



# Leodis Leather Build Along

No. 4

## Messenger Bag

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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.

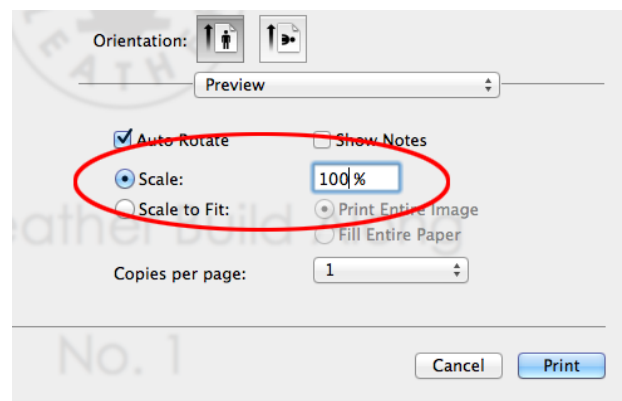
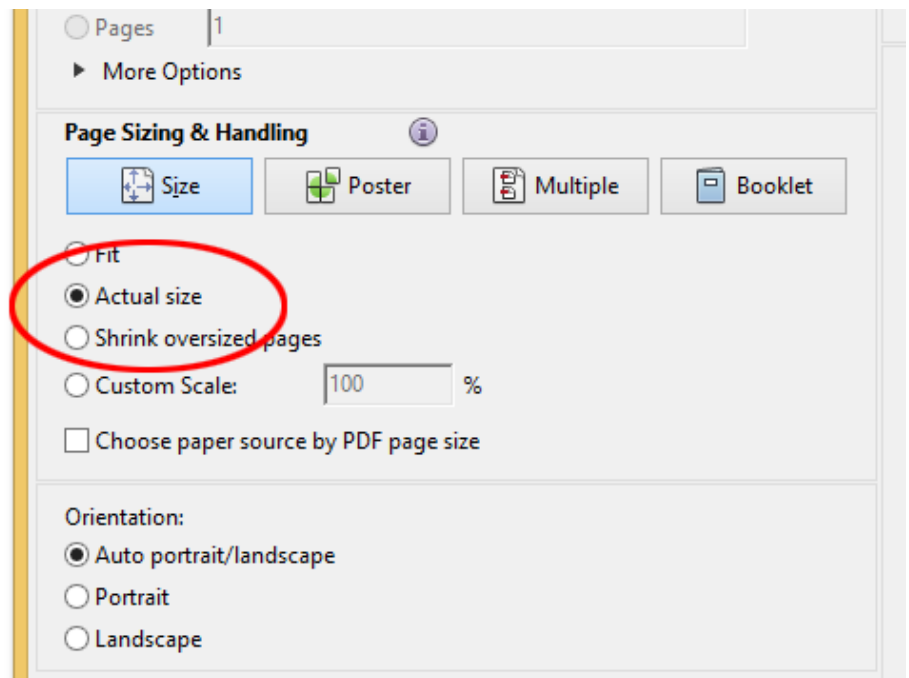
This pattern is a mixture of both **actual size and reference drawings**, so whichever size paper you have if you print this document **without scaling applied** then the pattern will be the correct size for you to use **for the actual size pages only**.

**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.



# Pattern

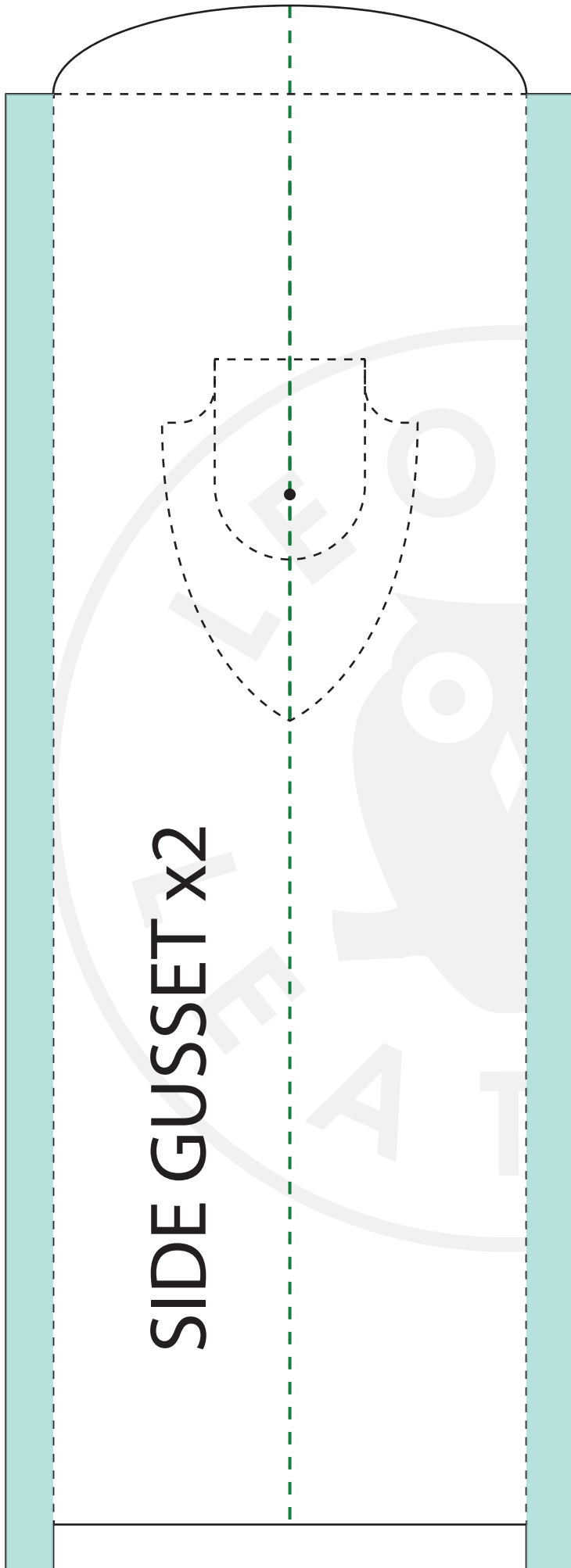
This piece is  
actual size.

1 inch

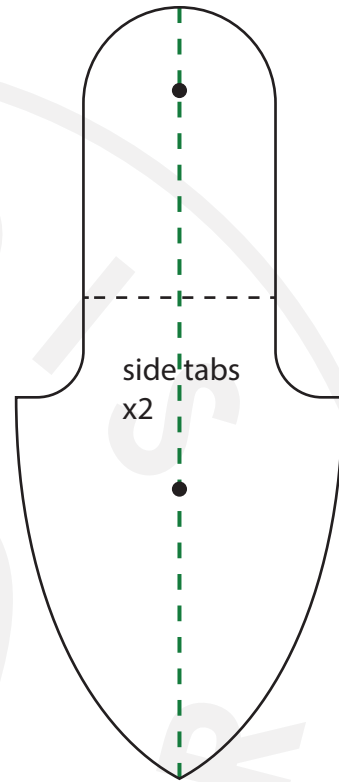


These pieces are actual size.

Print this page twice to get both sets of gusset and reinforcement pieces.



**SIDE GUSSET x2**



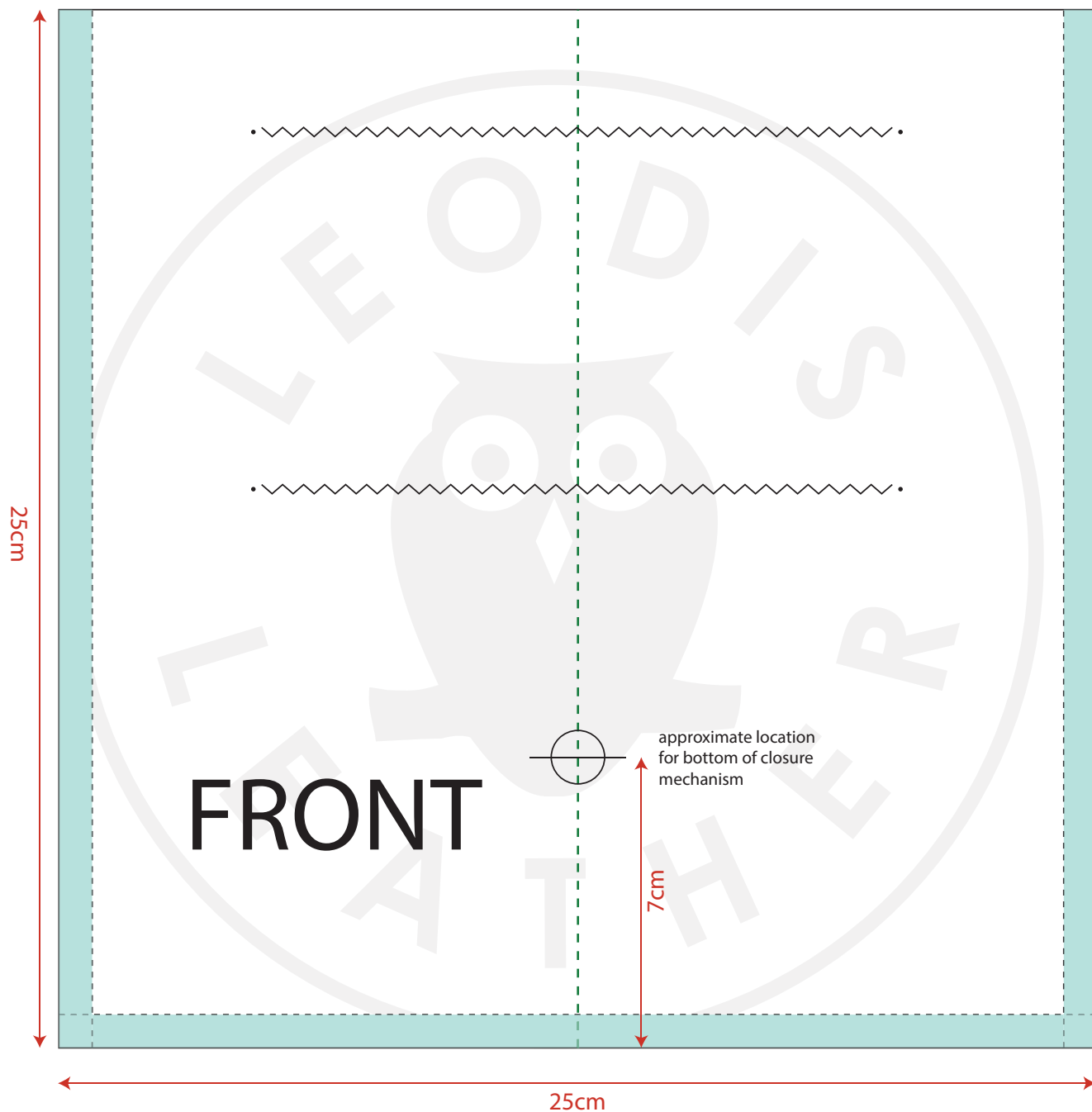
side tabs  
x2



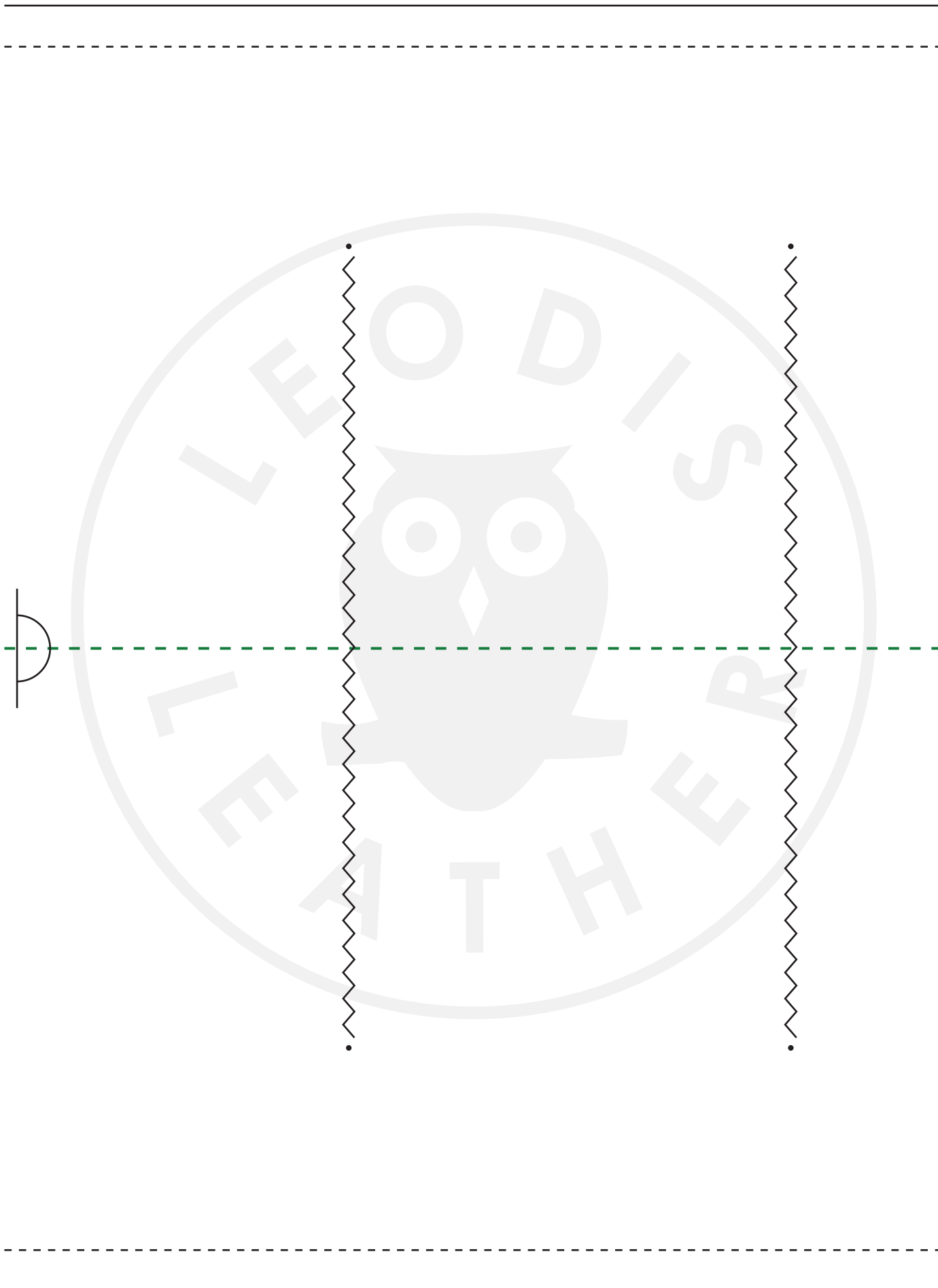
side tab interior support

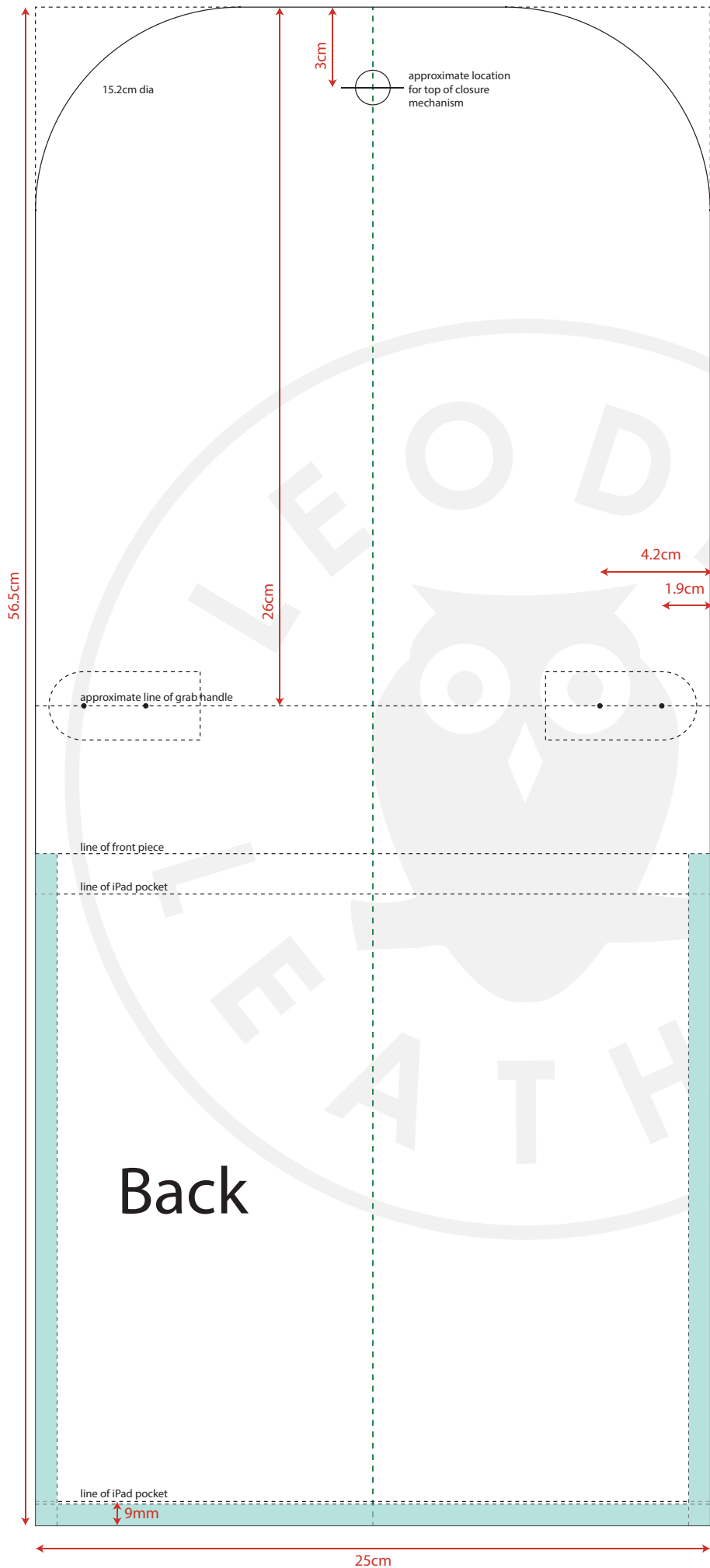
This is a reference diagram for the front and is **not actual size**, to create this cut a 25x25cm square of leather.

On the next page you will find an actual size section of this diagram, this can be printed and overlaid on the square that you have created in order to accurately mark the pocket location and the position of the closure mechanism.



This piece is actual size, see note on previous page.

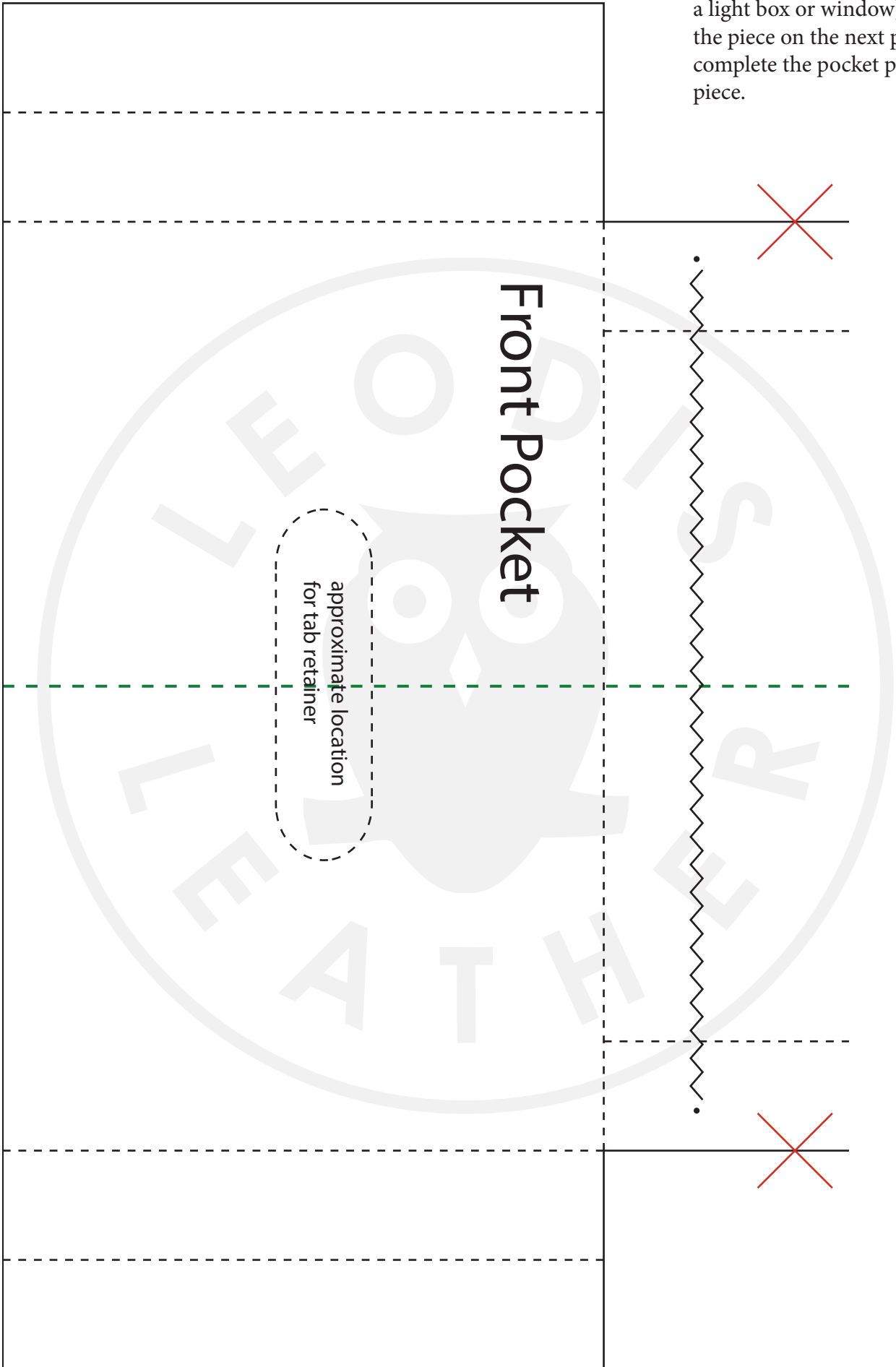




This is a reference diagram for the back and is not actual size, to create this cut a 25x56.5cm rectangle of leather.

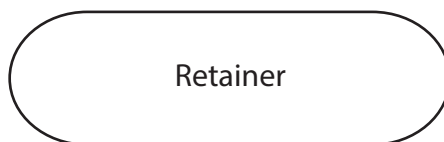
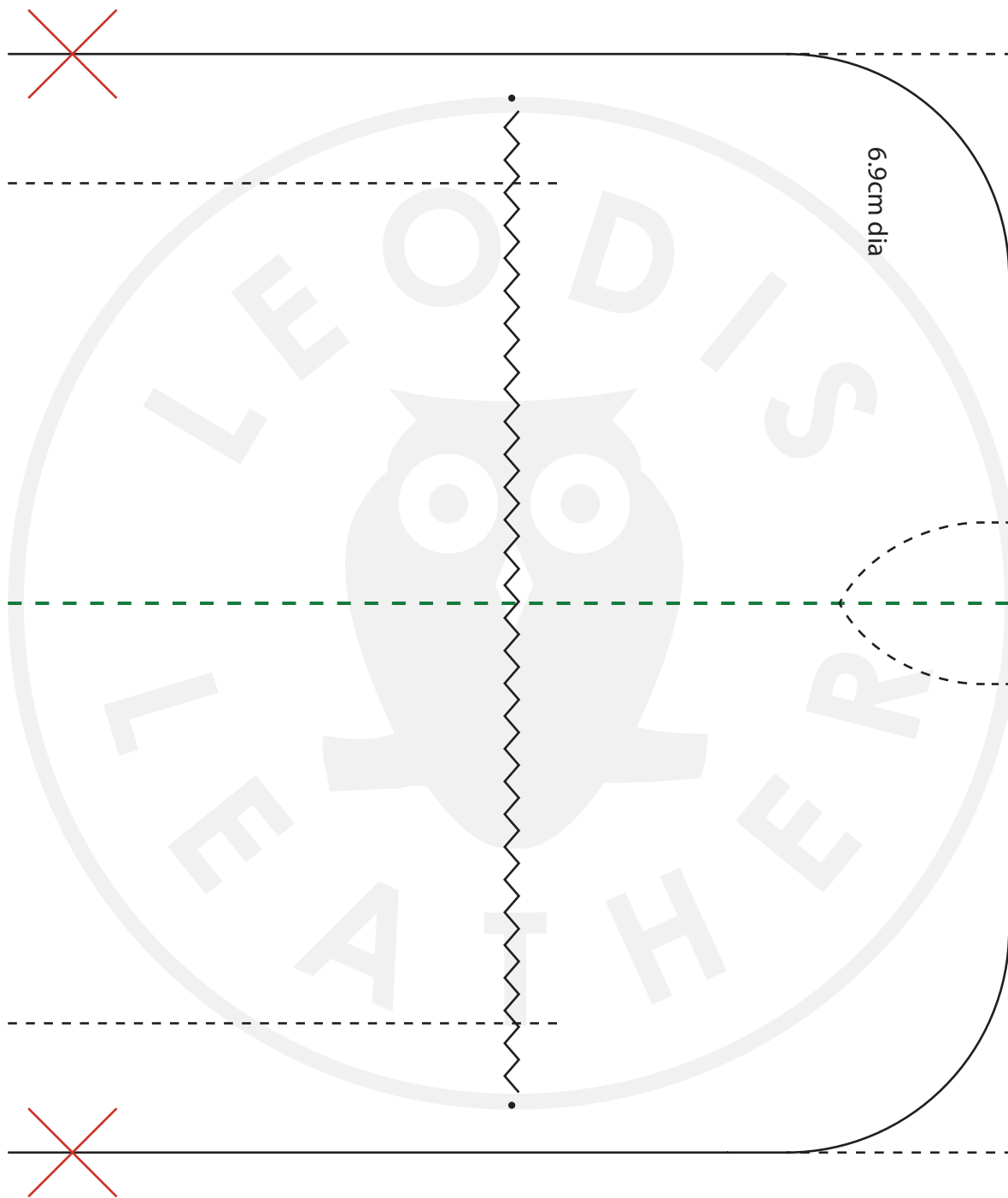
Most of the other measurements are approximate and do not need to be drawn initially on the piece.

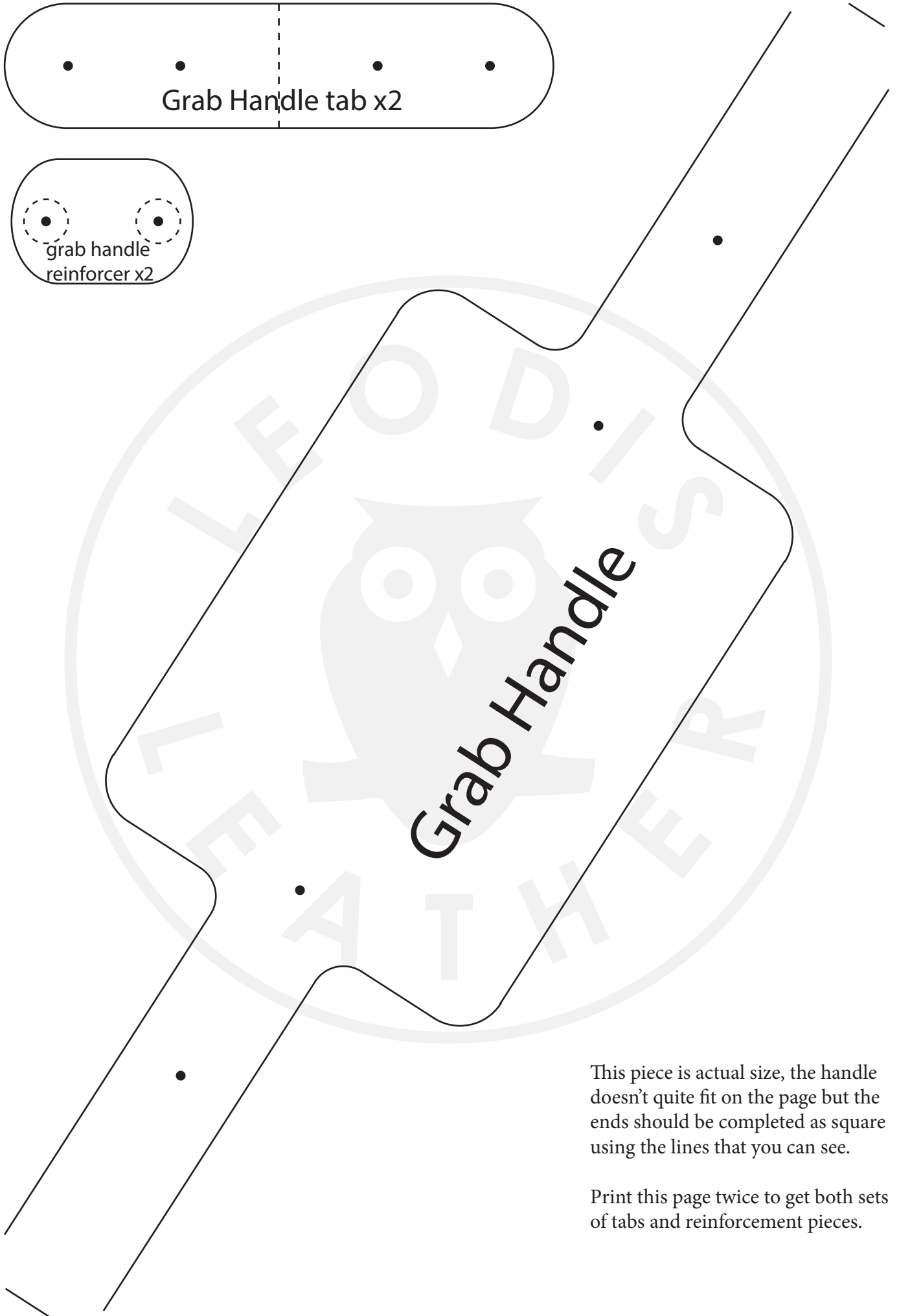
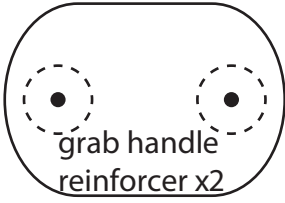
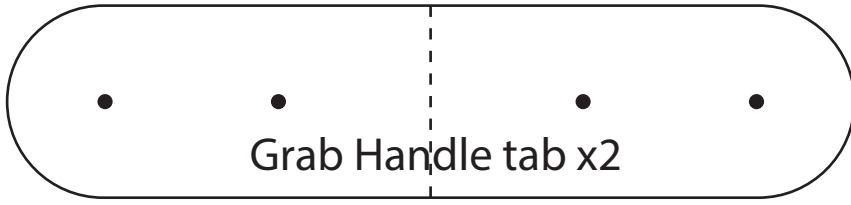
This piece is actual size, line it up using the red crosses (on a light box or window) with the piece on the next page to complete the pocket pattern piece.





This piece is actual size, see  
note on previous page



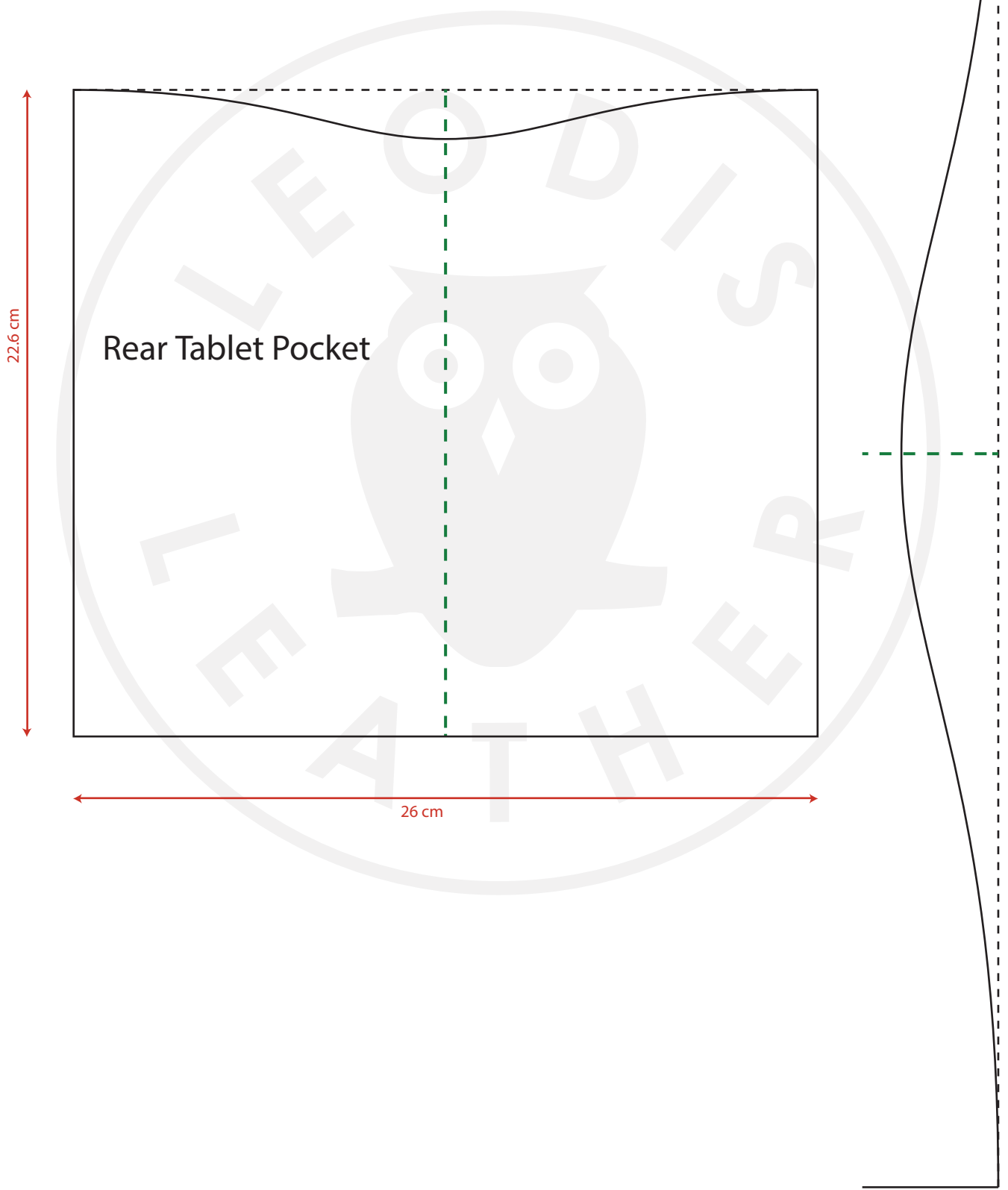


This piece is actual size, the handle doesn't quite fit on the page but the ends should be completed as square using the lines that you can see.

Print this page twice to get both sets of tabs and reinforcement pieces.

This is a reference diagram for the iPad pocket and is not actual size, create it by cutting a 26x22.6cm piece of leather.

The scallop line on the right hand side of this page is actual size, you can print this page and use that to help cut the scallop line (or cut it however you would like if you would like a different shape).



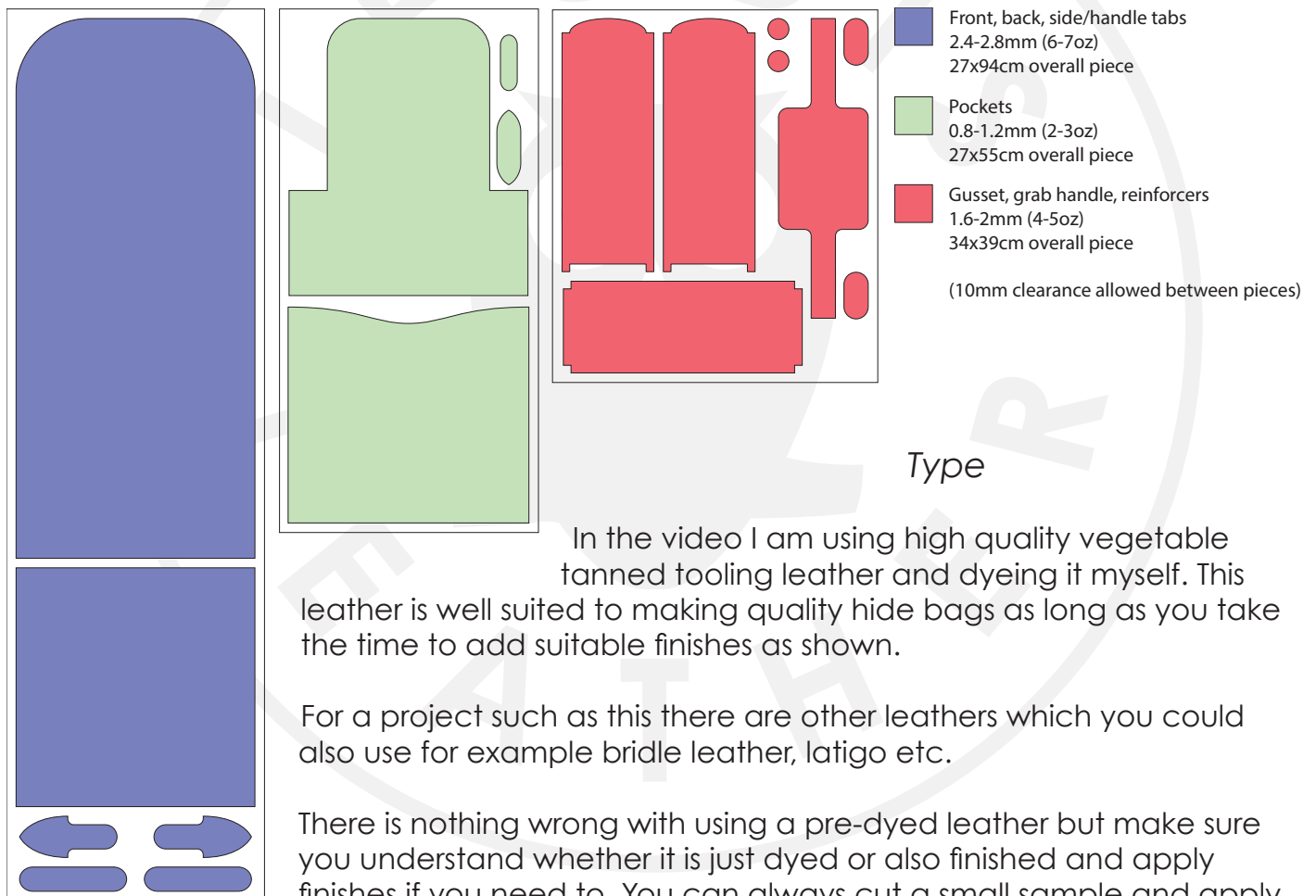
# Leather

## Weight

To make a bag like this ideally requires several different weights of leather. While this may seem frustrating if you don't have much experience and maybe only have one piece of leather available, this is the reality of making more complex items.

Below is a diagram showing the recommended weights for the different pieces. Experienced leather workers may wish to use different weights as they see fit; specifically a lighter (and less sturdy) bag could be made by reducing the weight of the main pieces. As always if you change the weight of the pieces you may find you need to adjust the pattern.

If you are less experienced I would recommend sticking to the weights I have shown since these have been tried and tested:



In the video I am using high quality vegetable tanned tooling leather and dyeing it myself. This leather is well suited to making quality hide bags as long as you take the time to add suitable finishes as shown.

For a project such as this there are other leathers which you could also use for example bridle leather, latigo etc.

There is nothing wrong with using a pre-dyed leather but make sure you understand whether it is just dyed or also finished and apply finishes if you need to. You can always cut a small sample and apply some water droplets to see how it behaves.

Most commercial bag makers (companies such as Saddleback) will make these sorts of bags from chrome tanned leather. There is no reason why you can't make bags such as these with chrome tan although the leather is often not as firm. You will also not be able to burnish the edges so you would need to apply an edge finish.

If in doubt ask your supplier for advice (not me!) or recommendations and remember they should always be happy to send you a small sample before you commit to buying a large piece.

## 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

for the main bag:

- 1 closure mechanism or clasp
- 2 quality 1" D-rings for the side tabs
- copper rivets or solid brass rivets

for the strap (may change depending on strap style):

- a tri-glide
- 2 quality snap hooks
- copper rivets or solid brass rivets

for the grab handle (optional)

- 2 quality 1" D-rings for the grab handle
- copper rivets or solid brass rivets

## Tools

This is a more advanced project so will require quite a few tools to complete to a high standard, you may well use more or less than this depending on your own practices:

- basic marking and cutting tools including a large set square
- scratch awl
- hole punch
- edge bevellers
- cobbler's hammer
- bone folder
- stitching stuff (marking tools, needles, thread etc.)
- stitching pony
- stitch groover
- skiver
- dividers
- burnishing tool
- side cutters
- basic woodworking tools for making the jig
- etc.

## Construction

### 1. Prep (if not using pre-dyed leather)

1. Cut out slightly oversize pieces of leather for all parts from the correct weights. Take care to ensure that there are no faults in the leather on the larger pieces.
2. Dye all pieces (outside only).
3. Buff the pieces well once they are dry.
4. If the pieces are too stiff apply neatsfoot oil (if it's compatible with the dye used).
5. Apply a sealer such as Fiebing's Tan Kote to the backs of all pieces.
6. Apply top coat to all pieces **except the gusset pieces**. Since this is for an outdoor item I would recommend using a beeswax based feed and sealer such as Fiebing's Aussie or Sno Seal as these will give the best protection from the weather. Buff when dry.

### 2. Cutting Out

1. Mark and cut the pieces from the leather remembering to mark through any holes and alignments. For the pieces which are too large to print you can use a large set square to carefully mark out.
2. Skive the backs of the D-ring tabs.
3. Mark the stitches on the D-ring tabs.
4. Dye the edges of the pocket pieces and burnish without bevelling
5. Bevel, dye and burnish all edges which are not stacked:
  - tops of the side gussets and the facing side of the bottom
  - top of the front
  - flap
  - facing side only of the D-ring tab
  - facing side only of the handle re-enforcers and tabs
  - the handle

### 3. Gussets

1. Form the side gussets by using a stitching groover along the fold and then moistening the groove. Start the fold with a bone folder and then set it in a wooden jig as shown.
2. Gouge the inside folds of the bottom gusset and form the bottom gusset in the same way as the sides.
3. Apply the top finish to the gusset pieces once everything is dry
4. Form the tabs on the bottom gusset again using the jig.
5. Dampen the D-ring tabs and form them around the D-rings.
6. Glue, stitch and then rivet the tabs to each side gusset.
7. Glue and stitch the gusset together making sure the bottom of the bag is aligned.
8. Bevel the insides of the tabs (inside the bag).

### 4. Pocket (Optional)

Note that you are welcome to move the location of the pocket to the inside of the bag (on the front or back), add an additional pocket, change the design/size or leave it off altogether.

1. Stitch the tab to the pocket.
2. Dampen and form the gussets on the pocket.
3. Measure and sew the tab retainer to the pocket.

4. Connect the guide marks on the front and pocket into a box shape, rough the boxes and then glue the pocket to the front of the bag.
5. Stitch the pocket to the front piece along the two horizontal stitch lines (make a groove on the inside of the bag).
6. Fold the pocket up and glue the gussets into place leaving a slight gap at the bottom. You should be able to slide some paper under the edge so as not to get glue on the front of the bag
7. Once dry stitch through to the inside of the bag.

### *5. Front Assembly*

1. Attach the lower part of the bag closure mechanism to the front of the bag as appropriate.
2. Glue the completed gusset to the front of the bag and true the top edges
3. Stitch together making sure to use double binding stitches where the stitch run passes over the gusset.

### *6. Grab Handle (optional)*

The grab handle is entirely optional, feel free to miss out these steps completely if you do not want one on the bag or change the design if you'd like.

1. Assemble the grab handle as shown in the video
2. Offer up the completed front part of the bag to the rear part and clamp them together using some small clamps with leather covered jaws
3. Fold the flap over and hold it down in place making sure you have it sitting in its final position (it should sit nicely over the curves in the side gussets)
4. By eye find the highest point of the flap where it curves over the top of the bag and mark this point.
5. Remove the clamps and make the holes as shown on the pattern piece using the mark and the set square
6. Glue, stitch and rivet the completed handle to the top of the bag

### *7. Final Assembly*

1. Cut out the iPad divider and skive the edges (adjust the size if you need to)
2. Glue the iPad divider to the back of the bag
3. Glue the back and front pieces together ensuring that all edges are squared and true. If you have someone to help you ask them as this is a bit of a four handed job!
4. Stitch the back together, again using binding stitches where the gusset meets the flap
5. Measure the position of the top closure mechanism and install into the flap as appropriate
6. Trim the corners to a small radius then sand, bevel, dye and burnish the main edges.

### *8. Strap*

1. Complete the strap as shown in the video or however you would like if you want to do a different style. In the video I am using 1.5" cotton canvas webbing and I began with a 1.5m length. This is enough to give an adjustable strap which can be set between ~75cm and ~145cm in length and should suit most people.

## Straps

In the video I make a separate canvas and leather 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?*

A strap which is attached to the bag may ultimately look neater and will require less hardware, however I feel that there are some advantages to the removable strap:

- Being removable the strap can be easily changed if it becomes worn or damaged
- The strap will have some independent movement from the main bag, this should make it more comfortable to wear and apply less pressure to the bag (especially given that this style of bag will be quite firm and rigid)
- The versatility of the bag is increased especially if the grab handle is added to the top
- The bag is more easily stored when not in use
- The construction of the bag is simpler when made in two parts leading to less frustration and mistakes

### *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.

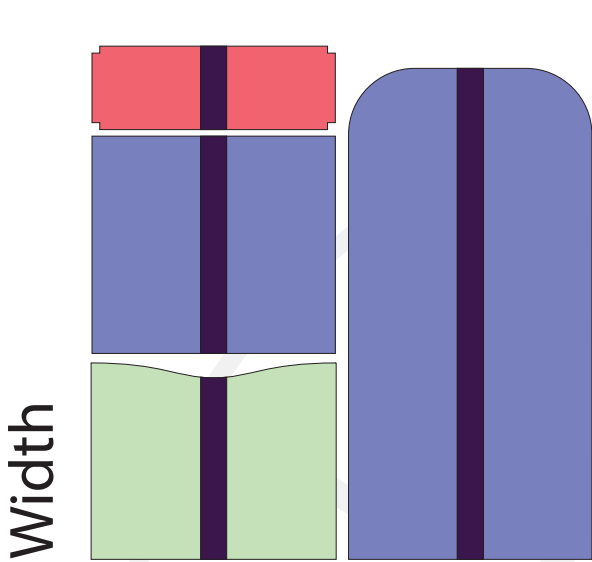
Thirdly completing a long leather strap (especially with nicely finished edges) is quite labour intensive and therefore increases the price of the finished item for the customer. Ideally it would be laminated and stitched so both sides were grain side leather; again a very time consuming process if you 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

This pattern can be easily adjusted to add or remove height, width or depth from the bag in any combination.

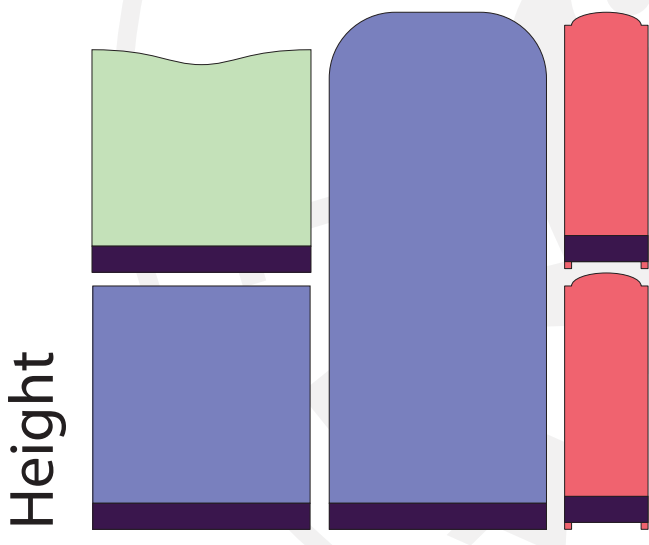


This is the reason why I have designed the pattern using the 3 piece square gusset rather than any curved parts since straight pieces are easily adjusted.

To add **width** we add the same amount to the bottom gusset piece, the front and back pieces and the iPad pocket.

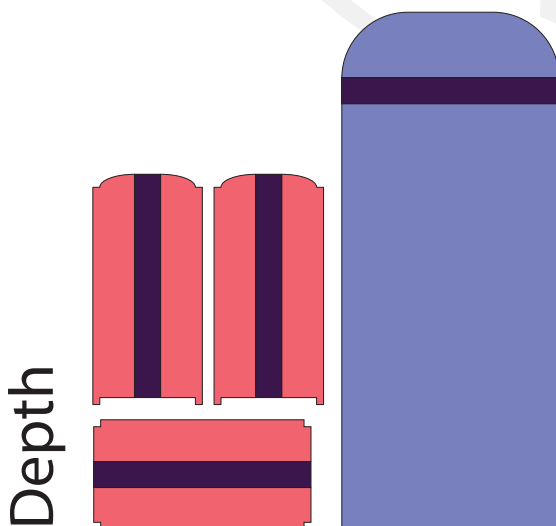
To add **height** we add the same amount to the front and back pieces, the side gussets and the iPad pocket.

To add **depth** we add the same amount to all gusset pieces and also increase the length of the flap by slightly more than this amount (since it will actually curve over that increased depth).



The sizes of the various tabs, handles and accessory pocket do not need to be adjusted when increasing the dimensions of the bag (unless you would like a larger pocket of course).

You should make sure that any holes for the handle and tabs etc. remain on the centre lines at all times so everything stays in line.



## Closure Mechanisms

For me the closure method on a bag is a compromise between:

- cost                    how much is the part?
- ease of use            how fiddly is it to open?
- security                does it offer protection against thieves?
- reliability              is the part likely to wear out or fail?
- aesthetics             does it look good and suit the bag?

Cost should not really be a contributing factor if you are making one bag or a small number of bags. It is not worth penny pinching on the closure on a nice bag since it will spoil the whole bag if it's low quality.

Ease of use and security inversely affect each other; the easier it is for you to open the easier it is for a thief to open! For this aspect it is necessary to consider where the bag may be used and what the target market is. For example a bag which is aimed at a hunter who may use it in the middle of a field does not need the same level of security as a commuter who will spend time in crowded stations.

Reliability should certainly be a consideration when making a high quality leather bag. A high quality leather bag could last a lifetime if looked after and you certainly wouldn't want to throw one away because of a small broken part. For this reason it would be best to avoid overly intricate parts which may break, or else ensure that the part could be accessed and replaced if needs be.

Aesthetics are of course important, the closure should suit the style of the bag. Some things such as a buckle are timeless and will suit almost any item. Other things are themed or may be too masculine or feminine which may be important if you are wanting to make a bag specifically for a lady or gentleman.

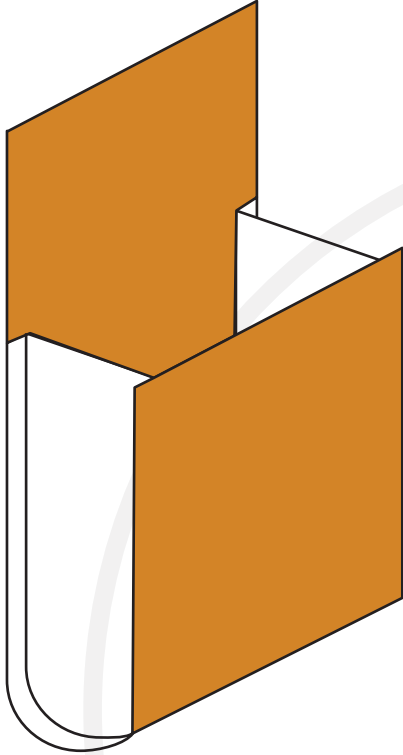
The most popular closure for this type of bag seems to me to be a buckle. Not only does this look good it is also inexpensive, reliable and secure so ticks all of the boxes except ease of use. I personally find buckles on bags overly fiddly so am not keen on them. If you wish to use a buckle you may want to shorten the flap, you can then attach a small tongue to the bag flap and a buckle to the bottom of the front.

I would avoid using snaps, sam browne studs or anything which requires pressure to close since this will be difficult to use when the bag is empty as there is nothing to push against.

## Other Styles of Gusset

If you wish to move beyond this pattern and try some other types of bags there are some other types of gussets that you may find useful. Here are a couple you could try:

### *U-Shaped Gusset*



With a U-shaped gusset the front and back of the bag would be made from one long piece of leather creating a neat appearance (shown in brown).

Each side gusset (shown in white) is a U shaped piece with a border turned outwards for stitching.

With this design the bag would not stand on its bottom and the interior space is also reduced slightly.

The gussets can be formed in a curved mould.

### *One Piece Curved Gusset*

With a one piece curved gusset the front and back of the bag would be made from two different pieces of leather (shown in brown and blue) as we have done in the video.

Instead of using 3 pieces for the gusset one long piece can be used (shown in white) which goes around the entire bag.

With the design the bag would still stand on its bottom.

This style of gusset is trickier in some regards than the 3 piece one shown in the video because it can be difficult to manipulate the leather into behaving properly in the corners.

It is also more difficult to measure accurately as the curve is unpredictable.

