Sew a Simple Drawstring Bag

Two measured fabric panels, a fold-over channel and one continuous cord

One plan, two pieces, one cord

A drawstring bag closes by gathering a fabric channel around a cord. This original teaching project uses TWO separate rectangles of stable woven scrap fabric, each cut to 180 mm wide by 230 mm high. One becomes the front and one the back. The left and right side seams and the bottom seam use a planned 10 mm allowance. Each top opening reserves a 30 mm turn-under: first turn 10 mm, then turn the resulting band another 20 mm inside so a channel can be stitched without trapping the opening.

There are two full-size original A4 or US Letter pattern sheets, one marked FRONT and the other BACK. Each carries the same 180 x 230 mm outline with side-seam stitch guides at x = 10 mm and x = 170 mm, a bottom stitch guide at y = 10 mm, and top folding lines at y = 220 mm (first 10 mm turn from the y230 raw edge) and y = 200 mm (second 20 mm turn). Coordinates are measured from the lower-left cut corner. A 50 mm scale bar appears on both sheets; check the actual ruler length at 100% before transferring marks.

To create a clean opening for the cord, the side seams stop at y = 200 mm, the line that becomes the finished upper edge. The uppermost 30 mm of each panel remains unjoined to the other piece so the front and back can form two separate channels. First tidy those four short side edges with a suitable narrow finish; do not sew the two panels together across their top thirty millimetres.

Finished dimensions are nominal, not promised

In a flat calculation, the span between the two side stitch lines is 170 - 10 = 160 mm. The planned height from the bottom seam y10 to the finished folded upper edge y200 is 200 - 10 = 190 mm. After the casing is attached near y182, the main usable fabric below the channel stitch has a nominal 182 - 10 = 172 mm depth. This is not an observed capacity: fabric thickness, seams, rounded corners, fold placement and gathering can make every practical dimension smaller.

Do not treat the 180 x 230 mm cut blank as the expected finished bag size. It includes two side allowances, a bottom allowance, and the full 30 mm top turn-under. The drawing's dashed fold guides are NOT cuts. The bright arrows and cord illustration are a route diagram, not a machine-sewing plan or guarantee that a specific drawstring slides easily.

Sew a Simple Drawstring Bag

Select materials and read the layout

For initial practice, choose clean, inexpensive, stable woven cotton with minimal stretch. Cut only expendable stock. Prepare an appropriate hand-sewing needle, general-purpose thread, scissors, millimetre ruler, fabric marking tool tested for compatibility, optional clips, and a smooth cord of approximately 650 mm as an illustrative starting length. A blunt bodkin can help thread the channel. If you use a closed safety pin as a threading aid, make sure it stays closed and account for it afterward. Never use a sharp loose pin or wire near your body, pets or children.

Check the fabric's surface and grain. A striped fabric may reveal skewed cutting lines more clearly than a solid colour. If the cloth frays heavily, use a material-specific edge finish before assembling; the printed diagram does not certify that a 10 mm allowance will work on every weave. Keep pressing optional: F049 requires following the actual care label and iron instructions before any heat is applied. An iron is not necessary to understand or mark this project.

Choose the correct A4 or US Letter customer PDF and select Actual Size or 100%, not Fit/Shrink. A 50 mm bar printing at 49 mm indicates a 0.98 reduction; an intended 180 mm panel would then be only 176.4 mm wide on paper. If scaling or outer corners are clipped, redraw the numeric sizes on a larger clean sheet rather than tracing a distorted guide. The two original paper masters have the same pattern dimensions, but independent calibration is needed on BOTH printed pages.

Prepare front and back - steps 1 to 7

1. Cut two plain fabric rectangles 180 x 230 mm using the correctly sized guide. Name one FRONT and the other BACK on the wrong side. Check that their upper edges share the same 180 mm width and their orientations match.

2. On the wrong side of each blank, draw side seamlines x10 and x170, bottom stitch line y10 and top folding lines y220 and y200. Mark the short side-opening sections at x0..10 and x170..180, y200..230; these will remain independent front/back edges.

3. Finish the exposed top side edges of each panel within the 30 mm opening zone using a fabric-compatible narrow edge finish, without sewing the front and back together there. Avoid bulky edge finishes that would block the cord channel. No specific anti-fray result is certified.

4. Bring the two rectangles together RIGHT SIDES FACING. Align raw left, right and bottom edges. Keep the two separate top opening sections flat and visible. Use clips or correctly placed pins only where appropriate; remove all hardware before the needle reaches it.

5. Sew the left side along x10 and the right side along x170 from y10 up to y200 only, using a suitable hand backstitch or another appropriate stitch for the chosen fabric. Do not sew above y200. Stitch spacing and strength depend on the real material; the diagram has no tested load rating.

6. Sew the bottom across y10 between x10 and x170. Reinforce the transitions at the bottom corners appropriately for the cloth without cutting through the seams. Do not trim corners aggressively or remove needed allowance merely to make the drawing appear sharp.

7. Secure thread ends on the inside. Check by sight for skipped stitches and snagged cloth, but do NOT pull the bag until failure to claim strength. Return loose needles and pins to secure storage before turning the fabric.

Make two separate channels - steps 8 to 14

8. Turn the joined shell right-side out gently, pushing the corners with fingers or a smooth blunt tool if safe. Do not stab a corner with a needle or sharp implement. The top 30 mm openings should remain unjoined at both left and right sides. Keep the opposing front and back side openings permanently unstitched to one another in every subsequent step: those four ends are the cord entry and exit points.

9. On the FRONT top, turn the raw y230 edge inward along the y220 first-fold line to conceal 10 mm of raw cloth. Keep that narrow turned edge flat; if the cloth cracks or frays, stop and choose another sample.

10. Fold the resulting top band inward again at y200, turning another 20 mm toward the inside of the bag. The finished upper edge is now at nominal y200. The second turn makes a folded channel about 20 mm deep; both folds together consume 30 mm from the cut height. Repeat independently on the BACK.

11. Sew the lower edge of each folded channel to its OWN panel near the nominal finished-body position y182 (approximately 18 mm below the upper fold), leaving its left and right ends OPEN for the cord. Do not stitch the front and back channels together, and do not stitch across the inside passage. The exact seam position may shift with real fabric and fold thickness; confirm a cord can pass before final fastening.

12. Before threading, feel or inspect the two separate channel openings safely with no sharp tool protruding. A blunt paper gauge or the actual approved cord may reveal an obstruction. Do not force a large cord through a narrow, twisted or glued channel; remake the channel larger if needed.

13. Attach one end of an approximately 650 mm smooth cord to a suitable blunt threading aid. Feed it through the FRONT channel from LEFT to RIGHT, then return through the BACK channel from RIGHT to LEFT. Both free cord ends should emerge together at the LEFT side. Remove and account for the threading tool.

14. Tie a suitable stopper knot in each free cord end so it does not slip back into the channel. Even when knotted, the two free cord tails remain an entanglement hazard while the bag is open; keep the finished bag away from children and animals at all times. Do not tie the cord around a child or animal or use it as a neck/waist strap. Check that there are no exposed sharp tools or accidentally trapped fabric sections before using the drawstring.

Understand the cord route before closing

This is a ONE-CORD arrangement, not the two-cord bags sometimes drawn in commercial tutorials. The cord traverses the 160 mm front channel once and the 160 mm back channel once, so the nominal enclosed path totals 320 mm. The 650 mm starting cord leaves approximately 330 mm distributed among two free tails, knots and handling slack before the cloth actually gathers. These are length calculations, not finished measurements; the correct cord length depends on thickness, knots, friction and intended draw distance.

Use a practice bag cautiously - step 15

15. With the bag empty, gently draw the two free ends at LEFT and observe whether the top gathers. Release tension and see whether the opening relaxes. If the cord snags, stop and inspect the casing rather than pulling harder. Record actual findings only if you assembled a physical sample. Keep the bag for dry, light, ordinary personal items only if its real seams and materials are suitable; this printed plan does not verify retention.

Do not place coins, sharp tools, liquids, hot objects, heavy equipment or important documents into an unverified fabric container. Decorative drawstrings can become entangled. Never attach one to a child, a pet, a crib, or a wearable item near the face or throat. Do not claim the bag is suitable for food contact, storage of medication or valuables, washing, load bearing, weatherproofing, or child-safe use without independent product-specific evidence.

Troubleshoot the construction instead of forcing it

The cord cannot pass: check that the top edges were first turned 10 mm and then 20 mm, that the lower casing seam was not placed too close to the folded top, and that no side seam extends beyond y200. A seam accidentally crossing the casing passage can be unpicked on expendable scrap instead of pulling a metal aid through fabric. One cord end exits on each side: trace the direction again; the intended path is FRONT left-to-right, BACK right-to-left, with BOTH tails at LEFT.

The bag twists: compare whether the two cut rectangles were identical and whether the side seams were stitched from y10 to y200 at the same positions. A casing of uneven depth can pull one side upward. The side edge frays: use a material-appropriate edge finish on fresh scrap. A seam puckers: consider marking or thread-tension differences instead of simply increasing force. Do not use a seam that visibly damages the cloth for load-carrying purposes.

If you resize this project, keep the relationships explicit. For a new cut width W with 10 mm side allowances, nominal width between seams is W - 20 mm. For a new cut height H with 30 mm top consumption and 10 mm bottom seam, nominal vertical span between bottom stitch and upper fold is H - 40 mm. A different casing depth or seam allowance requires recalculating all lines; simply enlarging a PDF through a print driver is not a controlled redesign.

Sources, original work and boundary of publication

Utah State University Extension, *Sewing Curriculum: Drawstring Bag*: https://extension.usu.edu/sanpete/files/Sewing_Curriculum_1.pdf . Background on the conventional casing and separate fabric opening; this lesson uses an independently designed two-rectangle, one-cord drawing and new instructions.

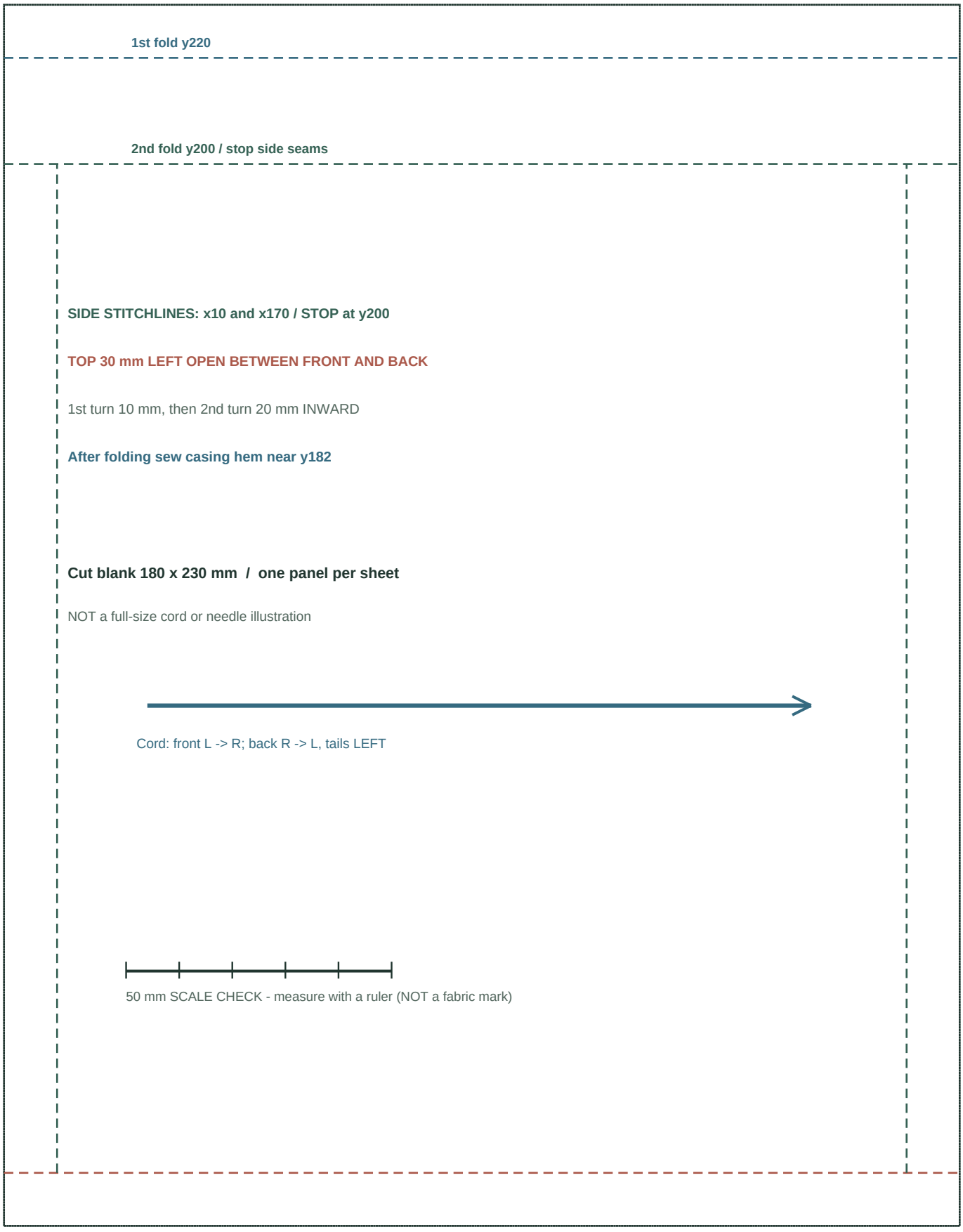
Utah State University Extension, *Beginning Sewing Skills* (Casing): https://extension.usu.edu/sewing/files/sewing_skills.pdf . Background terminology for casing width, not a fit or seam-strength test of this guide.

Oregon State University Extension, *Plain Seams and Seam Finishes*: https://extension.oregonstate.edu/sites/default/files/documents/4-h320-19.pdf . General reference for seam allowances and edge finishing; no third-party artwork reproduced.

All patterns, arithmetic, sewing-route diagrams, text, cover artwork and maker record pages are new Steadleaf Press digital work. No commercial bag pattern is reproduced. Steadleaf Press has not cut or joined fabric, threaded a cord, inspected material compatibility, filled a bag, cycled the drawstring, laundered a sample or conducted any safety, strength or durability tests. A calculated paper pattern is a starting guide for the reader, not certification of a finished bag.

FRONT FABRIC PANEL / FULL-SIZE

ORIGINAL VECTOR / FREE / ACTUAL SIZE / PATTERN 1 OF 2



BACK FABRIC PANEL / FULL-SIZE

ORIGINAL VECTOR / FREE / ACTUAL SIZE / PATTERN 2 OF 2



MAKER RECORD / WORK PLAN

Two cut panels: 180 x 230mm each

Side x10,x170 and bottom y10

Top folds y220 (10) / y200 (20)

Side seams stop at y200; top stays OPEN

Separate two casing hems near y182

Cord front L->R and back R->L

Both tails exit LEFT; actual cord length

Actual assembly findings / NOT TESTED

PUBLISHER: NO PHYSICAL BUILD OR PERFORMANCE TESTS PERFORMED

Only record a real observation if YOU performed it.



50 mm SCALE CHECK - measure with a ruler

MAKER RECORD / OUTCOME

ORIGINAL VECTOR / FREE / ACTUAL SIZE / RECORD 2 OF 2

Which original measurements were actually used?

What did actual material and tools show (if tested)?

Did anything shift, bind, heat, tear or become unsafe?

What remains untested? Never invent observations.

Which change is justified by your own evidence?

Was the result suited only to a low-risk intended use?

What follow-up is safer than continuing?

Date, initials, materials and next version

PUBLISHER: NO PHYSICAL BUILD OR PERFORMANCE TESTS PERFORMED

Only record a real observation if YOU performed it.



50 mm SCALE CHECK - measure with a ruler