttonhole Cutter with Wooden Block** is an extremely sharp tool to cut the fabric in the middle of the buttonhole.

7 **Thread Stand** is an independent spool holder.

8 **Dritz Metal Measuring Gauge** displays common seam allowances allowing you to check your gauge confirming that your seam allowance is accurate.

9 **Clover Fine Quilting Pins** are ideal for light to medium weight fabric.

TECHNIQUES

Ironing Fabric and Pressing Seams

Ironing and pressing are not the most popular aspects of sewing, but taking the time to iron fabric before cutting and pressing as you work will lead to neater results. Ironing is moving the iron around, while pressing is pushing the iron down.

Ironing Fabric

1. Set the iron to the correct temperature for the fiber content of your fabric. Too hot of an iron can melt a synthetic fiber.

2. Iron your fabric prior to cutting. Spray the fabric using a water spray bottle, or use steam to remove the wrinkles.

3. Using spray starch will add body to the fabric. If you are using starch, spray the back of the fabric with starch, then iron the front of the fabric. It will also keep an easily wrinkled fabric wrinkle free.

Pressing Seams to the Side

With light to medium fabrics, press the seam to one side.

1. Press the seam flat to set the threads. Setting the threads will lock your seam into place and prevent the threads from stretching and showing.

NOTE
Pressing is lifting up the iron and pushing down directly on a seam. Don't move the iron. Never use the edge of the iron to grab or push on the seam allowance; this will cause a distortion in the seam.
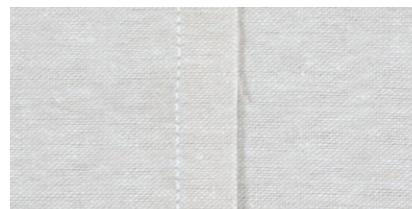
2. Finger press the seam to the side.

3. Press the seam.

🖼 Water in the Iron
If you never put water in your iron, it will last longer. If you have hard water, you will have to clean the iron to remove build up. Distilled water is too pure for some irons because it heats up faster than tap water, which can cause damage.

Pressing Seams Open

With heavier fabrics or to reduce bulk, press the seam open.

1. Press the seam flat to set the threads.

2. Finger press the seam open.

3. Press the seam.

🖼 A Long Open Seam
When sewing a long seam that will be pressed open, shorten the stitch length for a stronger seam.

Cutting

Once you have your pattern and fabric chosen, it's time to cut. Taking time to accurately cut will serve you well as you sew your project. There is usually more than one way to cut correctly. Measure twice (or 3 or 4 times) and let's start cutting!

🖼️ Tear the Fabric

Consider cutting or tearing large pieces into smaller, more manageable pieces for pressing and cutting. Most fabric will tear if you snip a starting point.

Cutting with a Rotary Cutter

You'll need a rotary cutter, an acrylic ruler, and a cutting mat. This has a bit of a learning curve, but the accuracy can't be beat. This method works best when the pieces you're cutting are smaller than your cutting mat, have straight lines or your pattern provides specific measurements to cut. I rotary cut 95% of my projects.

Holding the Ruler and Rotary Cutter

Hold the ruler with your non-dominant hand by forming a tent with your hand and apply even pressure. Keep your fingers at least an inch back from the cutting edge. When cutting a long edge, you can walk your hand up the ruler so that you're holding the ruler steady near where you're cutting.

Photo by Jymm Monroe

Hold the rotary cutter comfortably in your dominant hand and keep it perpendicular to the fabric. The handle will be at approximately 45° to the mat and ruler. You want to cut through in one pass using steady pressure; don't rock back and forth.

1. Using the acrylic ruler, cut a clean edge along one side of the fabric. Always cut away from yourself. Take care to align the lines of the ruler with the edge of the fabric to ensure a 90° angle.
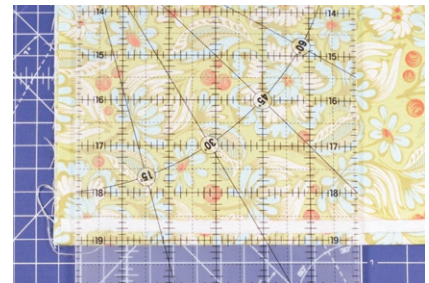
2. Using a line on the acrylic ruler, cut the width of your piece. *Use the measurements on the ruler, not the cutting mat.*

If your project is larger than the ruler, you can use the measurements on the cutting mat, moving the ruler as you cut.
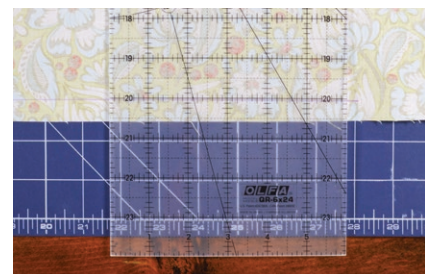

3. Cut the sides of your piece, taking care to align the ruler for a 90° angle.

Cutting with Scissors

Scissors are the best option when your project has pieces larger than your cutting mat, odd shaped pattern pieces, or curves. You can also use scissors to cut a specific measurement by marking the fabric. To find the right scissors, see Tools and Notions (page 15) to explore the options. It's best to have a cutting mat or smooth surface below the fabric while cutting with scissors.

Marking and Cutting a Shape with Straight Edges

1. Mark your fabric with cutting lines using a ruler or measuring tape and a marking tool. To find the best marking tool for your fabric, see Marking Tools (page 16). Make sure to have 90° corners, just as you did with the rotary cutting.
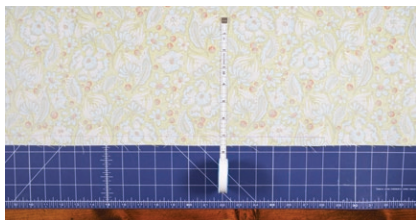
2. Carefully cut with fabric scissors along the marked lines.

Cutting a Pattern Shape

1. Place your pattern on the fabric. Pin if you are cutting with scissors; take care to place pins inside of the pattern piece. Cut around the pattern shape.
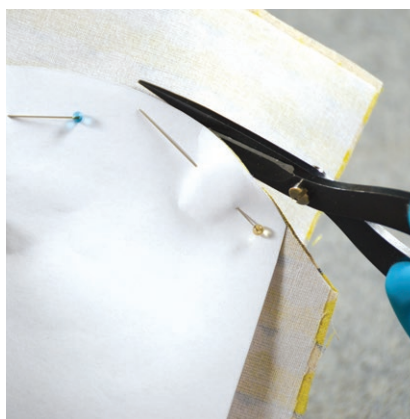
🌼 Freezer-Paper Pattern

Print or trace a pattern piece onto freezer paper. Place the wax side on the right side of the fabric and press. The wax will temporarily fuse the freezer paper to the fabric. Once you have cut, simply remove the freezer paper.

2. Cut slowly along the pattern piece creating a smooth edge.

🌼 Keep It Labeled

If your pattern has multiple pieces, leave the pattern pinned to the fabric for identification.

Pinning

To pin or not to pin is a long debated topic. Some sewists rarely use pins (me); others rely on them for every seam (my mom). Most of us will end up somewhere in the middle. It might seem like the pinning is time consuming, but using straight pins or clips to hold the fabric in place as you stitch can be a time saver with seams that won't need to be removed and redone.

Place pins perpendicular to the seam. When you're starting out, I recommend at least 1 pin every 2″–3″ (5.1–7.6cm) at a minimum. This will keep your fabric from slipping or shifting as you sew. As you gain confidence, you can start to pin less. Fine pins are for light to medium weight fabric, while thicker shaft pins work well on heavier weights and interfaced fabric.

Pinning a Long Seam

Fold the pieces to find the middle and pin together there. Place a pin at each end. Keep pinning in the middle of two pins until you have enough pins along the full edge. This will ease your fabric and ensure everything is smooth. This works well on curved edges and long seams.

Easing is working in excess fabric. If one side is slightly longer, even it out as you pin to the middle. Place the side with excess on the bottom next to the feed dogs. The feed dogs will better guide the excess and smooth it out.

🌼 Listen to the Maker

If a pattern encourages pins, use pins the first time you make it. The pattern designer included the direction for a reason. You can eliminate the pinning the next time if you feel confident and find it unnecessary.

Stitching

Sewing a Straight Seam

NOTES

- Fabric is typically sewn on the wrong side with the right sides together, so that the seam is not showing on the right side.

- Seam allowance is the distance from the seam to the edge of the fabric.

- Use the guidelines marked on your stitch plate to determine fabric placement for the desired seam allowance. Add a piece of washi tape to extend the lines.


- Watch the guideline as you sew, not the needle.

- Use the default straight stitch on your machine.

- It is easier to sew straight grain to straight grain or bias to bias, but *not* straight grain to bias, because the fibers are pulling a different way. See Straight Grain Versus Bias (page 10)

1. Stitch, using the seam allowance called for in your project instructions, until the pin is barely under the presser foot before removing the pin. Do **not** sew over pins; doing so will damage your machine. Let the feed dogs do the work. Your hands should be to the side of or in front of the needle; don't push or pull the fabric.
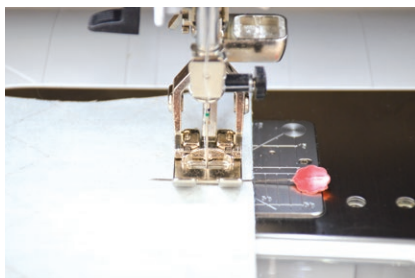
2. Check the seam allowance with your seam gauge.

Sewing a Curved Seam

1. Place a pin at the center and ends of the curve. You will want more pins on a curved seam than a straight seam.

2. Use the guidelines marked on your stitch plate to determine fabric placement and stitch the same way as the straight seam, gently guiding the fabric along the curve.

3. Leave the needle down, and lift the presser foot to smooth the fabric if it gathers.

4. After stitching, you need to *clip the curve*. Never clip the exact center of the curve; clip just to either side of the center. Clip close to the seamline stitching, but do not cut the stitching. Clip a triangle shape or a single line.

Pinning Two Seams Together

If the seams are pressed open, place a pin in the seam allowances. This will prevent the seam allowances from flipping or bunching as the presser foot crosses over.
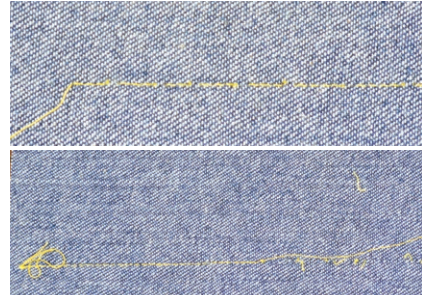

If the seams are pressed to the side, press them to opposite sides, so they lock together.

Seam Ripping

This is a necessary evil of sewing. Using a seam ripper, cut the thread every 3–5 stitches. Pull the bobbin thread from the back.


More Seams and Stitches

Backstitching

Backstitching is a way to lock the seam. By stitching back over the stitches, they will be held firmly in place. Backstitching is literally sewing in reverse. If you are going to cross over a seam later, then backstitching is not necessary, as the crossing seam will lock the first seam.

Hiding a Tail with Backstitching

If you are stitching at the edge of your finished project, you can start ½″ (1.3cm) in from the raw edges and backstitch to the edge before sewing forward. This will conceal the tails from the edge of the project, in addition to locking the seam before you stitch forward along the full seam. The opposite can be done at the other end by sewing to the end and then backstitching.

Turning a Corner

Leave the needle down and lift the presser foot to turn the corner. Turn when the distance from the corner equals the width of your seam allowance. Some presser feet have ¼″ (6mm) and ½″ (1.3cm) markings to help check the distance.
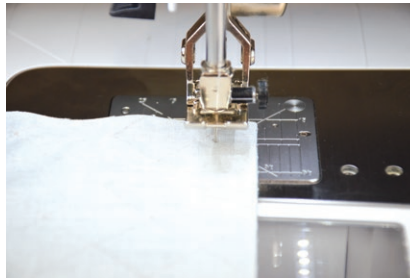
Top Stitching

Top stitching is both decorative and functional. It serves to finish the edge, often locking the lining out of sight. Using a thicker thread or a slightly longer stitch length for top stitching makes it more visible and attractive.

Zigzag Stitching

Zigzag is the most commonly used stitch besides a straight stitch. When stitched near a raw edge, it will prevent raveling and protect the edge over time. When a zigzag stitch is set to a short stitch length, it becomes a satin stitch. It can also be used to make a buttonhole.

Overlock

This is a way to prevent fraying. If the raw edges of your seam will be exposed in the finished project, overlock stitching will protect it. There are machines that only do overlock stitches; they are called sergers or overlockers.

Decorative Stitches

Decorative stitches look the best when the machine is stitching at half speed. Set your machine to half speed and push the foot pedal all the way down for consistent stitching. Each brand and machine will have their own set of decorative stitches.

Tacking Stitch

A tacking stitch, also known as a *basting stitch*, holds a piece in place temporarily until the final stitch is in place. It is often an elongated stitch length. It can be removed or if located within the seam allowance, it can stay in place.

Stitches (*from left*): Overlock, Tacking, Decorative, Zigzag, Backstitch, and Top Stitching

French Seam

This is a way to hide raw edges inside the seam for a finished look. First, place the pieces wrong sides together and stitch a narrower seam on the right side of the fabric. Open the piece and press the seam to one side and fold right sides together with the seam at the fold, then stitch a wider seam on the wrong side of the fabric. It encloses the seam allowance, leaving no raw edges exposed. This seam is a great tool for projects that will be frequently washed. It is often used in home decor and garment sewing. See Sleepytime Pillowcase (page 32) for reference.
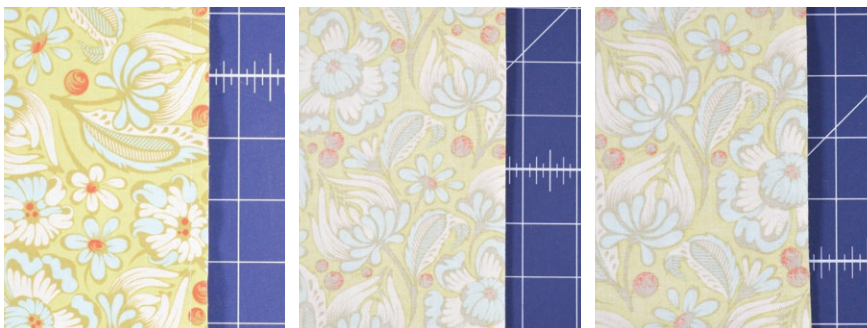
Stitching an Opening

Often when you're making a bag, you will leave an opening to turn the project right side out. By stitching through the seam allowance and off the edge when you're leaving an opening, you will encourage your fabrics to fold in once you turn it right side out.

Rounded Corner Stitching

Stitch ⅛″ (3mm) in from the corner at an angle starting 2″ (5.1cm) from the corner. Repeat for both edges. This creates a visually pleasing rounded corner on bags and pillows.
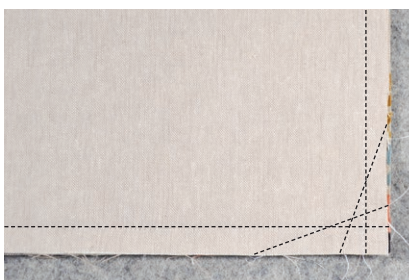
Adding Depth and Dimension

Bags function better when they have depth and dimension. The simplest ways to add depth are with Gussets and Squaring a Corner.

Making a Gusset

A gusset is a panel that adds depth and dimension to a project. They're easy to sew and easy to adjust to any width you desire. You can use the same fabric or a fabric of similar weight in a different color or print for the gusset.

1. Start with 2 matching panels to add the gusset between.

2. Round the corners by marking and cutting a curve.

3. Measure down one side, around the bottom, and back up the other side, using a measuring tape.

4. Cut the gusset piece to match the measurement found in Step 3.

5. Find the center of the bottom of the panels. Mark with a pin.

6. Align the center of the gusset with the bottom center of a panel and pin the gusset along the edge. Use lots of pins to ease the fabric around the corners.

7. Starting at the top of the bag, stitch the gusset to the panel with a ½″ (1.3cm) seam allowance, stitching 1″ (2.5cm) past the bottom center. Repeat from the top of the other side, so the seam overlaps at the bottom center.

8. Repeat Steps 5–7 for the other panel on the opposite edge of the gusset.

9. Clip the curve (see Sewing a Curved Seam, page 20). Use a point turner to smooth out the curved corners.

🐟 Piecing the Gusset
If your fabric is directional, insert a seam in the middle of the gusset to make the fabric run in the same direction top to bottom.

Squaring a Corner

1. Mark a square on the corner of the project, measuring from the seamline or fold.

2. Cut along the lines you marked.

3. Align the side seam and bottom seam or fold to one another.

4. Stitch the edges together, forming a square corner. Backstitch (page 21) at the beginning and end.

5. Use a point turner to smooth out the corner.

Consider Seam Allowances

GUSSET

If your gusset is 3″ (7.6cm) wide and you use ½″ (1.3cm) seam allowance, your gusset will finish 2″ (5.1cm). Make sure to account for 2 seam allowances when determining the width of the gusset.

SQUARE CORNER

If you cut a 3″ (7.6cm) square, after a ½″ (1.3cm) seam allowance, you will be adding 6″ (15.2cm) of depth to the bag. You will also lose 3″ (7.6cm) from the height and width of the initial panels.

Buttons and Buttonholes

Making a Buttonhole

Some machines have an automatic buttonhole stitch on the machine. If your machine does not, you can make a buttonhole with a zigzag stitch. Whether you are making a buttonhole with an automatic stitch or with a zigzag, you should make a practice buttonhole with the fabric you're using in your project. If you will be using interfacing, add interfacing prior to making the practice buttonhole; everything for the practice should be identical to the materials for the finished project.

Making a Buttonhole with a Zigzag Stitch

1. Measure the button to determine the length of the buttonhole needed. The measurement should be the diameter of the button plus 2 times the depth. Don't be generous; you want a snug buttonhole.

2. Mark a line that is the length determined in Step 1, on the buttonhole location.

🪡 Stabilize the Buttonhole

Buttonholes need interfacing or stabilizer behind the buttonhole. Woven fusible interfacing works well, as does a tear-away stabilizer. A 1½″ (3.8cm) square behind the buttonhole is an appropriate size for most buttonholes; adjust the size as needed.

3. Stitch 2 columns of zigzag stitches parallel to one another on either side of the line, leaving a gap in the middle. The width of the zigzag stitch is about one-third the maximum of the machine, i.e., if your machine is 5.5mm, your zigzag should be 2mm and the gap should be slightly smaller, about 1.5mm. The length of the zigzag stitch should be quite short.

4. Stitch a bar tack at the top and bottom of the buttonhole, matching the width of the buttonhole. A bar tack is a zigzag stitch with no length. You should do 5–7 stitches.
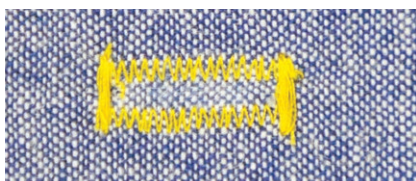
5. Put Fray Check on the buttonhole. Let fray check dry. Cut the buttonhole with the wooden block below.
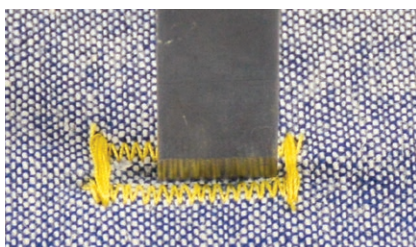
Hand Sewing a Button

This is a valuable life skill. Learning how to properly do it will also mean that you will do it less often because your buttons will not fall off; they will be properly attached.

Hand-Sewing Needles

There are loads of hand-sewing needle options. Choose the needle that works best for you. It needs to be sharp enough to go easily through the fabric you're stitching, and to feel comfortable in your hand. If you're sewing a button, it needs to fit through the holes in the button. The thread you're using needs to fit through the eye. Hand-sewing needles are smaller as the number gets higher; this is the opposite of machine-sewing needles. A size 9 embroidery sharp needle is my common go-to. Embroidery needles have a larger eye, making it an easy to thread needle. See an inclusive needle pack in Tools and Notions (page 15). Self-threading needles offer a spiral or pressure based threading option for quick threading.

1. Mark the placement line of the button using the buttonhole.
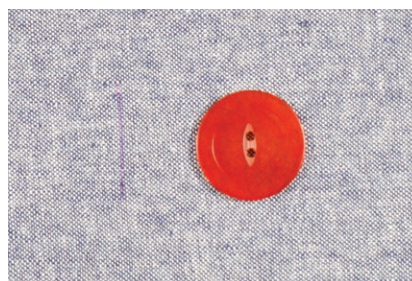
2. Thread the needle, doubling the thread. Knot the thread leaving a long tail.

3. Starting on the line, place one stitch on the line. Hold the tails out of the way and bring the thread through a hole in the button, back to front.

4. Hold the button in place.

5. Take the needle back down through another hole. You should do 5–6 complete loops from the top of the button to the back of the fabric. If your button has 4 holes, make the loops diagonal to form an X. On the last loop, knot the tails with the sewing thread.

🌸 Shank Buttons

If your button is shank style, you will use the same method as above, skipping Step 6. Do not wrap around the stitches as the shank is already providing space.

6. Wrap around the stitches 3–5 times. Knot the thread on the last 2 wraps. This will create space between the button and the fabric. If your fabric is thick, wrap 5 times to create more space.
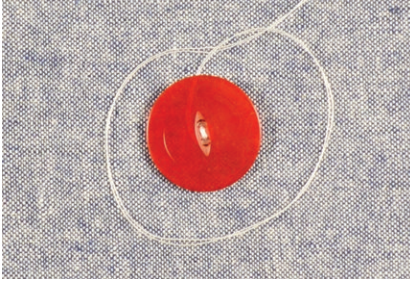
7. Knot the tails to the thread.

8. Bury the threads in opposite directions with a self-threading needle.
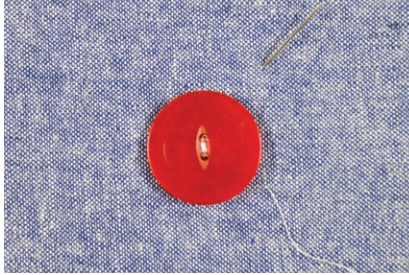
Basic Closures

Zippers

Learning to put in a zipper is a right of passage on your sewing journey. The good news is that it's easier than you think! Metal zippers must be the exact length needed as they cannot easily be sewn over or trimmed to size. However, a nylon or polyester zipper can be cut to size and come in a wide range of colors and lengths. Most sewing machines can easily stitch over the teeth of nylon and polyester zippers. Invisible and separating zippers are other types of zippers commonly used in garments.

Installing a Zipper

The following method works well for zippers sewn into a bag or left flat to be a side pocket or pillow closure. Do not use a metal zipper.

Steps 1–4 are for the optional zipper accent.

1. Cut 2 rectangles 1˝ × 3˝ (2.5 × 7.6cm) of accent fabric.

2. Press each rectangle in half, so they measure 1˝ × 1½˝ (2.5 × 3.8cm).

3. Lay the zipper along the panel it will be attached to, placing the zipper pull in the center. Place the zipper accents with the folds to the center and the raw edges even with the outer edges of the panel and avoid the zipper end.

4. Pin the accents in place and topstitch near the fold.

5. Place the exterior panel right sides together with the zipper aligning the edges of the zipper accents. If you're not using the accents, place the panel in the middle of the zipper. The right side of the zipper is the side with the pull. Pin in place.
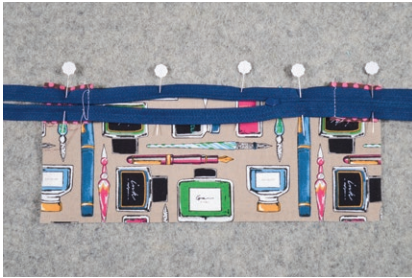
6. Using a zipper foot, stitch between ⅛″–¼″ (3–6mm) from the zipper teeth. If your presser foot is struggling to pass the zipper pull, put the needle down, lift the presser foot, and move the zipper pull to the area you've already sewn.

7. Repeat with the other panel on the other side of the zipper making sure to align the ends of the panels. Both panels are right sides together with the zipper.

8. If you are using a lining, place the lining right sides together to the exterior panel with the zipper in the middle. Stitch slightly inside the previous stitch closer to the zipper teeth.

9. Press the exterior panels and lining. Topstitch to secure the panels to the zipper; this prevents the fabric from being caught in the zipper.

🧵 Finished-Edge Fabric

If using felted wool or a similar fabric that does not unravel, topstitch to the zipper.

Other Basic Closures and Finishes

SNAPS

Snaps can be substituted in place of a button and buttonhole in a project. Snaps should be installed using the manufacturer's directions.

SWIVEL HOOK AND D-RING

This closure works well for heavy-weight fabric. The hardware is attached with a double-fold tab. It is made the same way a strap (page 29) is constructed, but on a smaller scale. The width of the tab is dictated by the size of the D-ring.

BUTTON WITH LOOP

Use a piece of round cord elastic to loop around a button.

DRAWSTRING

Thread a ribbon through a channel to create a drawstring closure. Use a safety pin to guide the ribbon through the channel.

BIAS TAPE

To cover a raw edge, wrap double-fold bias tape around the edge and topstitch. You can make your own with a bias tape maker or purchase premade bias tape. Bias tape can be used on a bag to cover all the exposed seams in lieu of a lining.

Straps

Straps are often necessary for bags. You can opt for a ready-made option or make your own straps for a custom look.

Ready-Made Straps

Webbing

Webbing can be made of cotton, polyester or nylon. Cotton will have a bit of give and stretch. Nylon and polyester can feel slippery.

Leather Straps

Ready-made leather straps are easily sourced or use a long leather belt, new or used. If the leather straps are sewn into the top seam of the bag, a thinner leather is ideal.

Add a Ribbon to the Webbing

Stitch a decorative ribbon to the webbing. There are more ribbon options than webbing options so this is a great way to customize for unique straps

Making Straps

Constructing a Double-Fold Strap

1. Cut the fabric 4 times the finished width.

2. Press in half. Press in half again by bringing both raw edges to the center. This is called a double fold.

3. Cut interfacing to ⅛″ (3mm) narrower than the finished width of the strap. I recommend Fusible Fleece for light- and medium-weight fabric. Woven fusible interfacing adds just a bit of body to thicker fabric. Interfacing also serves to reduce stretch. See Interfacings and Stabilizers (page 14).

4. Press the interfacing to one of the center panels.

5. Fold the strap back up along the pressed lines. Topstitch along both the edges, stitching the open edge first. Remember to stitch in the same direction.
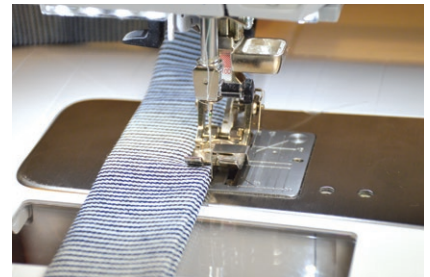
Using dual feed instead of a walking foot

🌸 Use a Walking Foot or Dual Feed

A walking foot offers more power to move the fabric. When there are more than two layers, it is highly recommended. Dual feed is a similar option found on some sewing machines.

PROJECT

GO-TO PILLOW

This pillow is the ideal beginner project and will become a go-to project for you. You'll be able to take any fabric you love and have it on your couch in just a few hours. It uses a traditional envelope backing which makes the pillow cover washable and easy to swap out. There are lots of great fabrics for a pillow—from linen to woven to sateen. I used a linen blend.

MATERIALS

Front: ⅜ yard (34.3cm)

Back: ⅜ yard (34.3cm)

Pillow form: 12″ × 12″ (30.5 × 30.5cm)
(If you want the pillow to be really full, purchase a pillow form 1–2″ [2.5–5.1cm] larger than your finished pillow.)

Fiberfill: Small amount to fill corners (optional)

CUTTING

Cut out your pieces using either a rotary cutter or scissors. Rotary cutting is recommended. See Cutting (page 18).

FRONT

Cut: 1 piece 13″ × 13″ (33 × 33cm)

BACK

Cut: 2 pieces 13″ × 17″ (33 × 43.2cm)

Make the Pillow

Seam allowance is ½″ (1.3cm) unless otherwise noted.

1. Press both of the backing pieces in half wrong sides together by aligning the 13″ (33cm) edges. You should be looking at the pretty side of your fabric and your piece will measure 13″ × 8½″ (33 × 21.6cm) after pressing.

2. Topstitch along the edge of each fold. See Top Stitching (page 21) for details.

3. Place the pressed back pieces onto the right side of the pillow front with the folds overlapped in the middle. Pin or clip the edges.
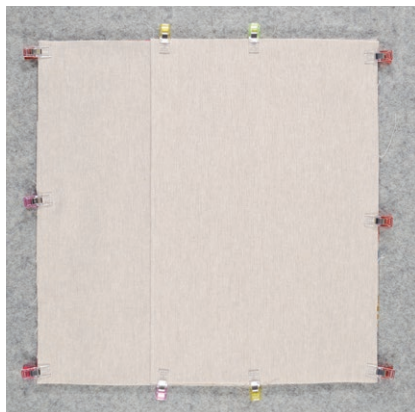
4. Stitch across the top of the pillow. Stitch from the top edge to the bottom edge on both sides. Stitch across the bottom edge. Start from the edge and stitch off the edge each time.
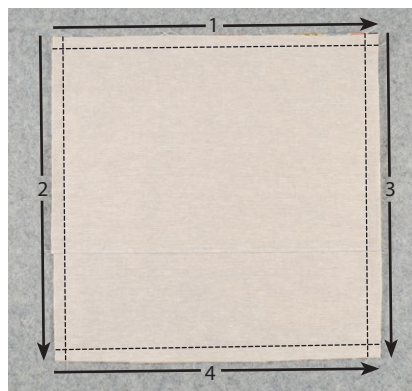
5. Add Rounded Corner Stitching (page 22).

6. Use an overlocking stitch or a zigzag to stitch around the raw edge of your pillow.

7. Turn the pillow right side out. Use a point turner to push out the corners. Place the pillow form inside.

🌼 Filling It Out

Add fiberfill to the corners if your pillow form is not filling them out.

Two-Squares Pillow

Cut 2 squares 1″ (2.5cm) larger than the desired finished size. Stitch ½″ (1.3cm) seam around the pillow as shown in Make the Pillow (Steps 4 and 5), but leave a 4″ (10.2cm) opening for turning. See Stitching an Opening (page 22). Turn right side out. Fill with fiberfill. Hand stitch the opening closed. This pillow uses a bit less fabric than the Go-To Pillow but doesn't allow for easy washing or changing the cover.

SLEEPYTIME PILLOWCASE

The best part about making your own pillowcases is that you can choose the fabric! They are a great holiday gift for children; you'll start stitching one for each occasion. If you choose a soft voile, lawn, or flannel, you'll create quite a dreamy pillow. I used quilting cotton.

PROJECT

MATERIALS

Main fabric: ¾ yard (68.6cm)

Accent: ⅛ yard (11.4cm)

Cuff: ⅓ yard (30.5cm)

CUTTING

Cut out your pieces using either a rotary cutter or scissors. Rotary cutting is recommended. See Cutting (page 18). If any of your fabrics are narrower than 42˝ (106.7cm), cut all the pieces the same width. Any width 39˝–42˝ (99.1 × 106.7cm) will work.

MAIN

Cut: 1 rectangle
25˝ × 42˝
(63.5 × 106.7cm)

ACCENT

Cut: 1 rectangle
2˝ × 42˝
(5.1 × 106.7cm)

CUFF

Cut: 1 rectangle
11˝ × 42˝
(28 × 106.7cm)

Make the Pillowcase

1. Press the accent piece in half lengthwise. It will measure 1˝ × 42˝ (2.5 × 106.7cm) after pressing. Press the cuff in half lengthwise. It will measure 5½˝ × 42˝ (14 × 106.7cm) after pressing.

2. Open the cuff after pressing and place it right side up. Place the accent strip along the long edge of the cuff.

3. Place the main fabric on top of the accent strip. The pieces should be aligned on the long edge with the accent strip in the middle and the right sides of the cuff and main fabric facing one another. Pin along this edge. See Pinning a Long Seam (page 19) for tips.

PROJECT

4. Stitch together using a ¼˝ (6mm) seam allowance.

5. Roll up the main fabric. Bring the other edge of the cuff around with the roll of the main fabric in the middle. Pin the edge of the cuff to the edge you stitched in Step 4. Take care to ensure that none of the main fabric is caught as you pin this edge.

6. Stitch together using a ½˝ (1.3cm) seam allowance.

7. Pull the main fabric out of the cuff turning the cuff right side out and concealing all the stitches. Press.

8. Fold the pillowcase in half, **wrong** sides together, to look like a pillowcase. Pin around the raw edges. Take care to align the edges of the cuff and accent piece. You are making a French Seam (page 22).

9. Stitch a ¼˝ (6mm) seam along both raw edges, back stitching at the beginning and end. See Hiding a Tail with Backstitching (page 21) to conceal the thread tails.
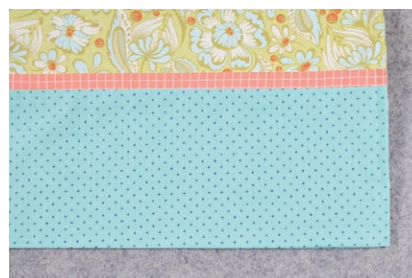
10. Turn the pillowcase wrong side out and press the edges.

11. Stitch ½˝ (1.3cm) seam along the same 2 edges, backstitching at the beginning and end.

12. Turn right side out and press.

KITTY'S BOOK BAG

Named for my favorite Aunt Kitty, a former librarian, this bag is perfect to hold your summer reading. It's a real treat to carry something you made and proudly exclaim, "I made it!" when you're showered with compliments. For the exterior, choose a thicker or stronger fabric and find a coordinating webbing. By using a thicker fabric, you won't need interfacing, and ready-made straps are easy. This project introduces Making a Gusset (page 23). I used a Kantha from Windham Fabrics for the exterior—two layers of fabric with a running stitch. I used quilting cotton for the lining.

PROJECT

MATERIALS

Exterior: ⅝ yard (57.2cm)

Lining: ⅝ yard (57.2cm)

Strap webbing: 1 yard (91.4cm)

Bowl: 5″–7″ (12.7–17.8cm) diameter

CUTTING

Cut out your pieces using either a rotary cutter or scissors. Rotary cutting is recommended. See Cutting (page 18).

EXTERIOR

Cut:

2 rectangles 13″ × 15″ (33 × 38.1cm) for panels

2 strips 2½″ × 22″ (6.4 × 55.9cm) for exterior gusset

LINING

Cut:

2 rectangles 13″ × 15″ (33 × 38.1cm) for lining panels

2 strips 2½″ × 22″ (6.4 × 55.9cm) for lining gusset

1 rectangle 13″ × 17″ (33 × 43.2cm) for pocket

STRAP WEBBING

Cut:

2 strips 12″ (30.5cm) for straps
(Wait to cut these.)

Make the Bag

Seam allowance is ½″ (1.3cm) unless otherwise noted.

1. Place the exterior panels wrong sides together.

2. Use a bowl or other round object that is 5–7″ (12.7–17.8cm) in diameter, mine is 6″ (15.2cm), and trace around the edge onto the 2 bottom corners. Cut along the marked lines using scissors.
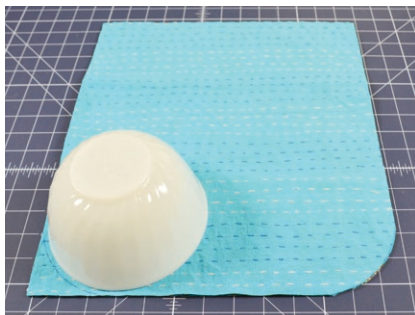
3. Stitch the exterior gusset together along the 2½″ (6.4cm) edge to create a long piece. If your fabric is directional, stitch together the bottom edge of the pattern.

4. Cut this piece to the measurement from Making a Gusset, Step 3 (page 23), and follow the instructions for Making a Gusset.

5. Press the pocket fabric in half so that it measures 13″ × 8½″ (33 × 21.6cm). Topstitch the folded edge.

6. Place the pocket on the right side of a lining panel, matching the raw edges. Mark a line 7½″ (19.1cm) from the left edge to stitch a pocket divider. Topstitch the line.

🪡 Topstitching a Pocket Divider

When you're topstitching something down in the middle of your project, you can pull the threads to the back and knot them. Pull on the tail that is already on the back and it will bring the front tail to the back. Knot the tails to secure.

PROJECT

7. Tack down the pocket to the lining panel by stitching ¼″ (6mm) seam along the edge. See Tacking Stitch (page 22).

8. Repeat Steps 1–4 with the lining pieces. Take care to ensure the pocket opening is towards the top of the bag during these steps.

Adjusting Strap Length

If you think you want to adjust the strap length, try pinning a longer or shorter length to the bag prior to cutting. You can easily interact with the bag to find the perfect length for you.

9. Cut webbing straps to 12″ (30.5cm), or desired length. Find the center of the exterior panels and mark with a pin. Measure 2½″ (6.4cm) out from the center to each side and mark with pins. Remove the center pin.

10. On one exterior panel, center the end of one strap over a pin, matching the raw edges and pin in place. Center the other end of the strap over the second pin and pin in place, making sure not to twist the strap. Repeat for the second strap and the remaining exterior panel.

11. Stitch the straps in place with a ¼″ (6mm) seam allowance.

12. Place the exterior into the lining right sides together.

13. Pin or clip the exterior to the lining around the top edge of the bag. Take care to align all the seams, and keep the straps down between the exterior and lining.

14. Stitch around the top of the bag leaving a 3½″ (8.9cm) opening between 1 of the straps. See Stitching an Opening (page 22).

15. Turn right side out. Press. Pin or clip the top edge in place to ensure lining does not show.

16. Topstitch around the top of the bag stitching the opening closed.

PROJECT

BUTTON-UP CARD CASE

Perfect for a gift, but you'll also want one for yourself! It's even more fun if you add a gift card. You're going to be cutting from a pattern piece. We are also going to use a button closure, making a buttonhole and sewing on a button. I used a lightweight linen blend.

MATERIALS

Exterior and lining: ¼ yard (23cm)

Woven fusible interfacing: ¼ yard (23cm)
(I used Pellon SF101.)

CUTTING

Cut out your pieces using either a rotary cutter or scissors. Rotary cutting is recommended. See Cutting (page 18).

EXTERIOR AND LINING

Cut: 1 rectangle 6˝ × 18˝
(15.2 × 45.7cm)

INTERFACING

Cut: 1 rectangle 5½˝ × 17½˝
(14 × 44.5cm)

Make the Case

Seam allowance is ¼˝ (6mm) unless otherwise noted.

1. Trace the Button-Up Card Case pattern (page 40).

2. Fuse the interfacing to the wrong side of the fabric.

3. Fold the fabric right sides together and place the pattern with "Place on fold." along the fold of the fabric. Cut around the pattern. I suggest scissors for the curve. See Cutting (page 18).

4. With the piece still folded in half, stitch around the edge leaving a 2½˝ (6.4cm) opening on the side. See Stitching an Opening (page 22).
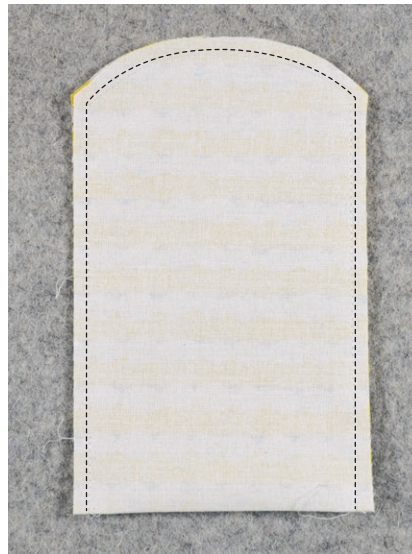
5. Clip the curve; do not clip the center of the curve. See Sewing a Curved Seam (page 20).

6. Turn right side out. Use a point turner to push out and smooth the curve. Press and tuck in the fabric at the opening.

Photo by Jymm Monroe

PROJECT
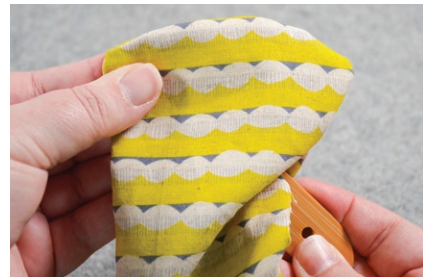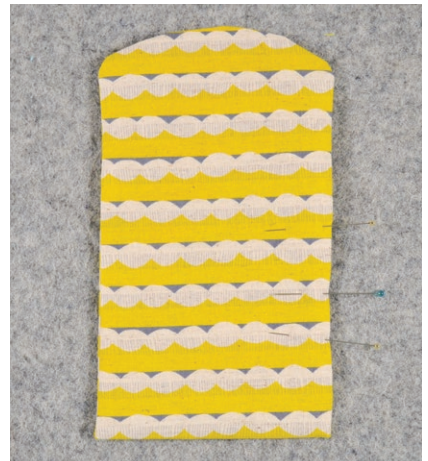
7. Fold up the bottom folded edge 1¾″ (4.4cm). Press. Pin or clip in place.
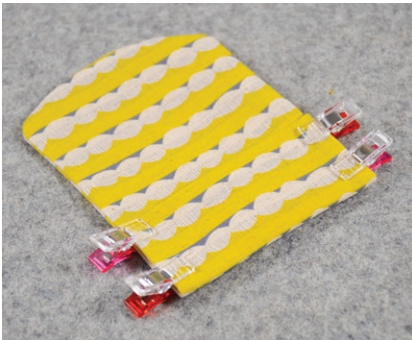
8. Topstitch the case ⅛″ (3mm) from the edge. Starting at the bottom edge and backstitching to secure, stitch up to the edge of the pocket and backstitch. Continue stitching the side and around the curve to the other side of the pocket and backstitch again, and stitch to the bottom edge, backstitching to finish.

9. Make a buttonhole on the curved end of the pouch. The bottom of the buttonhole should be ⅜″ (1cm) from the edge. See Making a Buttonhole (page 24).

10. Fold down the top panel to place the curved edge ⅜″ (1cm) from the bottom fold. Press.

11. Mark the button placement using the buttonhole as a guide. To sew the button to the case, see Hand Sewing a Button (page 25).

Button-Up Card Case

Place on fold.

Use a ruler to measure these inch marks to verify that printout is correctly sized.

1″
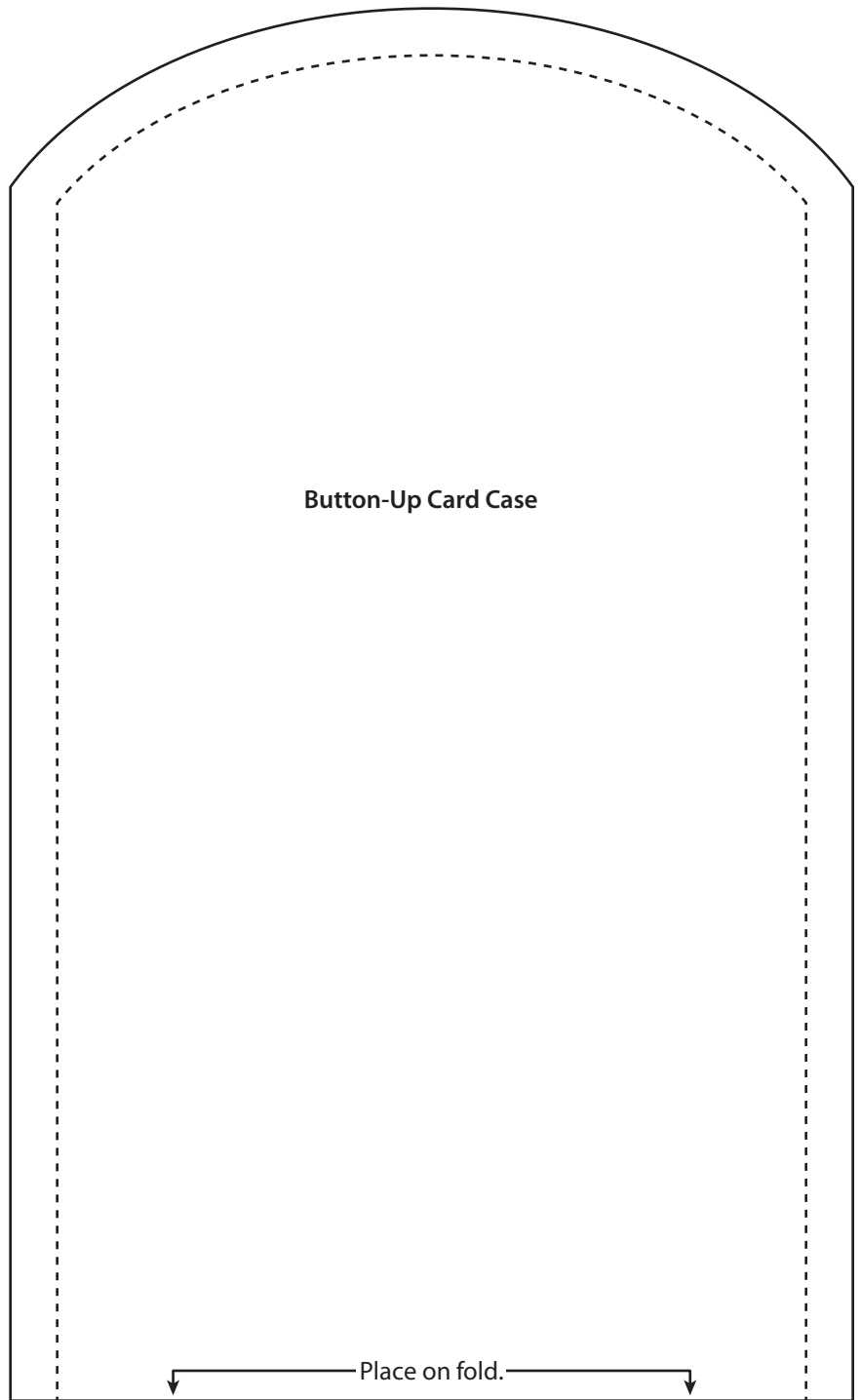
BACK-TO-SCHOOL PENCIL POUCH

Zippers introduce a whole new avenue to your sewing. Once you've mastered installing a zipper into a bag, you'll be able to make so many things. This basic pencil pouch can be enlarged to become a project bag or add depth by squaring the corners to hold almost anything. I used a lightweight canvas for the exterior and quilting cotton for the liner.

PROJECT

PROJECT

MATERIALS

Exterior: ⅛ yard (32cm)

Lining: ⅛ yard (32cm)

Fusible fleece interfacing:
⅛ yard (32cm)
(I used Pellon Fusible Fleece.)

All-purpose zipper:
10″ (25.4cm) or longer

CUTTING

Cut out your pieces using either a rotary cutter or scissors. Rotary cutting is recommended. See Cutting (page 18).

EXTERIOR

Cut: 2 rectangles
4″ × 10″
(10.2 × 25.4cm)

LINING

Cut: 2 rectangles
4″ × 10″
(10.2 × 25.4cm)

2 rectangles 1″ × 3″
(2.5 × 7.6cm) for
zipper accents

INTERFACING

Cut: 2 rectangles
3½″ × 9½″
(9.9 × 24.1cm)

Make the Pouch

Seam allowance is ½″ (1.3cm) unless otherwise noted.

1. Center and fuse the interfacing to the wrong side of the exterior rectangles.

2. Attach the zipper and zipper accents to both sides of the exterior and lining, using Installing a Zipper (page 26).

3. Open the zipper.
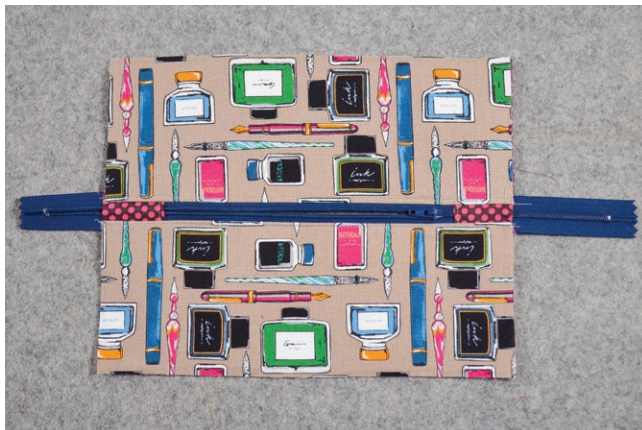
4. Pin or clip the exterior panels right sides together.

5. Pin or clip the lining right sides together. Leave a 4″ (10.2cm) opening on the bottom of the lining. See Stitching an Opening (page 22).
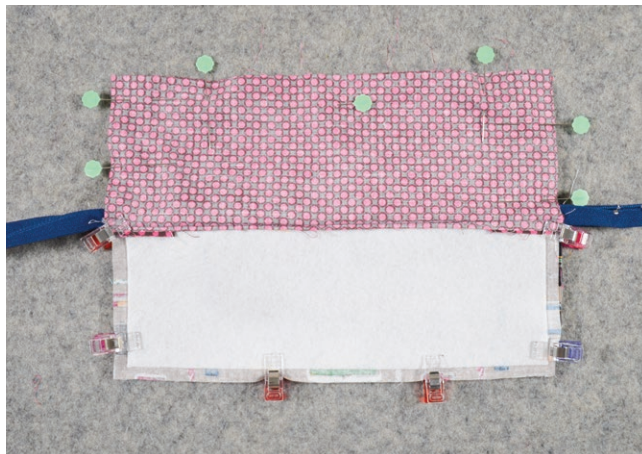
🪲 No-Sew Zone

Place a horizontal pin across the opening. If all other pins are perpendicular, this will serve as a reminder not to stitch this area.

6. Starting with the exterior of the bag, stitch down each side. Stitch back and forth across the zipper area a few times to add strength.

7. Stitch across the bottom of the exterior. Stitch across the bottom of the lining, leaving an opening (see Stitching an Opening, page 22).

8. Round the corner of the bag, using the instructions in Rounded Corner Stitching (page 22). Trim away the excess seam allowance to the outside corner seam on the exterior.

9. Trim off the excess zipper and cut a half-circle out of the seam allowance ⅛″ (3mm) from the seam.

🖼 Hump Jumper

The white piece behind the presser foot is a height compensation tool, more aptly referred to as a **hump jumper***. It provides a height boost to the presser foot when your machine is struggling over multiple layers. It is often included with a sewing machine.*

10. Turn right side out. Use a point turner to poke out the corners.

🖼 Other Point Turners

Don't have a point turner? Any narrow blunt object will work. Try a mechanical pencil with no lead or a chopstick. You should never use anything sharp for fear of piercing the fabric. No seam rippers or snips!

11. Hand stitch or topstitch the lining closed.

PROJECT

Finished size: 14″ wide × 14″ tall × 6″ deep
(35.6 × 35.6 × 15.2cm)

PROJECT

CARRYALL TOTE

The Carryall Tote introduces making your own straps. This allows you to choose a coordinating fabric. The straps of this tote wrap underneath the bottom of the bag, which will make the bag more comfortable to carry when packed full. You will also learn to create an exterior pocket. I used a yarn-dyed linen with quilting cotton. The straps are railroad denim.

MATERIALS

Exterior: ¾ yard (69cm)

Lining: ¾ yard (69cm), or 1¼ yard (1.14 m) for lining and pocket

Pocket: ½ yard (46cm)

Strap: ⅝ yard (57cm)

Lofty fusible fleece: ⅞ yard (80cm) (I used Pellon Thermolam Plus.)

CUTTING

Cut out your pieces using either a rotary cutter or scissors. Rotary cutting is recommended. See Cutting (page 18).

EXTERIOR

Cut: 1 rectangle 22˝ × 36˝ (55.9 × 91.4cm)

LINING

Cut: 1 rectangle 22˝ × 36˝ (55.9 × 91.4cm)

POCKET

Cut: 2 rectangles 8½˝ × 30˝ (21.6 × 76.2cm)

STRAP

Cut: 3 rectangles 6˝ (15.2cm) × width of fabric

FUSIBLE FLEECE

Cut:

1 rectangle 21½˝ × 35½˝ (54.6 × 90.2cm) for exterior

3 rectangles 1⅜˝ (3.5cm) × width of fabric for straps

Make the Tote

Seam allowance is ½˝ (1.3cm) unless otherwise noted.

1. Sew the strap rectangles end to end to create a long strip. Press the seams open. Trim the long strip to 116˝ (294.6cm). Sew the ends together forming a giant loop. Take care not to have a twist in the loop.

2. Follow Making Straps (page 29) to create the tote straps. As you fuse in the fusible fleece for the straps, butt the edges of the rectangles. The last piece will be trimmed to fit.

🌼 **Want to Use Ready-Made?**
If you want to substitute a ready made strap, you'll need to create a loop with a seam. Place the seam on the bottom of the bag to conceal.

3. Create the pocket by placing the 2 rectangles right sides together and sewing along both 8½˝ (21.6cm) edges, creating a loop. Press the seams open.

PROJECT

4. Offset the seams from one another by 1˝ (2.5cm) and press the loop flat creating the pocket panel. By offsetting the seams, you are reducing the bulk of the seams.
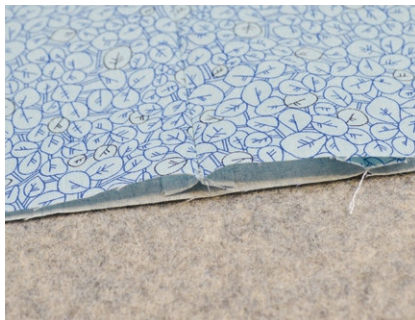
5. Tack the raw edges of the pocket panel together with a ¼˝ (6mm) seam. Topstitch the ends of the pocket panel with 2 rows of stitching ⅛˝ (3mm) and ¼˝ (6mm) from the fold.

**6.** Fuse the fleece to the wrong side of the exterior rectangle.

7. Fold the exterior panel wrong sides together aligning the 22˝ edge and press.

8. Open the exterior panel right side up. Place the pocket panel on top and align the pressed center of the pocket panel with the pressed center of the exterior panel. Pin in place.
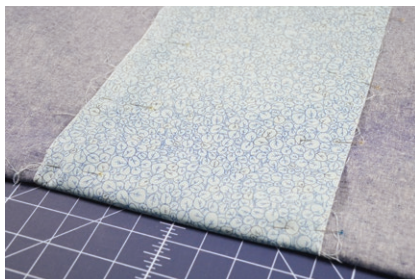
9. Tack down the pocket along the raw edges. Stitch from the top of the pocket to the bottom of the bag; if you get any gathers from excess fabric, they will be concealed under the bag.
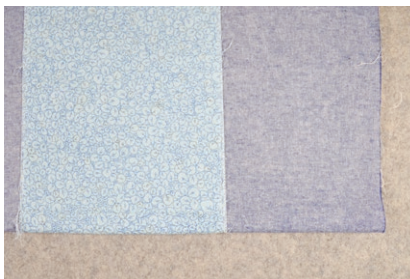
10. Mark a line 6½˝ (16.5cm) from the pressed center on both sides. Topstitch the marked line to form the bottom of the exterior pockets. Two rows of stitching will reinforce the pocket.
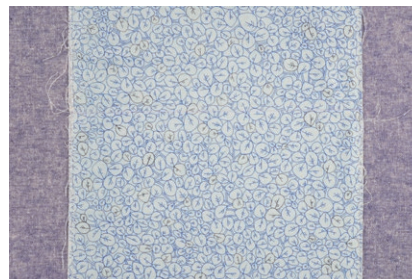
11. Fold the strap loop flat and put a pin to mark both ends. Align these center pins with the pressed center of the pocket, covering the raw edge of the pocket with the strap. Use a ruler to place the strap 5¾˝ (14.6cm) from the edge of the exterior panel. Pin the strap in place.
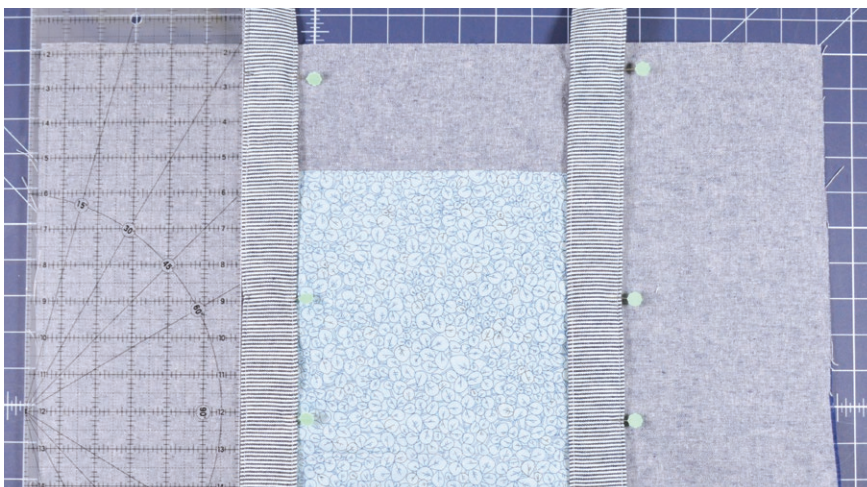
12. Measure 2˝ (5.1cm) from the top of the bag and mark a 1˝ (2.5cm) square on the strap at all 4 points. Mark an X in the square.

13. Topstitch the strap in one continuous line of stitching. Starting at the bottom of the bag, stitch down the outer edge to the upper edge of the first square.

• Pivot to stitch across the top of the marked square.

• Pivot to stitch down the next side of the square.

• Pivot to stitch across the bottom of the square.

• Pivot to stitch the diagonal.

• Pivot to stitch across the top of the square again.

• Pivot to stitch the next diagonal.

Continue to stitch the inner edge of the strap until you get to the next square. Stitch the square in the same pattern as above. Finish stitching the outer edge of the strap, overlapping the stitches at the end. You are stitching from one side of the bag to the other. Repeat on the other strap.

14. Fold the exterior panel right sides together, and stitch the sides together starting at the bottom fold and backstitching at the end.

🧵 Mind the Straps

Keep the straps out of the way by tucking them into the pocket and clipping them to the edge.

15. Following Squaring a Corner (page 24), measure a 3˝ (7.6cm) square from the fold and seamline, and complete the squared corners.

16. Repeat Steps 14 and 15 for the lining.

17. Place the exterior inside of the lining right sides together. Align the side seams. Pin around the bag leaving a 6˝ (15.2cm) opening.

18. Stitch the top edge following Stitching an Opening (page 22).

19. Turn the bag right side out. Press the top edge.

20. Pin around the top of the bag making sure to conceal the lining. Topstitch along the top edge.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lee Chappell Monroe has been creating since she first discovered crayons at age two! She's from a family of sewists and learned everything from her mother, affectionately known as The Guru. She loves all things fabric—from zippy pouch to queen-size quilt—and everything in between.

With a love of color and bold graphic shapes, Lee enjoys designing patterns and teaching all types of classes, while sharing her adventures on her blog. She is a trained graphic designer, which shows in her clean aesthetic.

Her work has appeared in multiple publications. Lee is also a BERNINA Ambassador, as well as a Creative Spark and Craftsy instructor. Lee lives in beautiful North Carolina.

Photo by Jymm Monroe

Visit Lee online and follow on social media!

Website: maychappell.com • **Instagram:** @maychappell

Resources

TOOLS

BERNINA USA
bernina.com
weallsew.com

OLFA
olfahandtools.com

Oliso
oliso.com

Snuggly Monkey
snugglymonkey.com

FABRIC

Crimson Tate
crimsontate.com

Mulberry Silks & Fine Fabrics
mulberrysilks.net

Robert Kaufman Fabrics
robertkaufman.com

Sewingly Yours
Lewisville, NC
sewinglyyours.net

Sew Lux Fabric
sewluxfabric.com

Sew Original BERNINA
Winston-Salem, NC
seworiginal.org

Windham Fabrics
windhamfabrics.net

Purchasing Fabric by the Meter?

Here's a handy conversion chart!

Yards	Inches	Meters (approx.)	Centimeters
⅛ yd.	4½″	0.15m	11.4cm
¼	9	0.25	22.9
⅓	12	0.3	30.4
⅜	13½	0.35	34.3
½	18	0.5	45.7
⅝	22½	0.6	57.2
⅔	24	0.61	61
¾	27	0.7	68.6
⅞	31½	0.8	80
1	36	0.95	91.4
1⅛	40½	1.1	102.9
1¼	45	1.2	114.3
1⅜	49½	1.3	125.7
1½	54	1.4	137.2
1⅝	58½	1.5	148.6
1¾	63	1.7	160
1⅞	67½	1.8	171.5
2	72	1.9	182.8

Common Yardage Widths

Usable widths:	40″ = 101.6cm
	42″ = 106.7cm
Commercial widths:	45″ = 110cm
	60″ = 150cm

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