Sew a Simple Book Sleeve

A measured two-panel sleeve with a practical book-to-fabric worksheet

A small fabric home for one book

This original project is a slip-in sleeve for a small book you carry in a bag or keep by your bed. It has two identical panels, a stitched bottom and sides, and a neatly turned open top. It does not attach permanently to a cover, use zips or require a machine. The example is intentionally sized for a common smaller paperback rather than every possible book. A thick hardback may need a redesigned pattern.

What you will make

The printed example uses two rectangles 180 mm wide and 250 mm high. A 10 mm seam allowance on both sides and at the bottom gives an approximately 160 mm usable flat width. That 160 mm flat width must accommodate B + T (135 + 16 = 151 mm in the example), leaving 9 mm insertion ease; it is not simply book face width plus 25 mm. Double-turning the top edge 10 mm twice leaves an interior height near 220 mm. These are calculated flat dimensions, not fit-test results. The book must slide in without pressure on the binding.

Materials and handling

Choose stable woven cotton or linen-cotton fabric, preferably a smooth washable remnant with no loose beads or rough trims. Use two 180 x 250 mm fabric rectangles after fitting the paper template; matching thread, clips, fabric scissors, measuring tape, fabric marker, needle and a suitable iron complete the kit. Optional lightweight woven fusible interfacing is not included: adding it changes the feel and sometimes the dimensions.

Protection and realistic limits

A cloth sleeve can reduce casual rubbing, but it does not guarantee protection against water, dents, tears, stains, heavy pressure or book damage. Never insert a damp book or allow a wet sleeve to stay against paper. Avoid fabric dyes that rub off, sharp decorations and excessive heat near paper. Publisher has not trialled physical fit, wash, abrasion or durability.

If the fit seems wrong

A sleeve that will not accept the closed book has insufficient effective width or height. Re-check the face-width measurement, thickness, seam depth and hem depth separately. A sleeve that is excessively loose may still be useful for another book; add no rigid closure that could bend the cover. Do not assume a digital print proves fit.

Creative variations

A second cloth colour can be used for the back, provided both fabrics are stable and compatible with the same care routine. For a wider book, redraw both panels using your own W and V. Do not simply enlarge the PDF by an arbitrary percent: this also enlarges the seam allowances and calibration lines.

Publication boundary and rights

Original text, calculated measurements, printable panel diagrams and maker records were developed for Steadleaf Press. Neither publisher nor reviewer has physically sewn this sleeve or tested real books. No abrasion, waterproofing, impact resistance, washing performance or binding-safety guarantee is made.

Measure and plan

Measure the book, not the title

Write down the closed book face width B (from spine edge to fore edge), closed height H, and thickness T at the widest point, all in millimetres. Measure with a straight ruler while the book is on a flat surface; do not flatten or squeeze the spine. Distinguish the book width from the entire wraparound width of opened covers.

Book-to-fabric calculation

For an uncomplicated two-panel sleeve use cut width W = B + T + 20 mm side-seam allowance + 8 to 12 mm insertion ease. Use cut height V = H + 20 mm top double-turn + 10 mm bottom seam + 10 to 15 mm clearance. The formula deliberately counts full thickness for a conservative insertion allowance; final fit varies with book shape and cloth bulk.

Worked example and cut-sheet limit

Example book: B = 135 mm, T = 16 mm, H = 205 mm. Choose 9 mm width ease and 15 mm top clearance. Then W = 135 + 16 + 20 + 9 = 180 mm; V = 205 + 20 + 10 + 15 = 250 mm. Print both full-scale 180 x 250 mm panels, each entirely on one page. If your calculation gives a larger size, draw a new rectangular pattern with a ruler instead of stretching or shrinking the PDF.

Check print scaling without guessing

In your print dialog choose Actual Size or 100% and disable Fit to Page. On each paper panel verify the two 50 mm rulers with a physical ruler before cutting. The interior dashed borders show 10 mm side and bottom allowances; two dashed top lines mark the 10 + 10 mm fold. The outer border is the cut line. If a line is clipped by your printer, do not patch it by eye; redraw the rectangle to measured dimensions.

Dry paper fit before touching fabric

Put the assembled front and back paper shapes around the closed, dry book without pushing the spine. Compare the expected interior width with B + T and confirm there is enough room for paper and fabric bulk. A paper fit indicates geometry only; cloth can behave differently. Revise the measured pattern for very rounded corners, stiff bindings or thick covers.

Decide what must remain free

Keep the sleeve top fully open and avoid stitching across the entry. Do not place rough stitching, a rigid label or decorative hardware where it can scrape the book cover. A removable sleeve cannot be used as a lifting handle or guaranteed weatherproof barrier.

Step-by-step / first half

1. Prepare a clean workspace

Set out two printed rectangular pattern sheets, smooth fabric and tools on a dry, well-lit table. Keep pins, needles and scissors under control. Follow the fabric-specific pressing temperature, not a generic highest heat setting.

2. Record your book measurements

Measure B, H and T and enter them on RECORD 1. Calculate W and V using the worksheet. Compare those values against the example dimensions before printing; do not assume every paperback fits this one pattern.

3. Confirm the printed pattern size

Print pages PATTERN 1 and PATTERN 2 at 100%. Use a ruler on all 50 mm reference lines. If a check is wrong, correct the print setting and repeat. Both sheets should show the same 180 x 250 mm rectangle.

4. Test the paper envelope

Hold the two sheets against the outside of the closed book, allowing the indicated 10 mm bottom and side seams. A rough dry paper check should show an open top with reasonable ease. Redraw the cut size if it cannot accommodate the measured book.

5. Cut two fabric panels

Prewash the fabric if its care instructions allow; let it dry fully and press flat. Align the paper grain direction with the woven fabric grain and cut one panel from each pattern sheet. Avoid stretching the cut edge and confirm the two panels match.

6. Turn the front top edge

With the wrong side upward, fold the top raw edge 10 mm, press, fold another 10 mm, and clip in place. Stitch close to the inner fold, without pulling the fabric. This encloses the raw edge and removes 20 mm from the panel height.

7. Turn the back top edge

Repeat the same 10 + 10 mm double fold on the second panel. Compare the heights after pressing. Both top hems should lie flat and be the same width so one edge does not dig into the book when inserted.

Step-by-step / finish

8. Pair panels right sides together

Place the panels together with right sides facing each other and their finished top edges aligned. Check that the side and bottom edges meet without stretching. Clip or pin within the seam allowance, keeping the top opening free.

9. Sew the first side seam

Sew along one long side 10 mm from the raw edge, beginning precisely at the finished top edge, fully stitching the hem-to-side-seam junction, and continuing to the lower corner. Do not start below the top edge: a gap could snag the book corner. Secure the start and end with a short backstitch or machine reverse stitch as appropriate. Do not catch the opposing top hem awkwardly.

10. Sew across the bottom

Turn at the lower corner and sew 10 mm in from the raw bottom edge across the width. Keep the layers even. If a corner is bulky, stop with the needle safely positioned and pivot instead of dragging the fabric.

11. Sew the remaining side

Continue up the final long edge to the exact finished top edge at the same 10 mm allowance; stitch through and secure the upper hem-to-side junction with no gap. Secure the end. Check that the top is still open and the seam forms a simple U. Remove all temporary pins and clips before turning.

12. Neaten the interior seam allowances

If the fabric frays easily, work a small zigzag, blanket stitch, or other suitable edge finish within the seam allowance without clipping through stitches. At the lower corners, reduce bulk cautiously while leaving enough material outside the stitch line to hold the corner.

13. Turn, press and inspect

Turn right side out through the open top. Ease corners gently with a blunt tool, never a sharp point that could pierce the seam. Press according to the textile care label. Look for visible holes, loose threads and uneven hems, and correct them before use.

14. Insert the book without force

Slide the dry, closed book into the finished sleeve while supporting it with one hand. It should not compress the spine or push hard against the top and sides. If the binding bends or the book sticks, remove it and enlarge the sleeve rather than forcing it.

15. Care for the sleeve

Remove the book before washing or spot-cleaning the fabric. Follow the fabric care instructions and dry fully before using it again. Retire or repair a sleeve with rough interior seams, dye transfer, frayed edges or a closure that repeatedly catches the pages.

STP-MAKE-F055 PATTERN 1 OF 2

180 x 250 mm full-size panel; print both sheets, cut each once.

CUT ONE FRONT PANEL

TOP: double-turn 10 + 10 mm



50 mm scale check (measure after printing)

SIDE + BOTTOM: sew 10 mm inside raw edge

STP-MAKE-F055 PATTERN 2 OF 2

180 x 250 mm full-size panel; print both sheets, cut each once.

CUT ONE BACK PANEL

TOP: double-turn 10 + 10 mm



50 mm scale check (measure after printing)

SIDE + BOTTOM: sew 10 mm inside raw edge

MAKE / MEASURE / ADJUST

Book measurements

Book title or identifier: _____ ; B (closed face width) = _____ mm; H (height) = _____ mm; T (thickness) = _____ mm.

Book-to-fabric formula

Cut W = B + T + 20 mm seams + 8-12 mm ease. Example: 135 + 16 + 20 + 9 = 180 mm.

Height formula

Cut V = H + 20 mm upper hem + 10 mm lower seam + 10-15 mm clearance. Example: 205 + 20 + 10 + 15 = 250 mm.

Print and cut record

Sheet 1 measured bar 1 ____ / bar 2 ____ mm; Sheet 2 bar 1 ____ / bar 2 ____ mm. Planned fabric cut W ____ mm x V ____ mm.

Book and paper dry-fit

Paper slip-in clearance acceptable before fabric cut? Yes / No. Notes: _____.

MAKE / MEASURE / ADJUST

Check the inside

Inspect sharp thread ends, bulky corners and dye transfer before placing paper against cloth.

Insertion

Never force a tight sleeve onto a fragile binding; book must be dry before use.

Care

Remove the book and wash/dry only as the textile label permits. No claim of impact or water protection.

After-use notes

Book fit observations, seam repairs and any stains: _____