



How to make bags and other things from crisp packets.

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Introduction

This all started a few years ago when some students and I were eating a packed lunch, and talking about how to recycle our rubbish. How can you recycle an empty crisp packet? I didn't think they went in the normal recycling collection, so we did some research. Turns out you can't recycle an empty crisp packet.

However, while searching online I discovered that it was possible to make them in to other things, and I was intrigued by pictures of handbags made with a folding technique. I did more research, watched videos online and had a go. Then I kept going, and ended up making rather a lot of things.

I then got in touch with the "Choose to Reuse" campaign in North Yorkshire, and have now taken part in 3 events – having stalls at the Royal Hall, the Showground in Harrogate, and the Designer Outlet in York. I do this for fun rather than profit – when you have made a bag you will realise that the time taken would not be covered by the cost you can sell the bag for!

These instructions start by telling you how to make a small, decorative bag. I recommend starting small, as the first time you make one you will probably make mistakes, and you will also realise how long the process takes! Start small, then you can always make a big one next time.

It's not that easy to describe how to do this in text – I have tried my best here but the best way to learn is to see. If you can come along to the Choose to Reuse events I usually do a demonstration. Or, try to find videos posted online that show the technique – try searching for "candy wrapper purse tutorial" – as many are US videos they don't have "crisp packet handbags"!

Can children do this? I've found that my secondary students are generally pretty good at it, but younger ones struggle with the dexterity needed to fold neatly. So I would say from about aged 10 or 11 upwards.

The question everyone asks me is – "how long does it take to make a bag". The answer is I don't know – because I never sit and do a whole bag start to finish. I think probably about 8 hours for a big one.

Gathering and preparing your crisp packets

I would not want to encourage unhealthy eating habits. Don't go out and buy crisps, if you would not normally do so! Instead, you need to collect packets from people who would be eating them anyway. I get friends and family to save them for me, but most of my supplies come from school – my pupils save me their packets.

You could always ask a local school – many are keen on Eco projects and would like to collect packets for you. Or a local pub? Ask your crisp eaters not to scrumple the packet, they are a lot easier to deal with if they are flattened.

It doesn't have to be crisp packets – I have found that some other wrappers work too – you will need to experiment. Cadbury chocolate wrappers from the large bars are good. However, the outer bags from crisp multipacks are usually too thin (apart from Kettle Chips). Generally, if it's foil backed it will work. I have tried coffee packets but they are too thick.

If you do buy crisps, choose them for the colour of their packets, not for their flavour! Most people eat Ready Salted and Cheese and Onion. Branch out, try Prawn Cocktail instead (if you want a pink bag!)

Washing your packets

They need to be washed. Otherwise your handbag will be greasy and smell of Cheese and Onion. I have now developed a two-stage washing process as follows:

- 1) Wash the crisp packets while you are doing the washing up, in hot soapy water, leave them to drain on draining board.
- 2) Once you have a batch that have been washed in this way, put them through the washing machine. Yes, really. Before I do this I cut off the bottom, and down the seam, so I can lay the packets flat, then I put them in a washing net so they don't get stuck in important parts of the washing machine and break it! Wash the washing net with normal washing load.
- 3) When out of the machine, I lay the packets out flat in the airing cupboard for about 24 hours to dry. They are then clean, non-greasy and ready to cut.

Cutting packets

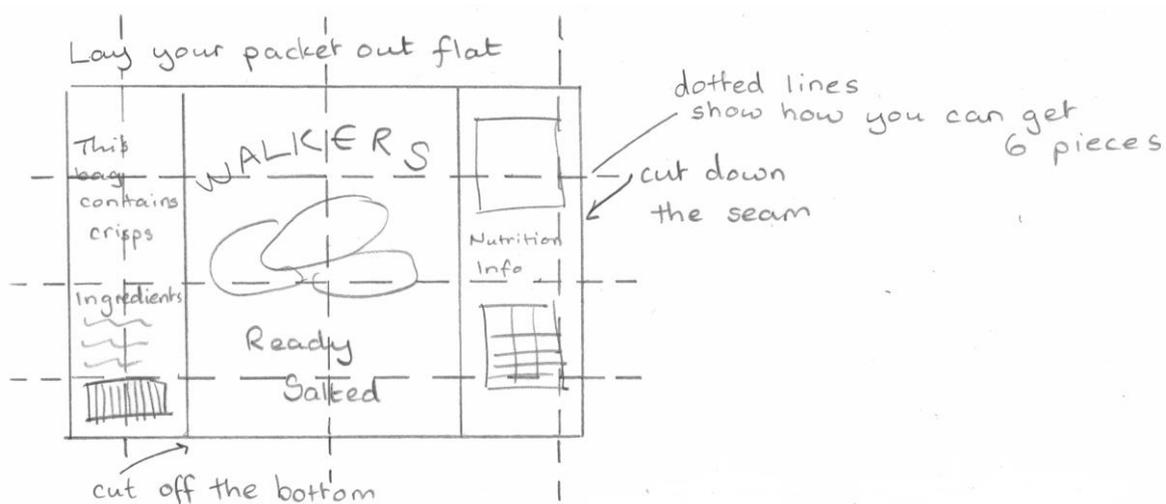
I make a template from an old cereal box – cut a rectangle 11.5cm x 5 cm. Use this as a guide to cut your crisp packets up.

A standard size crisp packet will yield 6 rectangles – cut into 3 strips first then cut each strip into two pieces, using the template to guide you. There will be some trimmings to throw away.

Bigger packets obviously give more pieces!

Don't start making straight away, you need to build up a good collection of pieces first to ensure a nice colour mix. I store mine in an old biscuit tin.

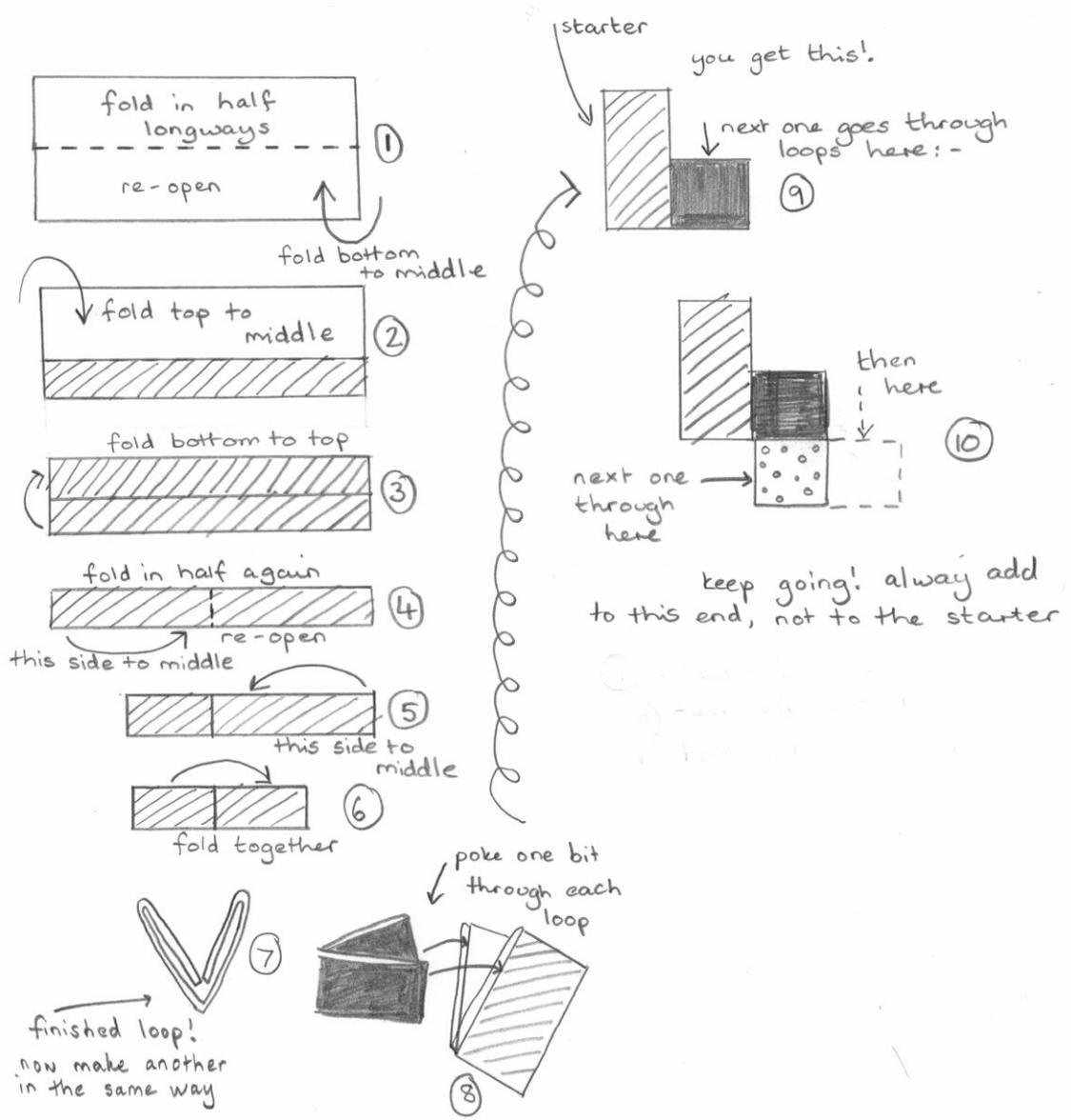
For a small handbag you need 168 pieces, which is about 30 standard bags worth. A large bag takes over 700 pieces – which is about 124 bags of crisps!



Getting started – the basic fold.

I would suggest getting someone to show you this, or finding an online tutorial. It is very straightforward once you know how. However, it is important to be accurate in folding, otherwise you will struggle to put the bag together neatly in the end.

- 1) Fold piece in half lengthways. Usually you will want the coloured side outwards.
- 2) Unfold.
- 3) Fold the top edge down to the middle fold line, then the bottom edge up to the middle fold line.
- 4) Fold in to the middle.
- 5) Now do the same thing end to end – fold in half.
- 6) Open up.
- 7) Both sides in to the middle.
- 8) Fold together. See picture on next page.



You now have one loop. Now make another.

Joining loops to make circles

You will see that your loop has two holes, your new loop has two poky ends. Put a poky end through each hole. You end up with an L shape of the two loops.

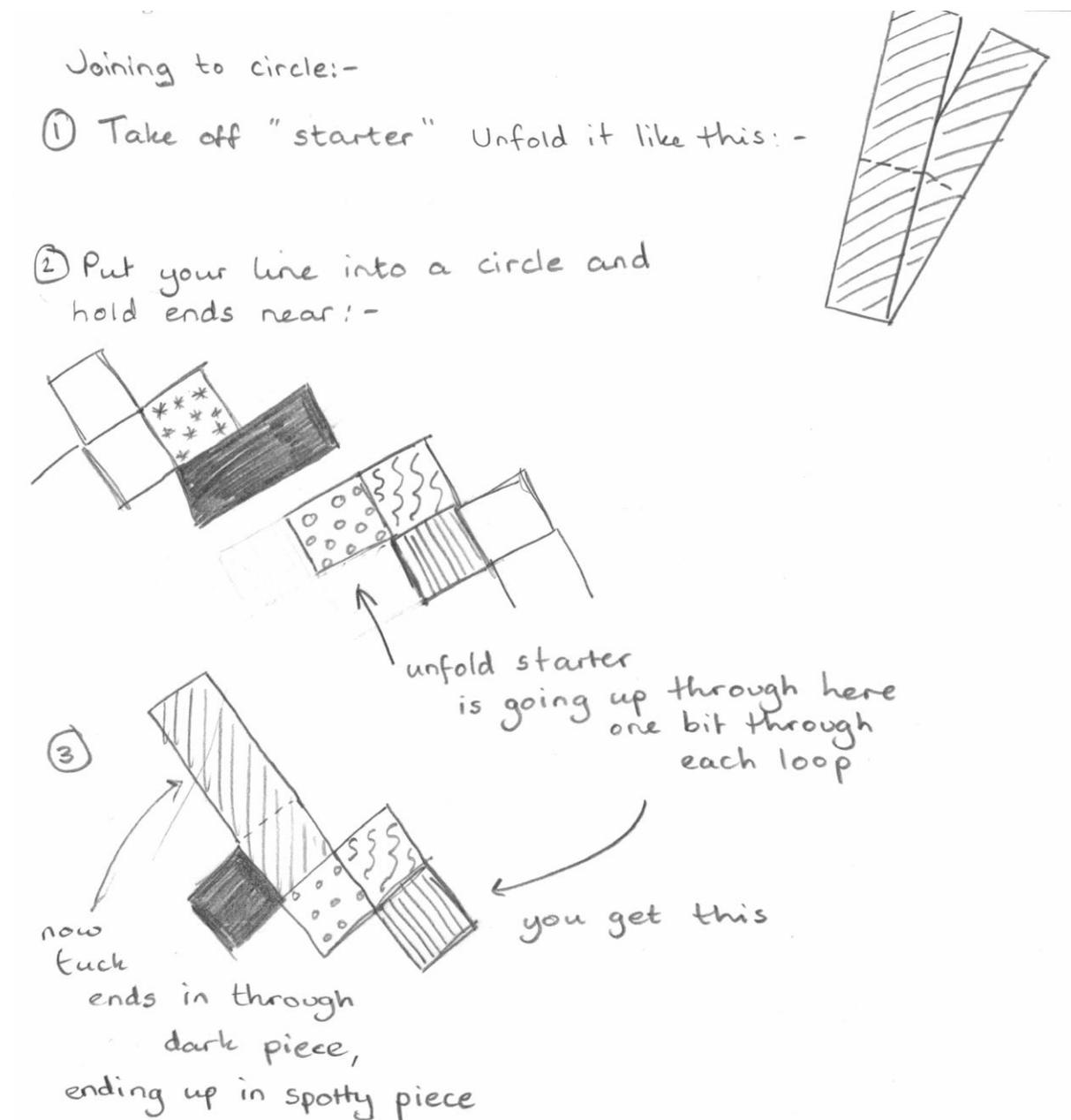
REALLY IMPORTANT

Your first piece is your "starter". You must always keep this at the beginning of your line, and add pieces to the other end. Or you will be in trouble later! You will know it is your starter because you can see the whole of the piece, the bits you add only have half showing and look square rather than rectangular.

Now, add another loop. You need to keep adding them to form a zig-zag line.

For the small bag, you need 28 in a line.

When you have 28, you need to join the ends of your line to make a circle. Do this by taking off your "starter" and unfolding it back to stage 4) in the folding instructions above.



You are going to use this unfolded "starter" to join the ends of your line. Poke one end of it through each loop of your last added piece, then tuck it in to the piece that you have taken it from.

If you have done this correctly you should now have a complete circle of pieces.

Again I recommend finding a video here!

Now you need to make more circles – for a small bag you need five in total.

A word about colours

You will notice as you fold that some pieces are more colourful than others. You might want to think about the design of your bag. I collect together colours to do one-colour bags – a red one, or a blue one. Or do circles in different colours to get a stripy bag. If you want a multi-coloured effect, try to get a good mix as you are adding them together – don't put two reds next to each other, for example. I have found that black and white, especially bar codes, looks good. And if you have a really boring crisp packet, turn it inside out when folding and have a silver piece instead! A completely silver bag can look quite striking.

Sewing your circles together.

You need strong thread. Embroidery thread is much better than sewing thread. I find the "glitter thread" is good as it has a bit of elasticity too it, also if you do end up seeing any thread (you shouldn't) – it looks nice. You need a blunt needle – an embroidery needle, or a plastic children's needle are fine. If you really want to recycle, cut up an old credit card into a small rectangle with curved off ends and make a hole in it!

REALLY IMPORTANT

There is a right way and a wrong way to put the circles together. If you look down from above on your circle, you will see that some pieces have two folds, some have three. You need to put a "two-er" next to a "three-er" for the sewing to work.

You are going to be sewing between the loops, not puncturing the material at all. If you sew correctly, you will not see the threads.

Start by tying a knot – go up through one link, down the other side, and tie the ends together in a double knot.

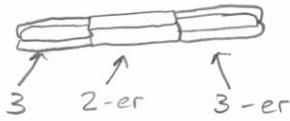
Now sew – up through one link and down through the next, in a zig-zag. When you have sewn the outside of your circle and got back to where you started – poke the needle through, and sew again on the inside.

You really need to sew both sides to make your bag strong. Pull the thread tight as you go, so the circles are held tightly together. If you run out of thread, just tie another piece on and keep going.

See picture on the next page.

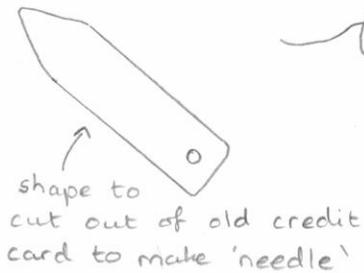
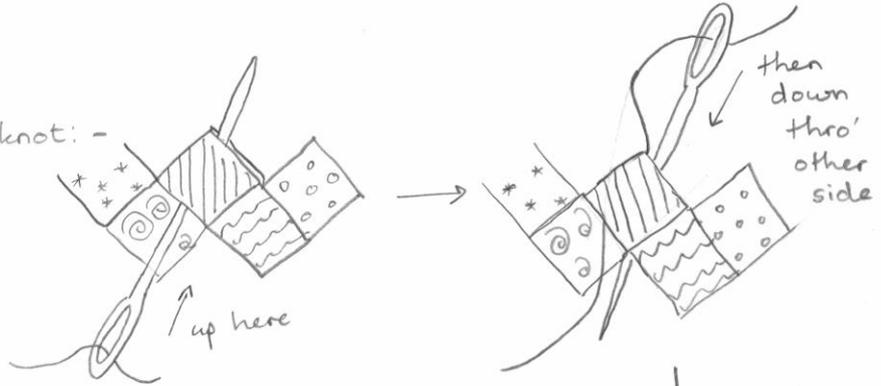
Sewing loops together:-

Look down:-



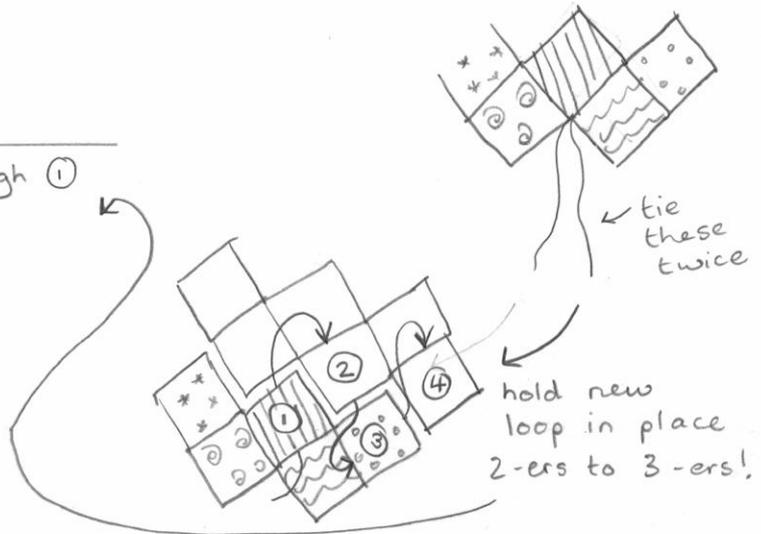
When placing loops a 2-er must touch a 3-er.

Start by tying knot:-



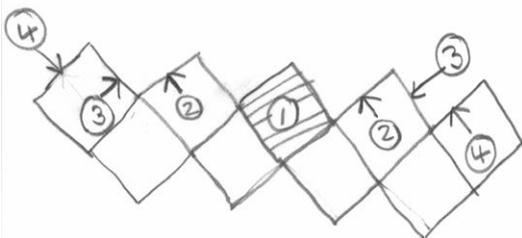
Sew in order:- up through ①
down through ②
up through ③
down through ④

Keep going!
Then on other side.



Once you have joined two together, now is the time to sew the base of your bag.

Sewing up the base:-



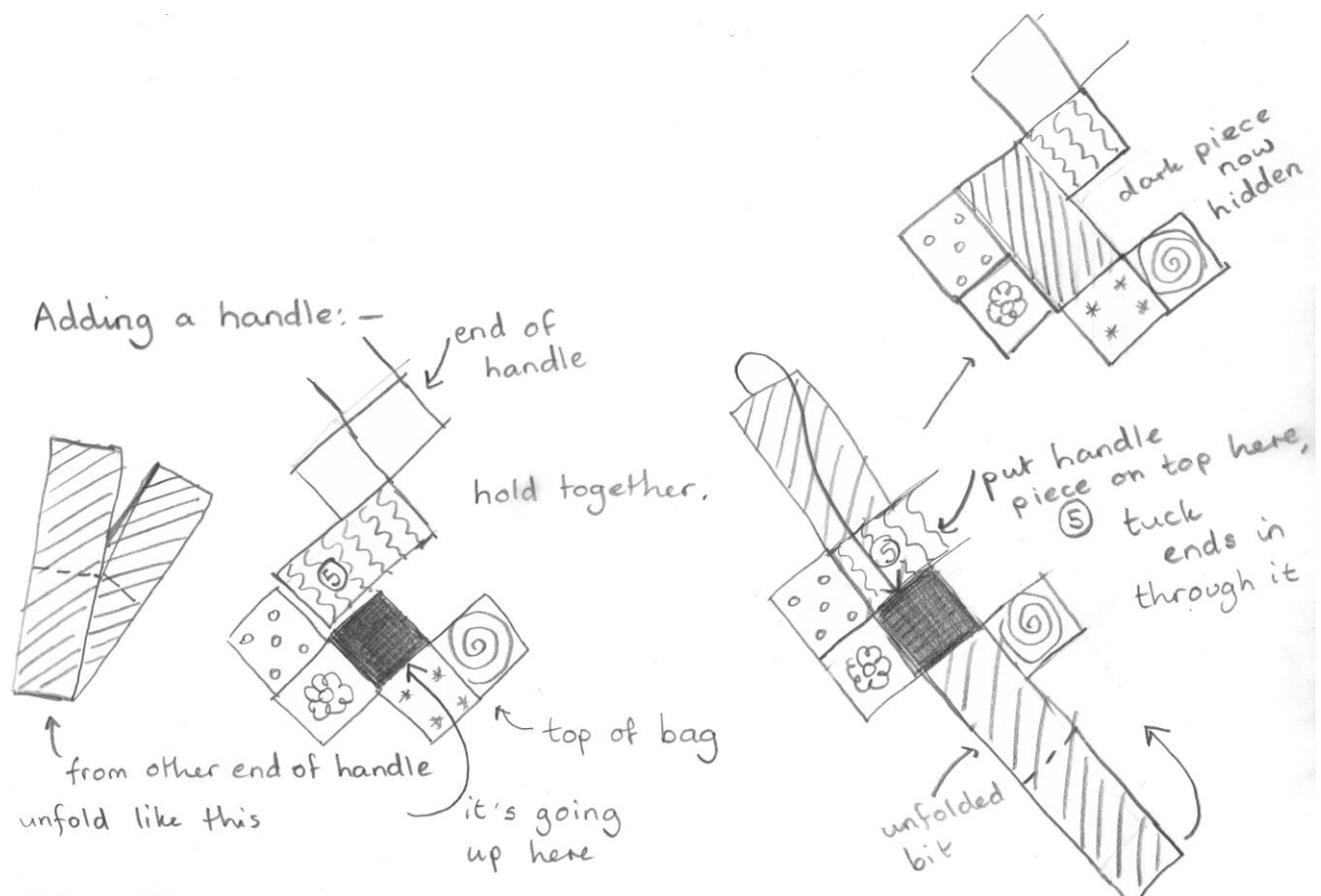
Poke ① forward. You won't see it when you've finished.
Move ② edge round so it meets other ② edge.
③ edge meets ③ edge.
④ edge meets ④ edge.

Again, a tutorial video would help here. You are going to push one piece in, and join the edges around it. When you sew the base, it needs more than one zig-zag – keep sewing until it is firmly joined. It doesn't matter if you go round some pieces more than once as you can't see the thread. When you have sewn the outside of the base, try to sew some of the inside, although it's hard to get right into the corners.

Now you have done the base, add more circles on top until you have five.

You now need to add a handle. Make one more line of 28 or so – you might want it longer or shorter.

Use the "starter" – unfolded, as you did when joining circles, to attach the handle. You will need to sew it on too. You could also add a tiny dab of glue for extra strength.



Bag finished!

Making other size bags

You can make a bag any size you want. Sizes I have made are:

Small – 5 rows of 28

Medium – 7 rows of 40

Big – 10 rows of 62.

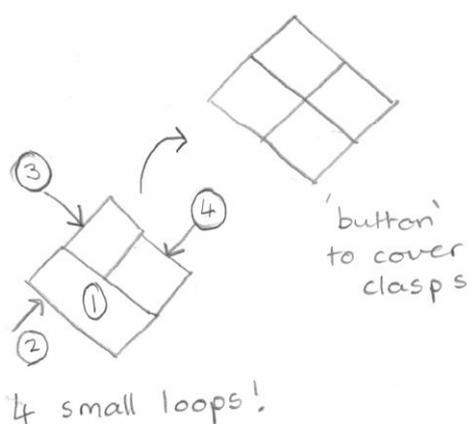
You do need an even number of loops in your circle, or you won't be able to join them.

I have also made glasses cases (10 rows of 14) and phone / i-pod cases (8 rows of 18).

With a big bag, you will need a double row for the handle. I have found that it's worth adding a bit of glue to make sure the handle attaches firmly with big bags, I use a hot glue gun.

For the big bags and cases, I add a magnetic closure. Search for "magnetic purse closures" online. You are looking for the ones with a "male" and a "female" bit, 18mm, and two spikes – you can poke these between loops and bend them over with pliers.

I then make a button from four small (bracelet size) pieces in a loop to cover the metal back, joining them on with the glue gun.



I have also made "clutch" bags with no handle, but a flap sewn on to go over and join on the front – if you add progressively smaller rows you get a pointed cover.

I know that it is possible to add zips to these bags, but I haven't managed to yet. If you are a master of zips you could do a pencil case too.

I have made very tiny bags using the bracelet sized pieces, five circles of 20 with a handle. These are useful for teddies or dolls!

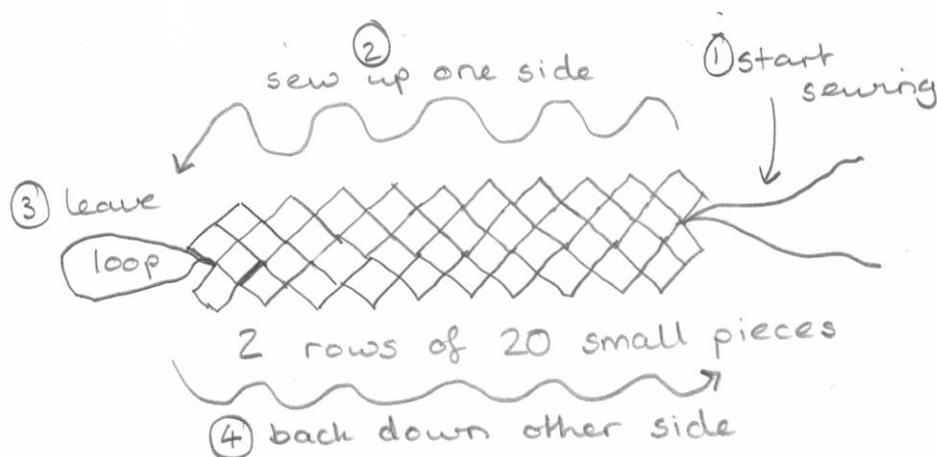
Making bracelets and other things

Bracelets need a smaller rectangle – 8 cm x 3.5 cm.

Use a template as before to cut them. Fold exactly the same way as before – it's fiddly with little bits!

To make a simple bangle style bracelet – join into a circle as for the bags. An adult size wrist will probably need 30, a small wrist 28, child sized 26. You need to carefully slip them on over your hand without pulling too much.

I have also made bracelets by sewing two rows of about 20 together with several bits of embroidery thread, then plaiting the ends in friendship bracelet style.



For cuff bracelets – join 3 or even 4 rows of about 30 loops, use a smaller magnetic closure. These look especially effective in silver.

For bookmarks – follow the instructions for the friendship bracelet, but use larger bag-sized pieces.

For coasters – use bag-sized pieces and join rows flat together – a square 8 by 8 works well.

I have also thought of doing place mats with larger rows.

Once you have the basic technique, the possibilities are probably endless...

Contact Details

Amy Chestnutt

01423 771693

spolem@hotmail.com

Please send me an email if you need help!