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# Slöjd



THE SWEDISH ART OF WOOD AND TEXTILE HANDICRAFTS

# Sew a tote bag

As a creative person, I always carry a lot of things around, and it didn't feel all that dignified with the broken-handled blue plastic carrier bag that was my companion for many years. Eventually I got fed up and sewed myself this bag instead. It is made up of only two fabric pieces and gets its volume from its boxed corners.

## YOU WILL NEED

- Sewing machine
- Sewing thread
- Fabric: heavy canvas works best
- Dressmaking pins
- Webbing or braid for handles (optional)
- Tailor's chalk or pencil
- Pattern paper
- Scissors
- Iron and ironing board







*The easiest way to get a straight hem on a heavy fabric is to iron it first.*

Start by drawing out the pattern for the bag onto paper. You can draw directly onto the fabric if you want, but it's usually a good idea to start with paper to know exactly what you're doing when it's time to start cutting. Draw a square the size you want the bag to be, then add measurements for the sides and the base – which for this design have the same width. I wanted a bag with 14cm (5½in) wide sides and base, so I added 7cm (2¾in) the bottom edge and each side of the pattern. I also added a 1.5cm (⅝in) seam allowance to the sides that will be sewn together and 3cm (1¼in) at the top where the bag will be open. For example, if you want your bag to be 70 x 70cm (27½ x 27½in) and 14cm (5½in) deep, you would cut out two pieces that each measure:

WIDTH: 70cm (27½in) + 14cm (5½in) (sides) + 3cm (1¼in) for seam allowances = 87cm (34¼in)

LENGTH: 70cm (27½in) + 7cm (2¾in) (base) + 5.5cm (2½in) (seam allowance and hem) = 82.5cm (32¾in)

The pattern pieces for the bag will look bigger than the dimensions of the bag when finished, but that's nothing to worry about since a part of the fabric will become the sides and base. And honestly – can a bag like this ever be too big?

Cut out the paper pattern and place it on top of the fabric, aligning the edges with the fabric grain. Mark with chalk around the paper's edges and cut out the pieces following the chalk marking.

### Cut out and hem the bag pieces

Once you have cut out the bag's front and back pieces, zigzag the edges. Then make a hem on the edges that will become the top of the bag.

The easiest way to get a straight hem on a heavy fabric is to iron it first. I fold the fabric 1.5cm (⅝in) from the edge and iron until the whole edge is ironed flat against the wrong side of the fabric. Then I repeat this, folding down the edge twice, so that the first fold tucks underneath the second. When I've finished I have a razor-sharp hem that won't cause any issues. When I have ironed a hem like this, I don't use any dressmaking pins to keep it in place; I don't think it's necessary.

Sew the hem with two straight lines of stitching. I placed one line 1.3cm (½in) from the edge and the second one around 3mm (⅛in) from the edge.

Make the handles

Now it’s time to add the handles. I like them long and sewn over the full length of the bag. If you don’t have webbing or braid to use for handles you can make your own like this:

Cut a 9cm (3½in) wide fabric strip that is as long as you want your handle to be, plus a few centimetres for contingency. Fold the strip in half, wrong sides together, so that the long edges meet each other and iron flat. You will get a fold that runs down the middle of the whole strip; this will be your marker for this next step. Unfold the strip, fold the long edges in to meet the centre fold line and press flat with the iron. <sup>(1)</sup>

Then you can fold the strip along the middle again and iron. <sup>(2)</sup>

Now both raw edges are tucked inside the handle, which is made up of four layers of fabric. Sew the handle together by topstitching along the open edge.



Position the handles and sew them in place

To gauge where to sew on the handles, I draw a chalk line on the fabric to mark where their edges should be positioned. I sew them on straight, placing each one so that it just covers the line. I use a small amount of textile glue to keep the handle in place instead of pins, as it’s tricky to get the pin through thick layers.

Sew each handle in place 2–3mm (¼in) from each long edge. Start at the base of the bag and sew up to the edge that will become the bag’s opening. There you can reinforce the seam by sewing back and forth across the handle a few times before you continue towards the base of the bag along the second edge of the handle.

Sew the bag pieces together

When the handles are in place you can position the two bag pieces right sides facing, then sew them together using a straight seam along the three sides that aren’t already hemmed. Sew with a 1.5cm (⅝in) seam allowance. When you come to the corners, you don’t need to do anything in particular: just follow the edge of the fabric and continue sewing. Then you can use your iron to press the seam allowances open.





**Box the corners**

Fold the corners of the bag so that the side and base seams meet, and iron flat. I decided to make the base 14cm (5½in) wide, so I needed to sew a 14cm (5½in) wide seam over the edge. Hold the tape measure by the edge and place it over the bag’s side seam. Move the tape measure up and down along the folded edge until the 7cm (2¾in) mark sits over the seam when the edge of the tape measure sits over the folded edge. Draw a line across the whole corner, then sew along it with a straight seam. <sup>(3, 4)</sup>

The triangular section that you separated from the rest of the bag with a seam should now be folded in towards the base of the bag and sewn in place with a straight seam that runs along its edges. <sup>(5)</sup>

**Neaten up the inside of the bag**

Now we have a functional bag! To neaten it inside we will now cover the seam allowances with a strip of fabric; this will also make the bag sturdier.

Cut a 6cm (2¾in) wide fabric strip long enough to cover both side seams and the base seam + 5cm (2in) seam allowance. Iron the edges 1cm (¾in) along the long sides of the strip. Turn the bag inside out and place the strip over the

pressed-open seam allowances. I fixed the strip in place using a small amount of textile glue, and when I came to the top edge of the bag, I folded in the short edge of the strip to prevent it from sticking out over the edge. <sup>(6)</sup> Then I sewed the strip in place by topstitching along its edges. <sup>(7)</sup>





# Sew a cushion cover

This cushion cover is kept neat with button fastenings at the back. If you sew it in a sturdy fabric it will make a perfect sofa cushion. The front includes a patchwork motif but if you like, you can use the ‘flying geese’ pattern from the project on page 49 on your cushion cover instead.

## YOU WILL NEED

- Sewing machine
- Sewing thread
- Sewing needle
- Tape measure
- Dressmaking pins
- Scissors
- Drawing paper
- Buttons
- Braid or ribbon for the button fastenings
- Iron and ironing board
- Tape or paper glue
- Textile glue (optional)

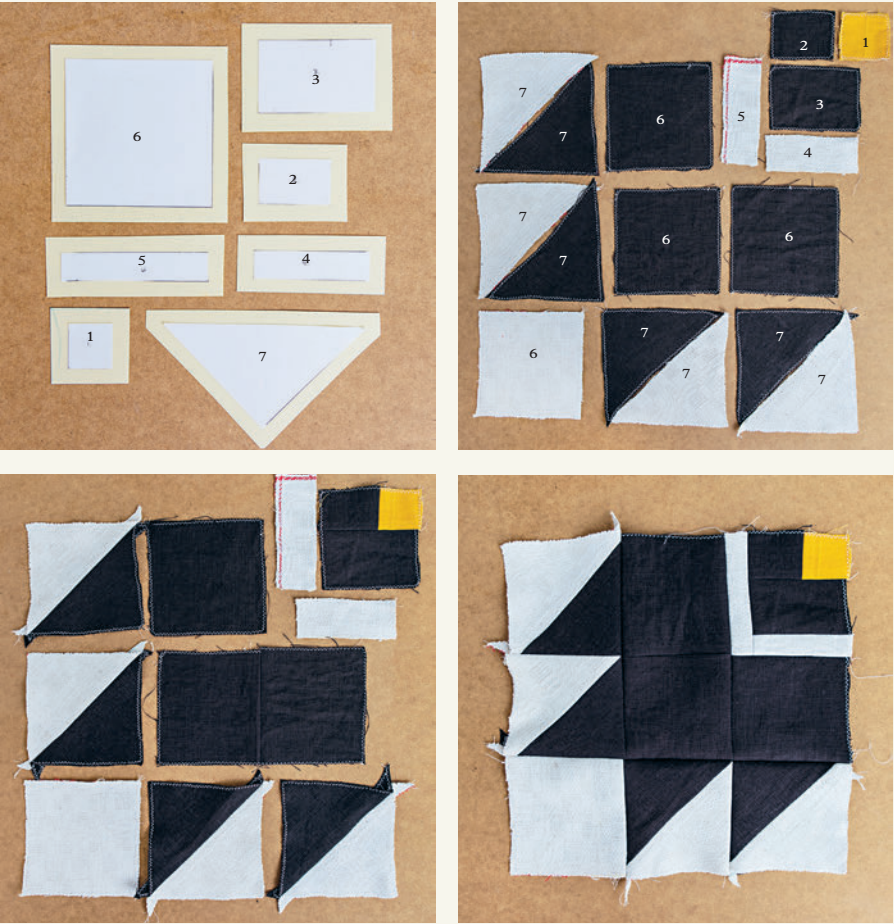


Get started

For this cushion cover you will need one front and one back panel. Both should be the same size, with the addition that the front should have a 25cm (9¾in) long section that will become the section with buttons on it at the back when the cover is finished. The following calculations include 1.5cm (5/8in) seam allowances.

THE FRONT should be the cushion’s length + 28cm (11in) by its width + 3cm (1¼in).

THE BACK should be the cushion’s length + 3cm (1¼in) by its width + 3cm (1¼in).



Sew the front

The blackbird motif for this cushion is sewn together from straight pieces, with straight seams. If you want to crack the code, you need to figure out in which order the pieces should be sewn together. It’s a bit like a jigsaw puzzle.

This bird is made from 9 squares that are all 10 x 10cm (4 x 4in), and five of these are made up of smaller pieces. All the patchwork pieces are sewn together with a 1cm (¾in) seam allowance. To make it easy for myself I like to draw the motif on paper, cut the pieces out and glue them to another piece of paper that I then trim to size so that I can get 1cm (¾in) around the original piece. Then I don’t have to calculate the seam allowance when I draw the pattern onto paper. Remember to add the seam allowances to the following pieces.

- | THE HEAD IS MADE UP OF:                  | THE BODY IS MADE UP OF:  |
|--|--|
| 1 yellow 3 x 3cm (1¼ x 1¼) square (1)    | 3 black 10 x 10cm (4 x 4in) squares (6)  |
| 1 black 5 x 3cm (2 x 1¼in) rectangle (2) | 1 white 10 x 10cm (4 x 4in) square (6)   |
| 1 black 5 x 8cm (2 x 3¼in) rectangle (3) | 4 black and 5 white triangles: draw a 10cm (4in) square and cut it in half diagonally for your pattern (7) |
| 1 white 8 x 2cm (3¼ x ¾in) rectangle (4) |  |
| 1 white 10 x 2cm (4 x ¾in) rectangle (5) |  |

Sewing patchwork

When you have sewn two patches together press the seam allowances open at the back before you sew on the next piece. It can be helpful to lay out the pieces on the table arranged in the motif, instead of just placing them in piles that are colour co-ordinated or arranged according to another system. When the pieces are laid out in the shape they will ultimately be sewn into, it’s easier to see which pieces it makes sense to sew together next.



## Sew the blackbird together

Draw out all the patches on the fabric using the paper templates and tailor's chalk. Cut them out and zigzag the raw edges of the pieces.

Sew the yellow patch together with black rectangle no. 2.

Then sew on black patch no. 3, so that the yellow beak is joined to black pieces on two sides. Remember to use whatever seam allowance you added to your pattern pieces – mine is cm ( $\frac{3}{8}$ in).

Take the shorter of the two narrow white strips, no. 4, and sew it to the bottom along black patch no. 3. The other white strip, no. 5, is sewn to the edge that is made up of patches 2, 3, 4. Now the patch for the head is finished.

Take all the triangular pieces (7) and sew them together in pairs with one black and one white piece facing each other. Next, sew two of the large black squares (6) together.

Sew the remaining no. 6 black square to the head section along the white no. 5 piece, then sew the part that is made up of two black no. 6 patches to the head section and the black no. 6 patch that you just sewed on.

Now you will have four black and white patches, one white patch and a bird body with a head in front of you.

Sew two black and white patches together, then sew them into place to the left-hand side of the body of the bird. Sew the remaining two black and white patches to the remaining white square, then sew to the bottom edge of the bird, referring to the photographs on page 24 for positioning. The bird is finished!

The patchwork blackbird is 30cm (12in) square plus seam allowances all round. Since this is smaller than my cushion, I added a border of fabric all round. Refer back to the sizing on page 24 to calculate how large your borders should be.

## Sew the cushion cover together

Zigzag the edges of the front and back pieces and hem both along the edge where you want the opening to be (the hem is folded against the wrong side of the fabric). Place the pieces with right sides together, and fold the remaining length from the longer piece so that it is sandwiched in between

the front and the back pieces. (The other way around to how you sew the pillowcase project on page 19, where the pocket is placed on top.) Sew the pieces together with a 1.5cm ( $\frac{3}{8}$ in) seam allowance around all three sides, and leave the side where the fabric is folded over.

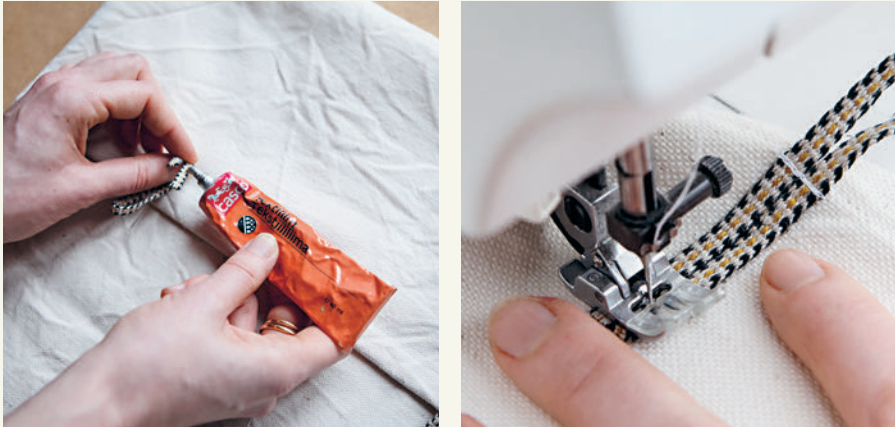
## Sew the corners

When you sew 90-degree angles (which you usually want to do at the corners), then turn them out, it's easy to end up with cone-shaped corners and not ones as sharp as you had in mind. This is due to the seam allowances getting pushed together in the narrow corner, which bulks it out when you turn out the cushion cover.

To get nice square corners when you sew thick fabrics, you can sew a small diagonal over the corner, then cut off around half of the seam allowance. Of course, it's not risk-free to cut off the seam allowance, as the remaining fabric can start fraying. Therefore, sew the part of the seam that goes over the corner again so you have a double seam. This time you can use shorter stitches (1mm), which will usually be okay.







1

2

**Add the case closure**

I chose to make a closure with loops of braids and buttons for this case, but you can add a zip or ribbon ties if you'd prefer.

A ground rule is that a buttonhole should be the same length as the width + height of the button, so that was the measurement I used as a base when measuring my loops. I also added 8cm (3½in) to get a longer section above the loop. This meant my braid lengths measured twice the button width, plus twice the height of the button + 8cm (3½in).

I wanted three loops on my cushion, so I cut three lengths of braid and marked with a pencil where they should be positioned. To hold the braids in place while sewing it, I secured each length in place over the pencil marks with a small amount of textile glue. <sup>(1)</sup>

I fixed the loops in place by sewing back and forth four times over them with straight stitch at two points. <sup>(2)</sup>

**Sew on the buttons**

When the loops are in place, you can mark where you want the buttons and sew them in place, making sure each one has a shank – remember that the braid loop needs to fit underneath the button.

Start by threading a needle and tying a knot at one end of the thread. Bring up the needle from the wrong side of the fabric by the marking where



3

4

the button should sit, and pull the thread through until the knot stops it at the back of the fabric. Insert the needle through one of the holes in the button, back through another and then down through the fabric again – but place a finger between the button and the fabric so that you get a space. I like to use double sewing thread and sew the button in place with around eight stitches, at the same time as I hold the button away from the fabric with my left index finger and thumb. <sup>(3)</sup> Then I wrap the thread around six times around the stitches to hold them together. This is called the button's shank. <sup>(3, 4)</sup> Secure the thread by sewing a few stitches straight through the shank back and forth, then you can cut the thread. The cushion cover is finished!

