



# Leodis Leather Build Along

No. 6

## Turned Messenger and Tote Bags

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## Printing Instructions

This document is laid out on A4 paper. If you are in the USA you will need to use US Legal paper or buy some A4 paper from Amazon, clipping may occur with US Letter paper.

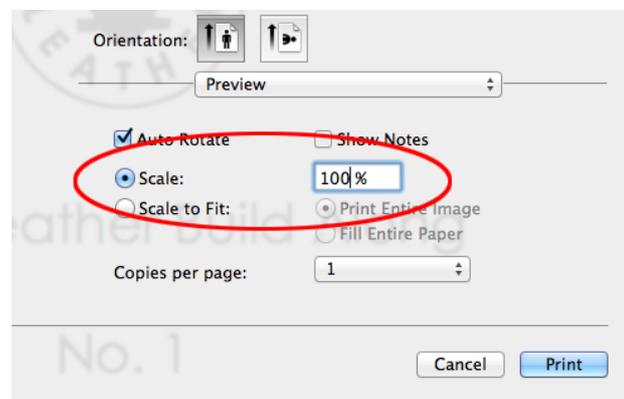
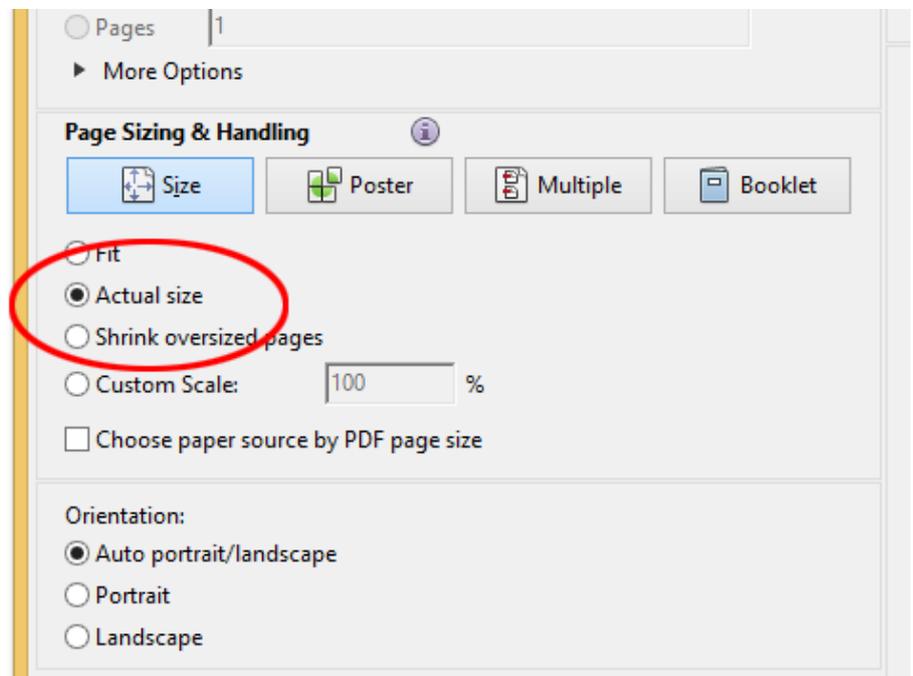
This pattern is a mixture of both **actual size and reference drawings**, so whichever size paper you have if you print this document **without scaling applied** then the pattern will be the correct size for you to use **for the actual size pages only**.

**Please check the 1 inch measurement with a ruler after printing in order to ensure that no scaling has occurred.**

Please see below examples of the settings for Adobe Reader on a PC or Preview on a Mac. If you use other software just make sure that no scaling options are applied, or set the scale to 100%.

To use the pattern you can stick it to some thick cardboard (e.g. 1mm mount board) and then cut around to make a reusable pattern.

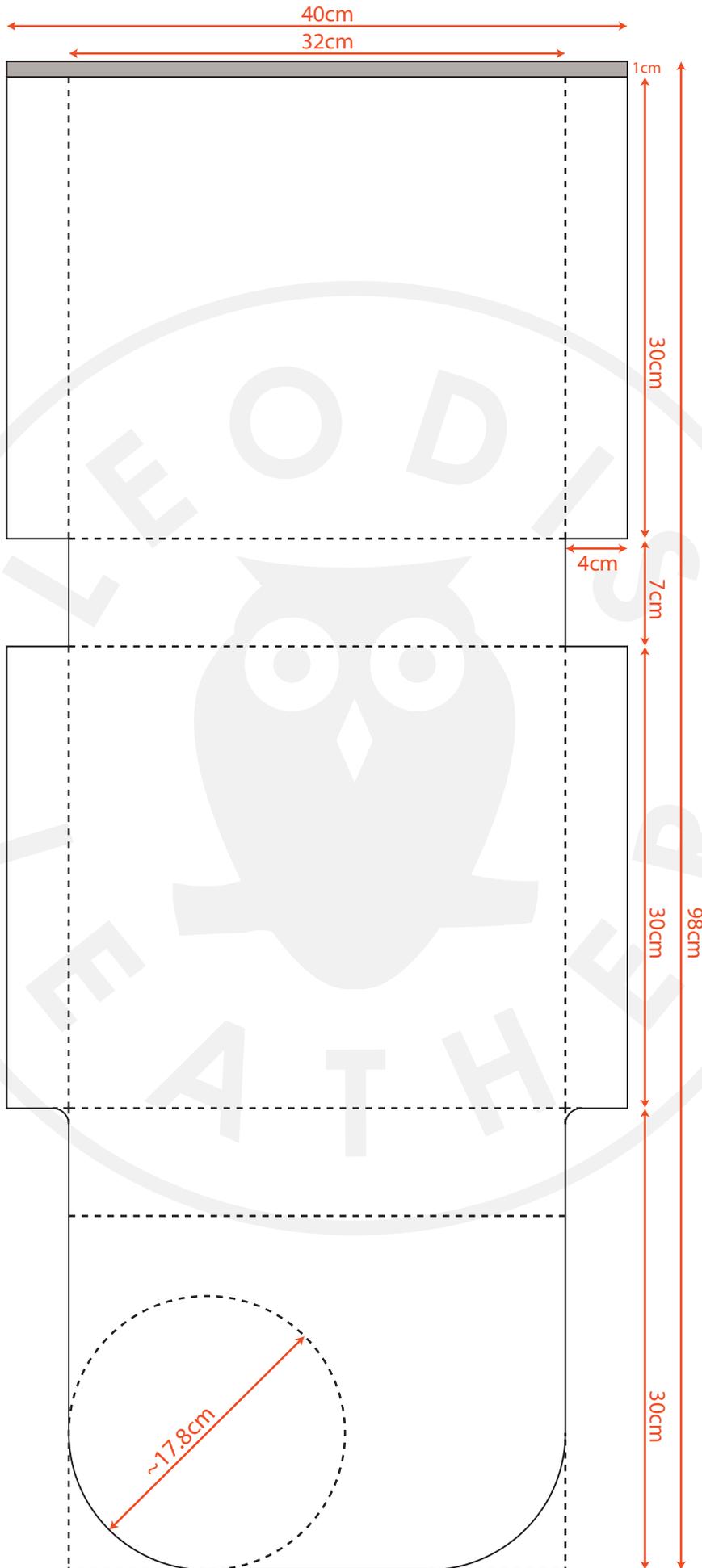
If you only wish to use the pattern once you can place the paper over the leather than then prick through with a scratch awl. For any straight sections make a prick mark at either end and then connect the lines with a scratch awl. For any curves make a mark every few mm.



# Patterns

Messenger bag  
main piece.

This piece is  
reference size  
only.



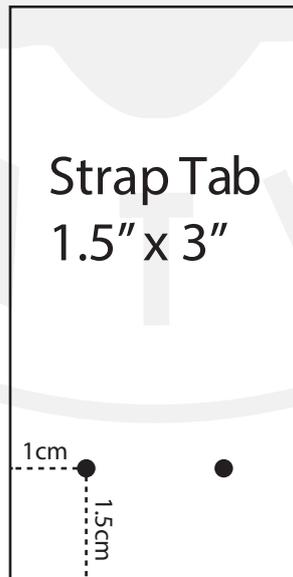
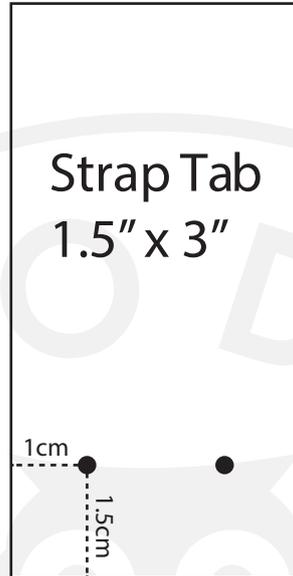
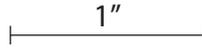
Messenger bag strap tabs and strap.

These pieces are actual size, the width should match your strap and strap hardware.

For the strap itself you will need ~1.6m in length and your chosen width.

In the video I used 1.6m x 1.5" of cotton canvas webbing. This gives a fully adjustable strap.

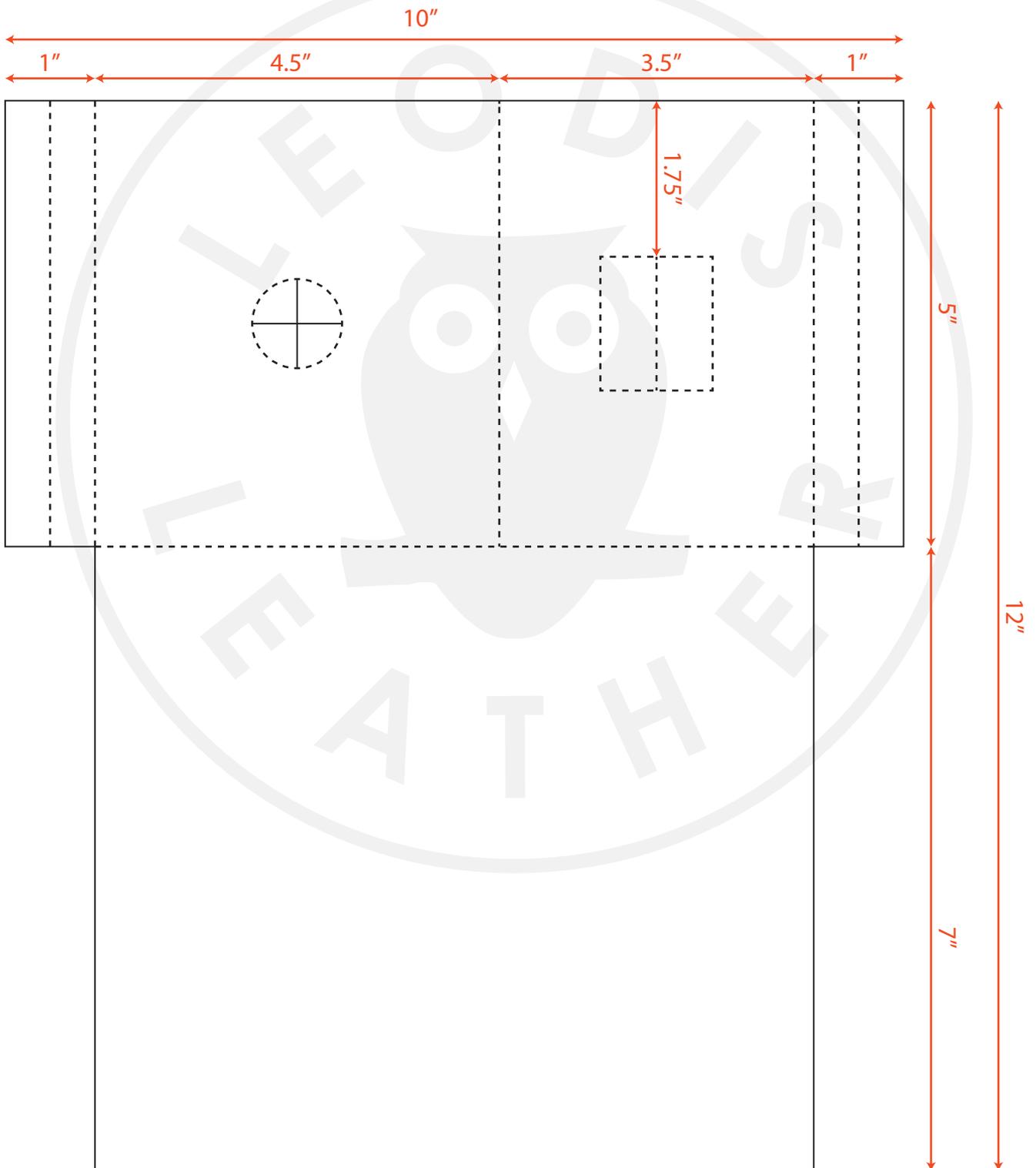
If you want to make a different type of strap you can work out whatever measurements you need for that.

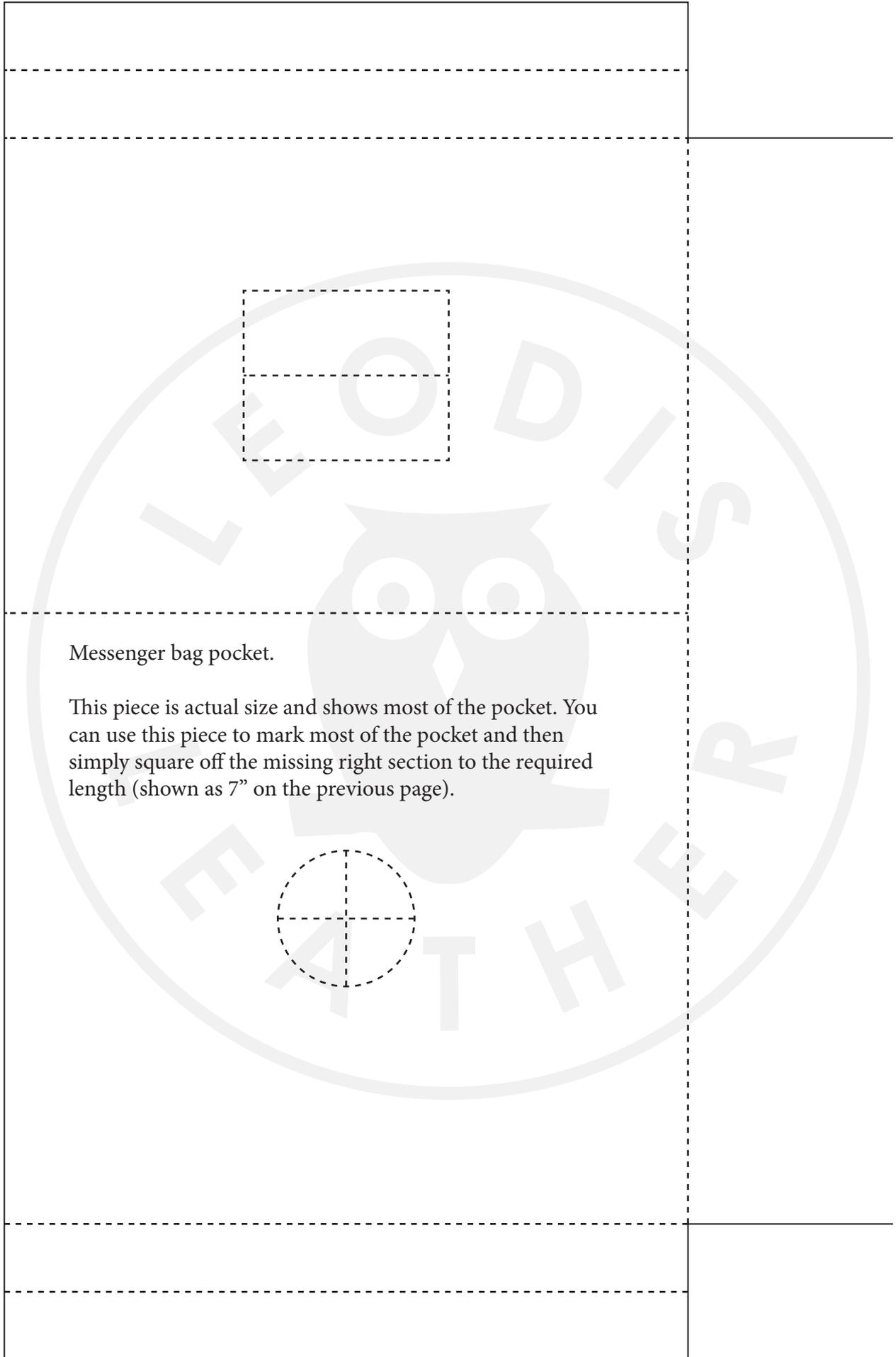


Messenger bag pocket.

These pieces are reference size only, see next page for actual size portion

1.5 x 4.5"  
pen loop strip





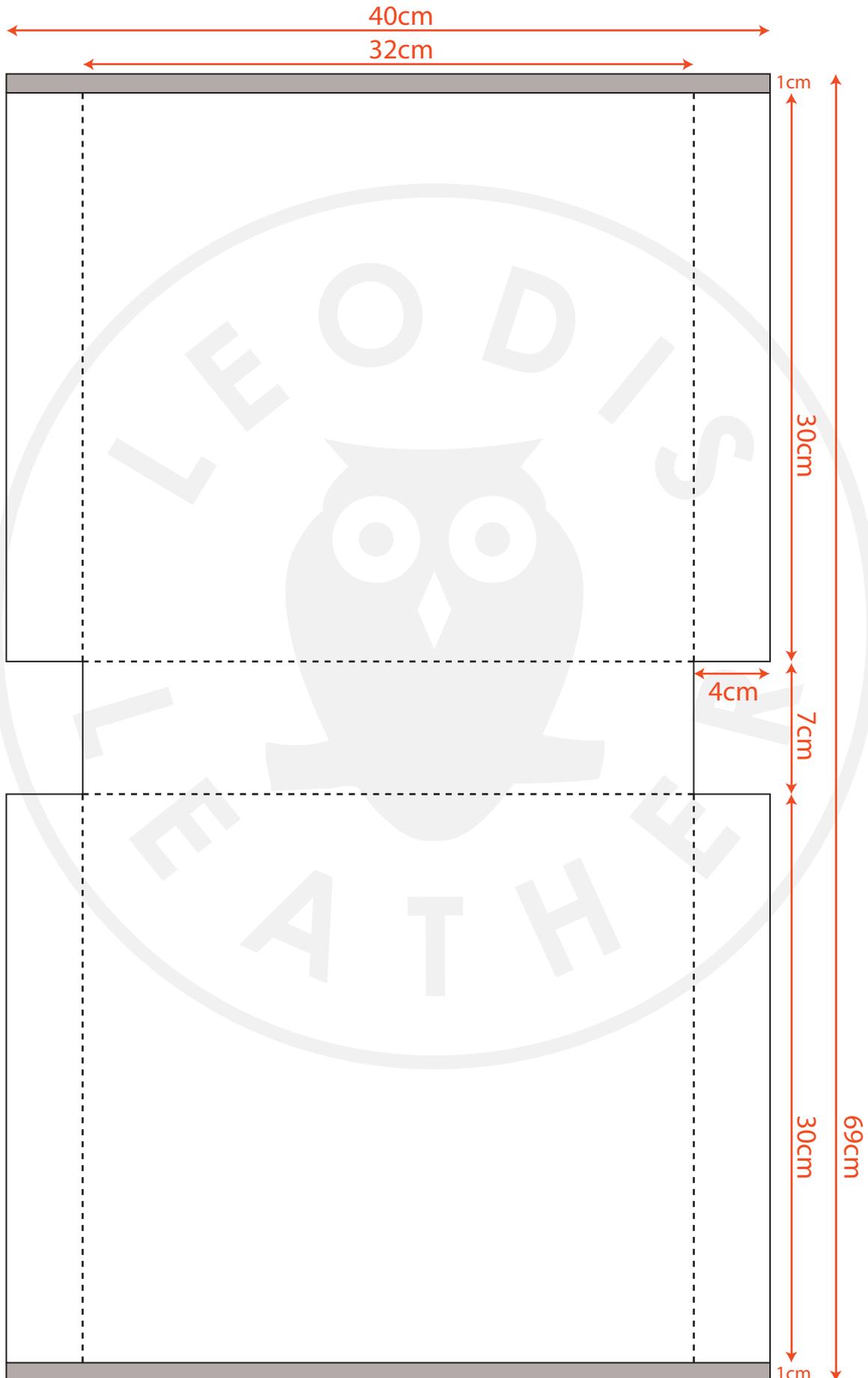
Messenger bag pocket.

This piece is actual size and shows most of the pocket. You can use this piece to mark most of the pocket and then simply square off the missing right section to the required length (shown as 7" on the previous page).



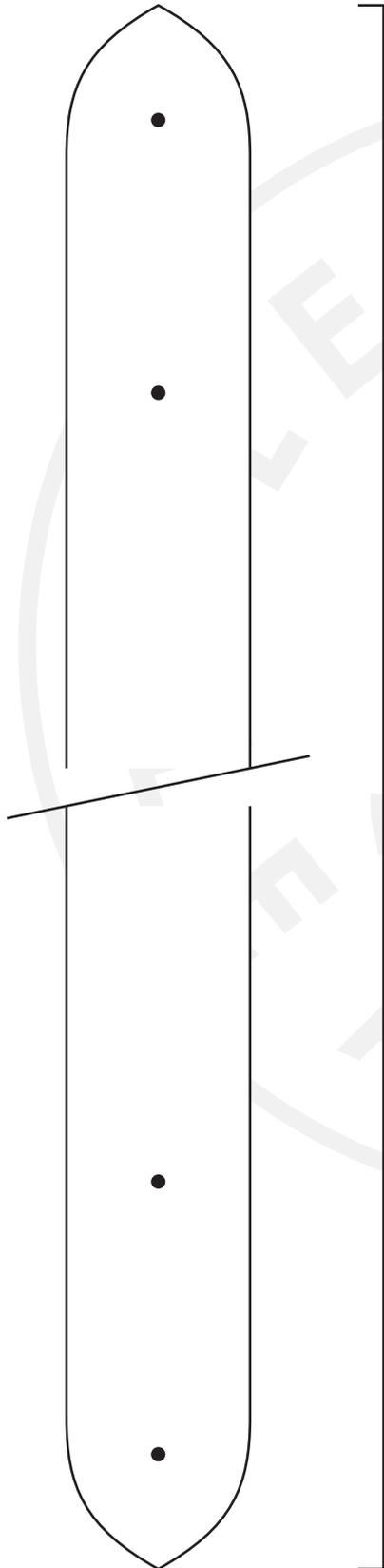
Tote bag main piece.

This piece is reference size only. The grey strips show the turning allowance and can be omitted if you only want a cut edge on the top of the bag.



Tote bag straps and strap tabs.

These pieces are actual size (though don't show the full length of the strap) and can be used for marking the holes in conjunction with the template on the next page. You can shape the ends however you like. As shown in the video the side tabs are optional on the tote bag but do add a nice detail as well as increasing strength and helping to shape the opening of the bag.



Two handles required:

Total length for hand carry ~24"

Total length for shoulder carry ~31"

Side Tab  
1.5" x 3"

1cm  
1.5cm

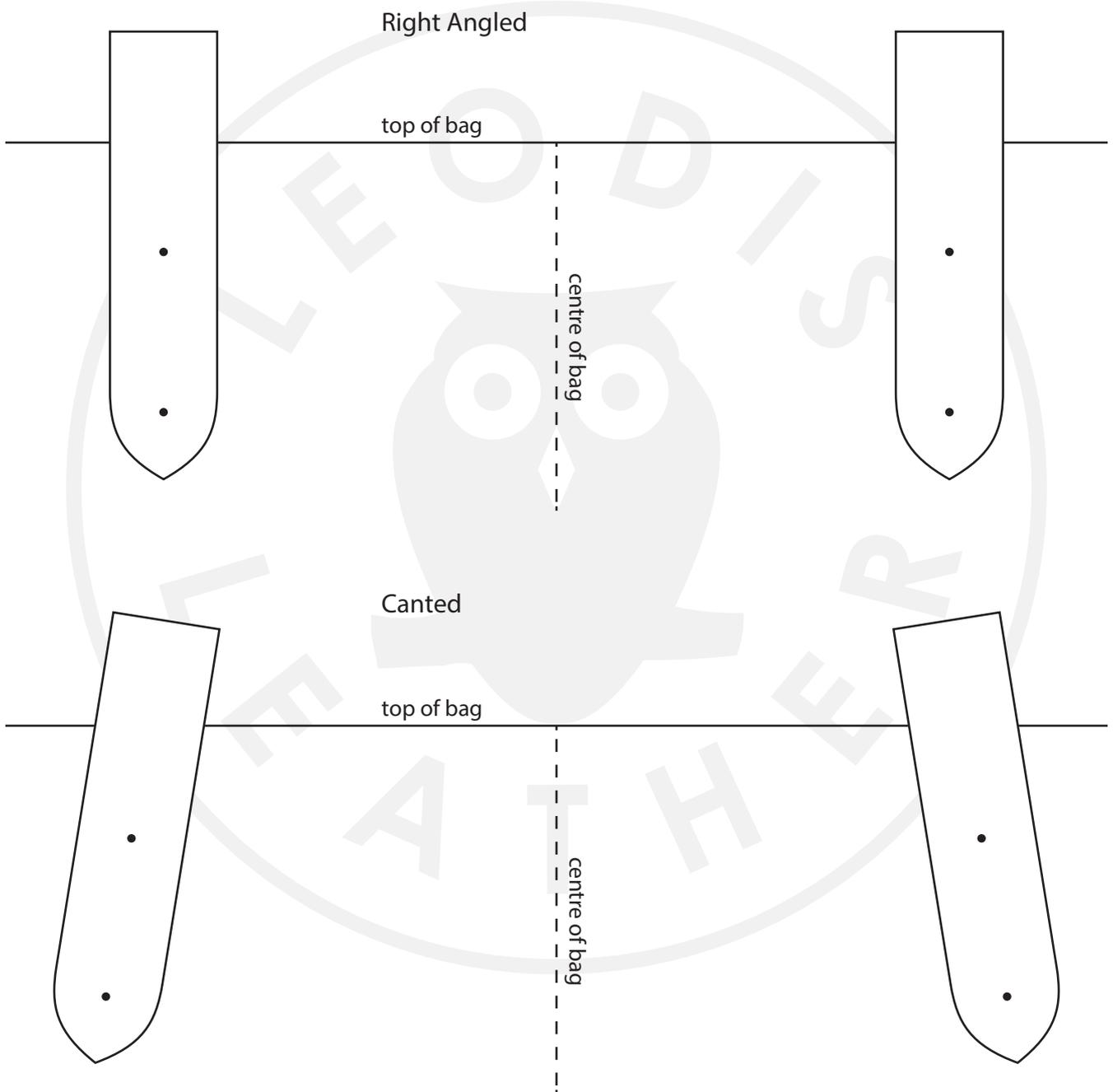
Side Tab  
1.5" x 3"

1cm  
1.5cm

## Tote bag handle style

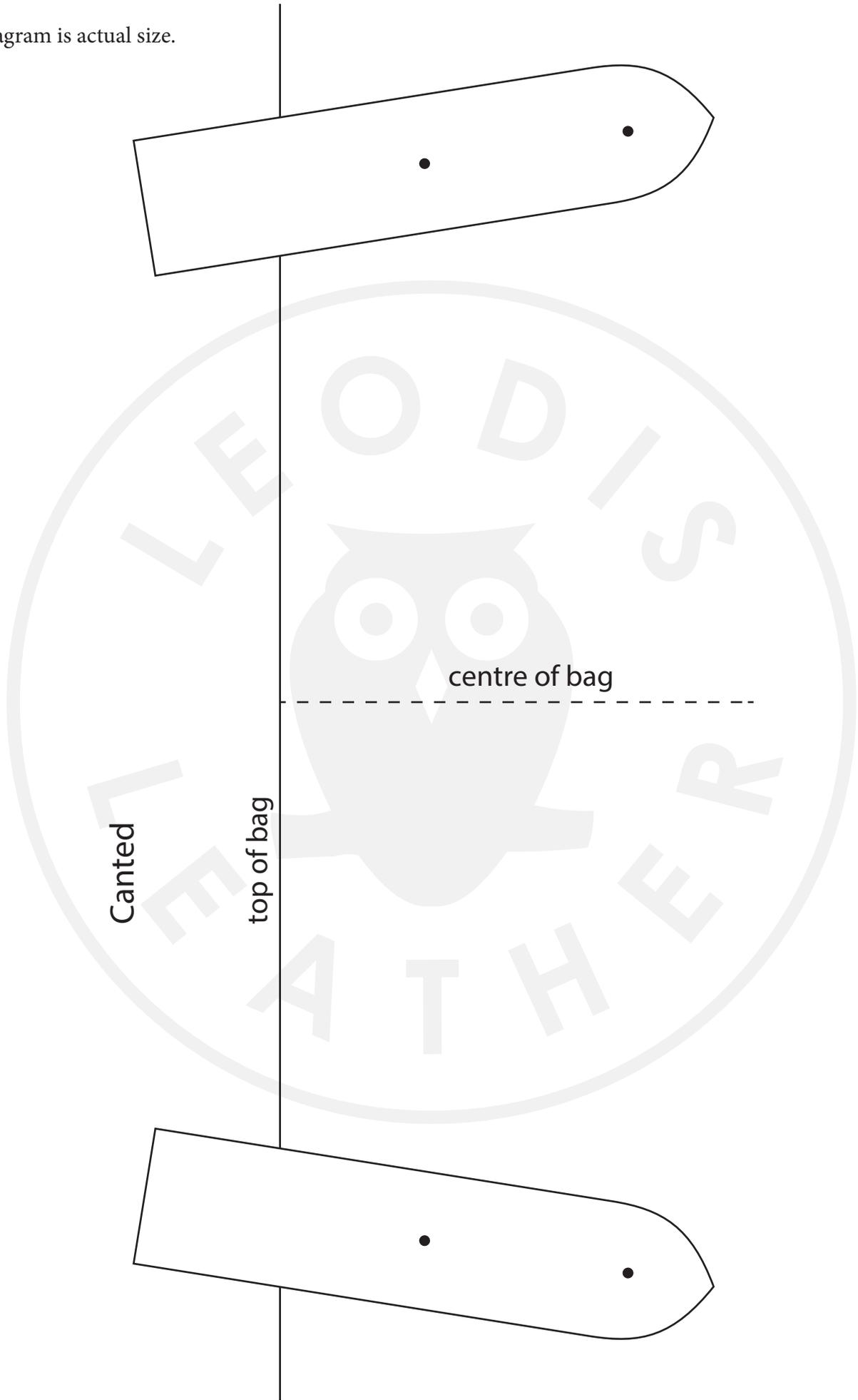
These diagrams are reference size only. You can have the handles on the tote bag coming up at right angles to the bag top or canted inwards. The handles will lay a bit better against the bag when it's loaded with items if they are canted but do work fine at right angles also if you prefer the look of that. If you're unsure use the canted template.

The next two pages have these templates at full size for you to lay over your bag as shown in the video.



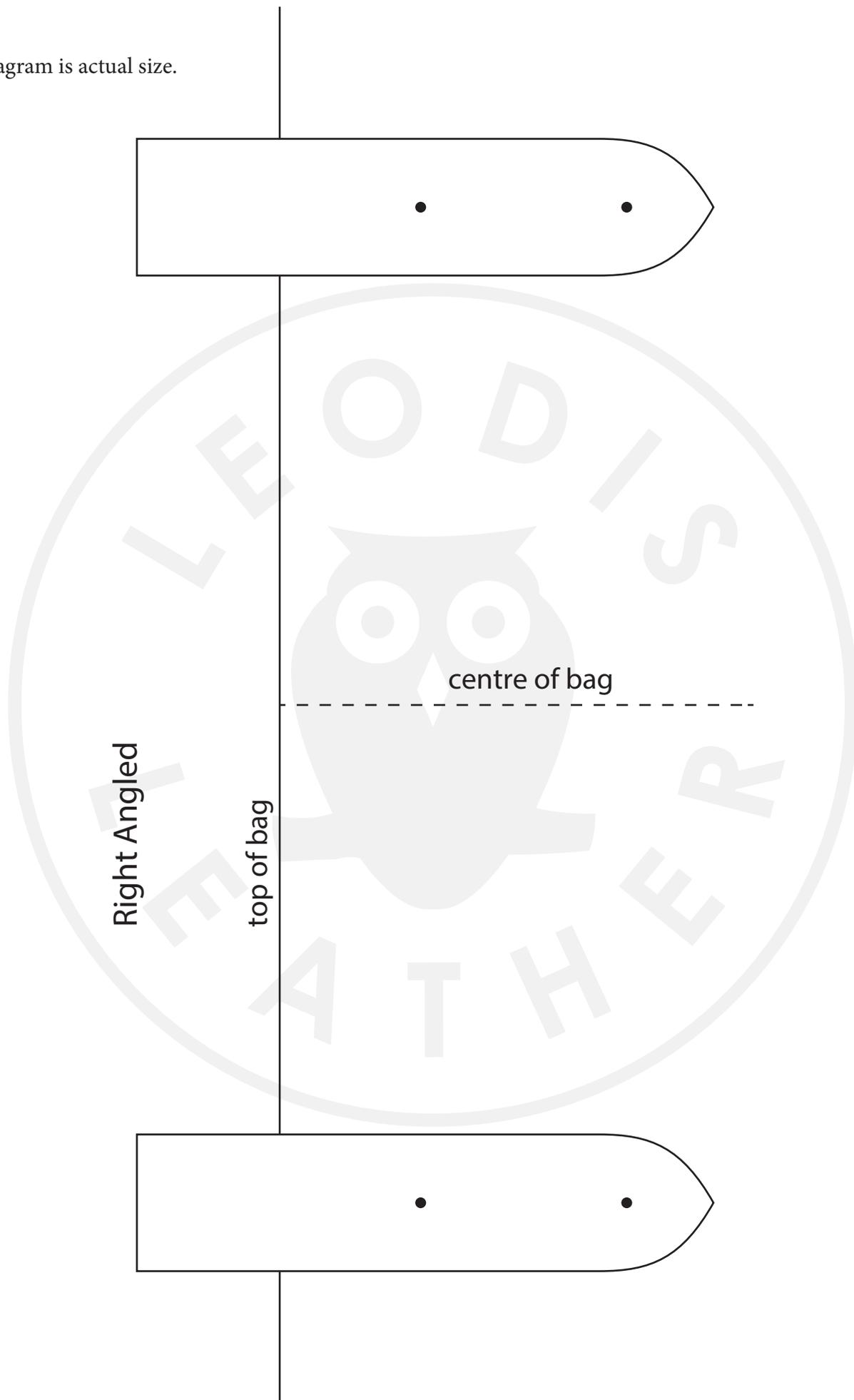
Canted tote bag handle template.

This diagram is actual size.



Straight tote bag handle template.

This diagram is actual size.



# Leather

## *Weight*

The ideal weight of leather for these bags is about 1.2 - 1.8mm (3 - 4.5oz).

Towards 1.8mm the bag will be a little heavier and sturdier, towards 1.2mm the bag will be lighter and feel a little softer. If you are less experienced then stick to these weights for the best results.

You could push the weight up to ~2mm on the thicker end but you may start to have trouble turning the bag; that would depend really on how soft the leather was.

You could also drop down to around 1mm if the leather was fairly strong (remember not all leathers of the same thickness have the same structure) and you weren't making a heavy duty bag.

Remember that if you increase the sizes of the bags from those shown then they are likely to need to take more weight so should be towards the heavier end of the recommended weights.

For the inner pocket I would use a lighter leather of around 0.8 - 1mm (2 - 2.5oz) such as calfskin or any other suitable thin leather.

## *Type*

I would recommend using a pre-dyed full grain vegetable tanned leather for this project for the best results. There are lots of nice pre-dyed leathers available in the recommended weights so there's really no need to dye expensive russet cowhide as you might with other projects. You can still do this if you want to though.

The leather needs to be soft and flexible, it's no good using a very stiff leather as it doesn't suit this type of bag and you will struggle to turn the bag when the time comes.

You could use either a vegetable tanned or a chrome/mineral tanned leather. Vegetable tanned is always nicer but chrome tanned will be cheaper and usually more flexible.

However you can't finish the edges well on chrome tanned leather which doesn't matter so much for the turned seams but would still have to be addressed on the flap. For this reason if using chrome tan you may have to apply an edge finish/paint (e.g. Edge Kote or a Tandy one) rather than burnishing where necessary.

You may also find a lot of leather which isn't full grain but suits the thickness and flexibility needed such as top grain or splits, this may often be described as upholstery leather. I tend to only use full grain leather if I can as I like the natural surface grain to be visible however if you want to economise on the material then those alternatives would be cheaper. They still often look very nice as well.

As always don't buy super cheap leather though if you can avoid it as you'll spend the same amount of time working on it and it's a shame to use very low quality materials.

Ask your supplier for samples or advice if you're unsure of suitability before buying.

## Suppliers

For help finding suppliers in the UK please see my website for an up to date list of recommended suppliers:

<http://www.ianatkinson.net/leather/links.htm>

## Hardware

I would recommend using solid brass high quality parts for the bags. Rivets should be double cap as both sides will be clearly visible.

### **messenger bag:**

The strap hardware should match your chosen strap width, in the video I make a 1.5" strap but you are free to choose your own size. A thinner 1" strap may require a simple shoulder pad making for additional comfort if the bag was heavy.

- 1 tri-glide
- 2 strap loops
- 8 rivets (+1 for the pocket)

### **tote bag:**

- 8-12 rivets

## Tools

The tool list is not meant to be exhaustive and you may use more or less tools depending on your chosen methods.

- basic marking and cutting tools including a large square, small square and meter ruler
- scratch awl
- hole punch
- edge bevellers
- cobbler's hammer
- bone folder
- stitching stuff (marking tools, needles, thread etc.)
- stitching pony (plus saddler's clams if you have one but you can manage without)
- skiver
- dividers
- burnishing tool
- etc.

# Construction

## Messenger Bag

**Pocket steps 3-7 are optional, if the pocket is omitted turnover steps 8-10 are also optional**

1. Cut out the main bag piece
2. Apply any finishes if required
3. Mark and cut out the pocket piece
4. Fold the pocket gussets into place
5. Make the pen loop and attach it to the pocket (if required)
6. Make your logo tag and attach it to the pocket (if required)
7. Glue the pocket closed, apply the central rivet and stitch all three seams
8. Skive back the turnover on the front of the bag
9. mark the centre of the pocket and the centre of the bag. Begin to turn the turnover and then glue the pocket into place. Apply glue to the whole turnover and stick it down.
10. Stitch along the turnover allowing 1cm clear at either end of the seam
11. Bevel and burnish the bag flap (if suitable, see video for explanation)
12. Glue and stitch down both sides of the bag making sure it's inside out at this point
13. Flatten the bottom of the gussets into position, glue/clamp them closed and stitch
14. Turn the bag inside out
15. Make and install the two side tabs for the strap
16. Finally fit the strap to the bag (if you want to make a different strap to the one shown in the bag e.g. a leather one with a buckle you are welcome to do so)

## Tote Bag (turnover and pocket are optional as above)

1. Cut out the main bag piece
2. Apply any finishes if required
3. Skive, fold and stitch the top of the bag if desired and if not bevel and burnish the top of the bag as appropriate in just the same as the messenger bag. If you wish to install the pocket make that and add it when stitching the turnover in the same way.
4. Make the straps and attach them to the bag

Finally follow steps 12-15 as with the messenger bag, you don't need to install the side tabs if you don't want to but they do help to shape the bag and add strength.

## Enhancements

The video also shows additional things at the end that you might want to consider such as adding zips, seam welts, closures etc.

If you want to do any of these think about where in the building process you need to insert steps before you begin, for example with a closure mechanism you may wish to install the lower/underneath part of that before you begin stitching and so on.

These instructions can not cover every eventuality and option, as always please see these as a starting point from which you can add you own ideas and alterations.

## Straps

In the video I make a canvas strap for the bag. Of course you can make any sort of strap that you like and it is your choice whether to make it removable or to attach it permanently to the main bag.

### *Fixed or Removable?*

For this kind of bag it makes most sense for the strap to be fixed permanently to the bag. This will be neater and less fussy, and since the bag wouldn't be carried in the hand there is no need to be able to convert the bag in this way. Also since this bag is softer and more flexible it will lay comfortably against the body without the need for swivels on the straps.

Of course if you prefer you are welcome to add D-rings to the bag and then make a removable strap, this is entirely your preference.

### *Leather or Canvas?*

You can make the strap from cotton canvas webbing as I did, or you can use leather. There are other materials available such as polypropylene webbing as well which are also suitable however the cotton canvas webbing has a nicer look and feel. I am sure that many people will wonder why I didn't make a leather strap however there are some good reasons as discussed below.

Firstly if you are making bags and the straps are leather you will need to keep in stock quite large pieces of leather from which to cut the straps. I often find that I don't have big enough pieces available which is why I prefer the canvas.

You could get around this problem by buying belt strips however you may pay way over the odds for pre-stripped leather. As an example a 1.5 x 54" belt strip from Tandy is £31, that works out at over £55/sqft. Normal veg tan tooling leather is around £7-10/sqft depending on grade.

Secondly people often worry about dye rubbing off leather onto people's clothes if they haven't finished it properly, this is the sort of item where that could easily happen. Using the canvas should eliminate this worry.

Of course if you are using high quality pre-dyed leather such as a bridle leather this is a lot less likely as generally the tannery will have finished and sealed the leather well.

Thirdly completing a long leather strap (especially with nicely finished edges) is quite labour intensive and therefore increases the price of the finished item for the customer. Ideally it would be laminated and stitched so both sides were grain side leather; again a very time consuming process if you don't have a sewing machine which I don't!

Ultimately this is a choice in terms of time, style and materials that you can make for yourself. If you choose to make a leather strap this can be adjusted most easily by using a buckle, however you will not get the same range of adjustment that the canvas gives.

## Adjusting the Pattern

These patterns can be easily adjusted to add or remove height, width or depth from the bags in any combination. In the diagram on the next page the red strip represents 3cm and the blue strip 1.5cm but you can add or remove however much you need to within reason.

The blue measurement would always be half of the red measurement.

For the tote bag you can simply ignore any adjustments made to the flap portion of the diagram since the basic layout is the same.

If you adjust the depth remember that each gusset tab should be half the bag depth + 5mm.

So on the original drawing the gusset is shown as 7cm and each tab is 4cm ( $7\text{cm} \times 0.5 = 3.5\text{cm}$ ,  $3.5\text{cm} + 5\text{mm} = 4\text{cm}$ ). The 5mm is for stitching and then the remaining half is because the seam meets in the middle.

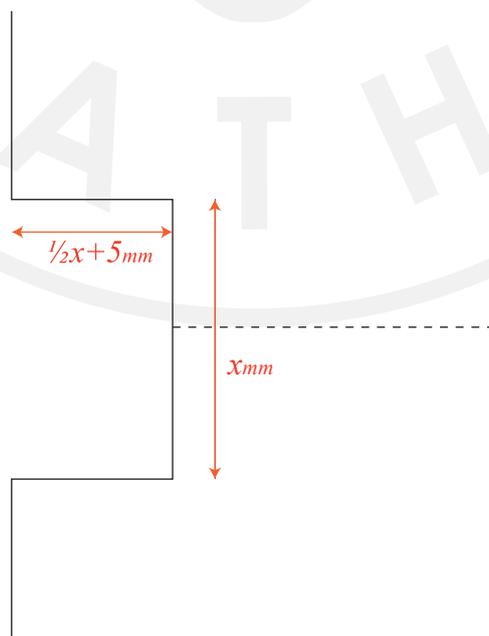
Since the 5mm allowance is already there you do not need to add this again i.e. it is constant not proportional.

For example let's say you wanted a 15cm depth rather than 7cm:

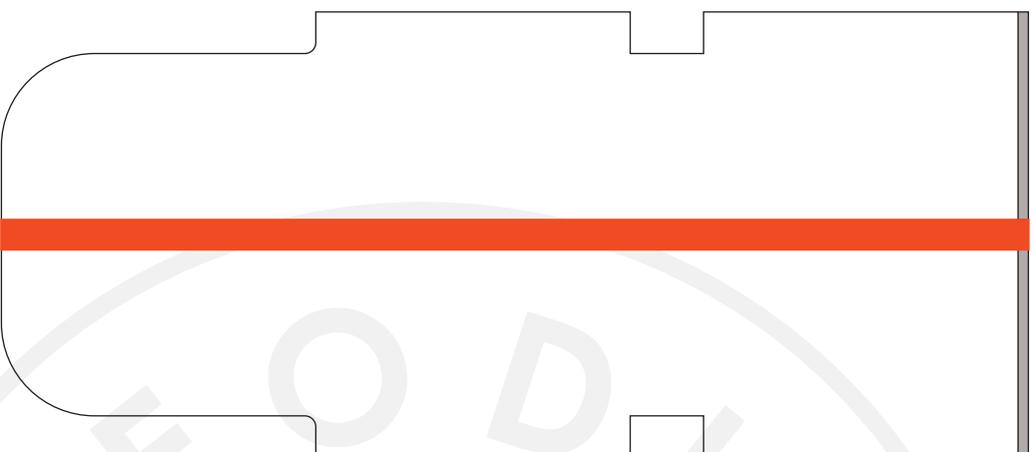
We add 8cm to the bottom (red strip) and 4cm to the side tabs (blue strip). This makes the bottom 15cm and the side tabs 8cm.

$15 \times 0.5 = 7.5$  and  $7.5 + 0.5 = 8$  so the tabs are still half the gusset plus 5mm we didn't add that again.

If you find this confusing please try it with a piece of paper before cutting leather! The diagram below shows the same thing if you prefer to visualise it that way.

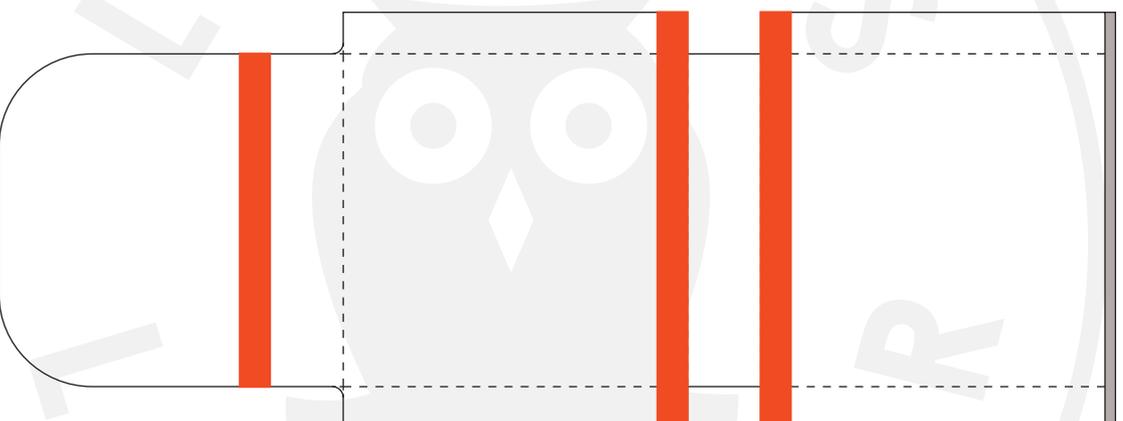


Width



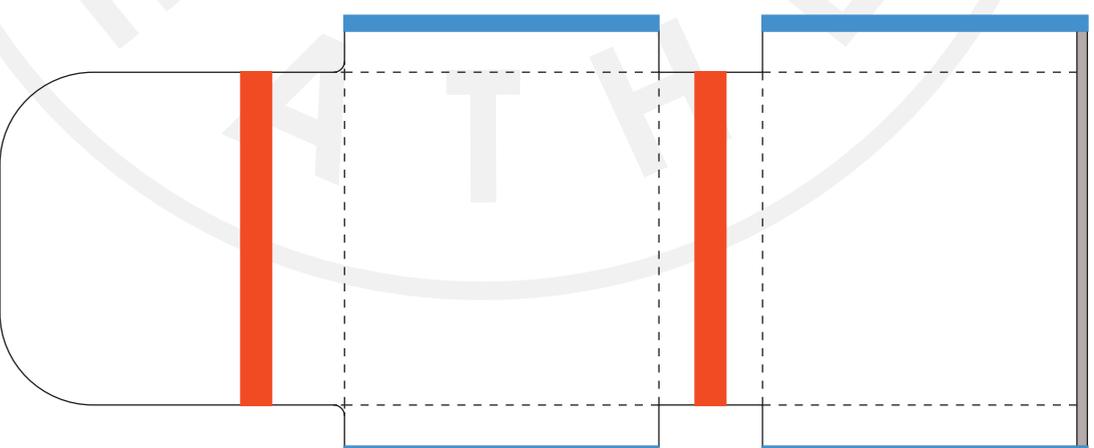
To add width we stretch the pattern in the middle by the required amount.

Height



To add height we add the required amount to the front, back and flap.

Depth



To add depth we add the required amount to the bottom and flap. We then add half that amount to each of the side parts.