

Shell Shopping Bag

by Sue Sherman



This pattern makes a market bag you can keep in your purse for those times when you are shopping, so that you don't need to take a single-use plastic bag from the merchant. It's quick and fun to make from 3 fat quarters. It uses the same technique as a sleeveless "shell" top, to finish off all the

edges smoothly without any hand stitching.

While it is being made the bag looks like a sleeveless top, and I found the easiest way to describe the various parts of the bag is to use clothing terms ("armhole", "neck", etc.). I hope you find this makes sense for you too.

The finished bag can go to the mall or the grocery store, and it will wash nicely, especially if you pre-wash the fabric before sewing. I like to use my hand-dyed cotton lawn, which wears well and remains colourfast even after washing in hot water, and polyester thread for strength. The pattern also works well with pretty quilting cotton prints and batiks.

You can find a video on how to make this bag at my [YouTube channel "Sue Sherman Quilts"](#) or copy this link:

<https://youtube.com/channel/UCyLU6wYnluvmMN7DFHIJ-Vw>

Instructions

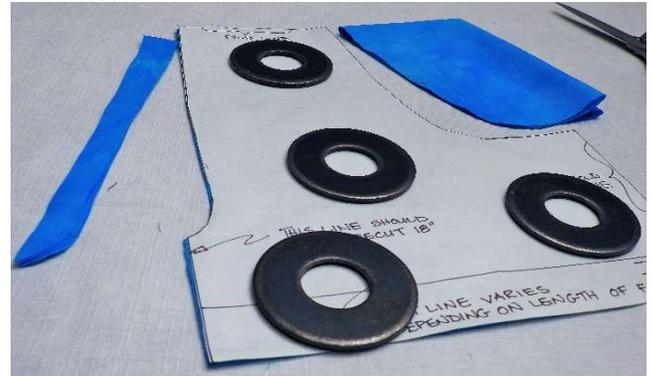
You will need three fat quarters in all: 2 for the front and back panels of the bag, and a third for the facings and handle tops.

1. Trim the fat quarters to 18" wide and 20" long (you can cut the pieces as long as you can from the fat quarters, but the width needs to be 18").



2. For the facing, fold a fat quarter in half, and then fold in half again in the other direction to make a 9 x 10 (or so) inch square.

Print out the pattern piece on the last 2 pages of these instructions, match up the 2 pieces along the "match line", and tape them together. Use the pattern piece to cut the "neck" and "armholes" for the facing.

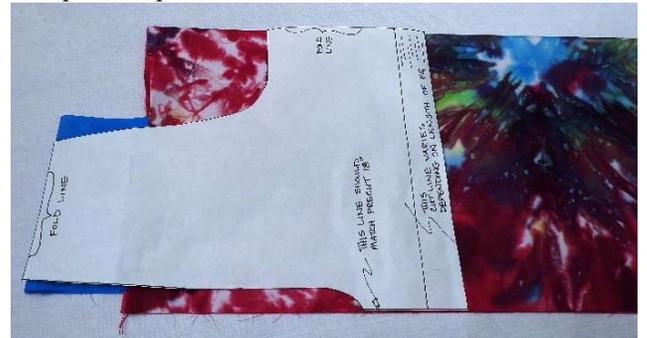


From the piece you cut out for the "neck", cut 2 handle tops 5" x 5½". Finish the straight (bottom) edges of the facing using a narrow hem or a lightweight binding.

3. Place the 5" edges of the two handle tops on the 18" edge of one of the remaining fat quarters, right sides together, with the long edge of the handle top piece about ¼" away from the outside edge of the fat quarter. Sew using a ¼" seam; press away from the handles. Sew the remaining 5" edges of the handle pieces to the remaining fat quarter.



4. Fold the bag in half lengthwise and again crosswise. Use the pattern piece to cut the "neck" and "armholes".



Cut a 6" x 2" tab from one of the pieces cut away from the "neck". (You will use this in Step 12.)

Lay the bag from step 4 out flat onto a work surface right side up. Lay the facing right side down over the bag body matching the “neck” opening all around. Pin and sew the neck opening using a ¼” seam allowance. Clip the seam all around, especially at curves. Turn to the right side and press.



DO NOT give in to the urge to sew the “armhole” sleeves in the same way as the neck. This would only result in frustration, as there is no way you could turn the piece right side out!

5. This is the fun step! We are going to do the equivalent of climbing inside the little tunnel between the neck and armhole edges, as though we were sewing the armhole seam from the inside.

I sometimes think this step is easier to do than it is to explain. If you are finding it difficult, you may find it helpful to look at the YouTube video (see page 1)

Lay the bag down on a table with **wrong** sides together. Pinch the bag body and facing together at one of the underarm edges, and then roll these edges over so that the **right** sides are together, rolling around the cut edges of this little part of the “armhole” seam. Keep holding these two pieces together, and take them over to the sewing machine.



You are going to sew this seam with right sides together, just as you are holding it, but without being able to turn the piece inside out. You need to just start at the beginning and keep going, trusting that the two pieces

you are sewing together were cut from the same pattern so they will line up at the end.

Start at the edge you are holding, and make a lock stitch. Without using pins, continue sewing the “armhole” seam using a 1/8” to 3/16” seam allowance, as far as you can along the seam, which should be a little past halfway. As you sew this seam, you are pulling the seam through the “tunnel” between the “neck” and the “armhole”. When you can’t sew any further, cut the thread and remove the piece from the machine.

Now go to the other side of that same “armhole” seam and re-organize the piece so that you are pulling it out of the other side of the “tunnel”. Continue sewing the seam until it meets up with the stitching from the other side. Clip curves as necessary.



6. Repeat Step 6 for the other “armhole”. Lay the whole bag out flat and press both “armholes” well.

7. Now sew the sides together using a French seam, as follows:

- a. Lay the piece on a flat surface wrong sides together, matching front and back. Pin the side seams together, catching the facings into the seams.
- b. Sew with a 1/8 seam allowance. Trim if necessary, press and turn so that the right sides are together.
- c. Now sew the side seams again with a ¼” seam allowance. Turn right side out but **do not press** this time.

8. To make the side creases, lay the bag on a cutting mat. Starting with one side, fold the handle in half lengthwise, folding the outside of the handle under the inside edge (i.e. folding the “armhole” edge under the handle to meet under the “neck” edge.) Continue the same fold down to the bottom of the bag by moving the side seams about 2” towards the centre of the bag. Repeat for the other side. Use the rulers on the cutting mat to make sure that the sides of the bag are parallel and that the fold is the same on each side. Check also that there are no puckers and that the handle tops lie flat.

Pin along the raw edge at the bottom of the bag. Carefully transfer to an ironing surface and press the folds into place.



9. Sew across the tops of the handles to secure the folds in place.



10. Sew the bottom seam with a French seam as follows:

- a. With wrong sides together sew across the bottom edge with a 1/8" seam allowance. If this is not possible due to the alignment of all the pieces, use a larger seam allowance and trim to 1/8".
- b. Turn so that the right sides are together, making sure that the folds both go to the same side of the bag, that



the corners are neat, and that the whole bag is lying flat. Press.

- c. Sew again 1/4" away from the first seam.
- d. Turn right side out and press again.

11. Fold the bag in thirds lengthwise and press the folds. Now fold the handle end down so that it lies about 2" from the bottom of the bag.



Starting at the fold, roll the bag up into a small cylinder around 4" long and 2" in diameter, which will fit conveniently into most purses. Now unfold it again to add the tab closure.

12. To make the closure tab:

- a. Using the 2" x 6" piece of fabric from Step 4, fold over 1/2" at both short edges and press.
- b. Fold in half lengthwise, press, and fold the raw edges to the centre, so that you have a 1/2" x 5" tab. Press well, using steam if necessary. Topstitch all around, about 1/8" from the edge.

c. Sew a small piece of the hook side of hook-and-loop fastener (such as Velcro) to one end of the tab.

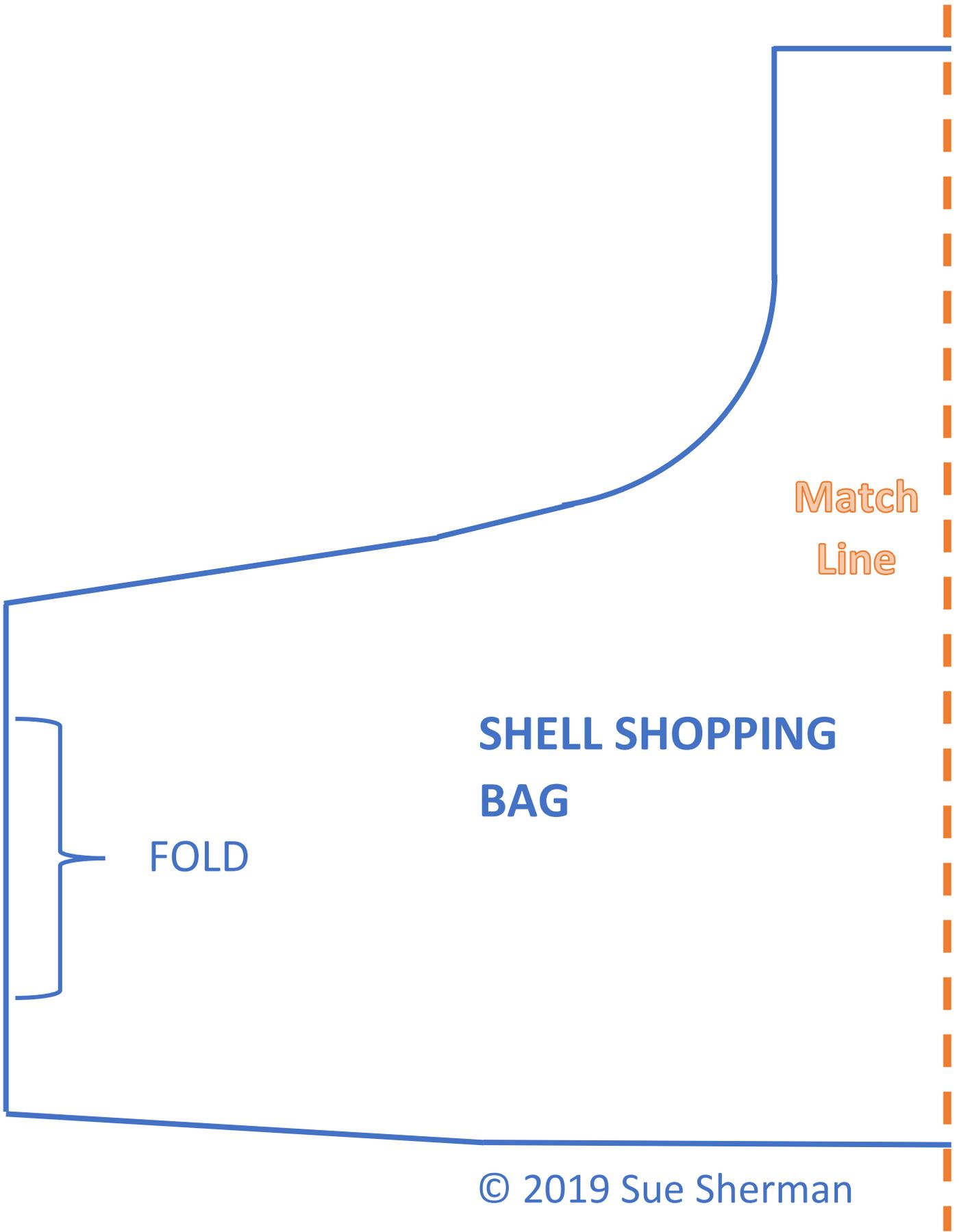


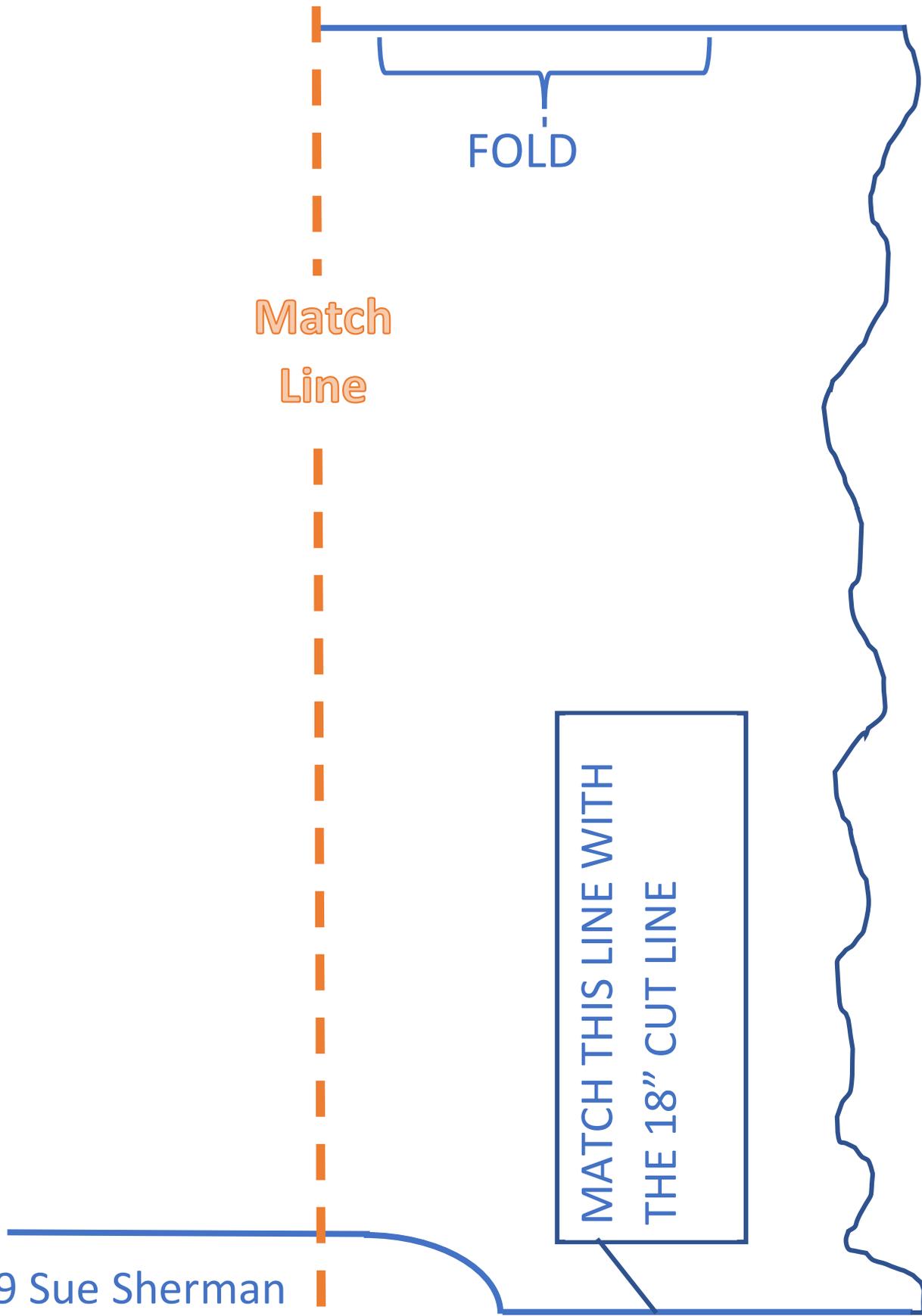
d. Sew the other end of the tab to the centre of the bag front, 5" above the bottom seam, orienting the tab towards the top of the bag, with the piece of fastener facing the bag.

e. Sew a matching loop piece of the hook-and-loop fastener 2"-3" from the bottom centre of the bag, so that it engages when the bag is rolled up as described in step 12.

f. Sew a second loop piece a few inches above the tab, aligning with the closure tab when it is lying flat. You can use this to attach the tab out of the way when the bag is unfolded for use.







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