Basic Tote

A standard tote (like the ones that are given away as freebies) is finished at approx. 15 inch square. You'll know if this size suits you or whether the things you carry work better in something a bit bigger or smaller. The beauty of making your own is you can have whatever size you like!   If you're making out of a panel you've created or bought, you need to take your sizing from that.   Straps tend to be approx. 30inches long – again –your bag, your choice! Remember to add seam allowances to your pieces – they can be whatever you are happiest using. Personally, I find a quarter of an inch too small for construction, but you may not!

FABRIC
2 x outer fabric and 2 x lining fabric THE SAME SIZE as each other.
2 x straps at 32 x 3 inches (or 4 inches wide if not using interfacing)
2 x medium weight interfacing strips at 32 x 2 inches.

USING PATCHWORK PROJECT
If you are using **a patchwork project** I would advise either, stitching round the panel just inside the seam allowance (so it won't be seen once constructed) and consider adding a border as it's easier to put a plain piece of fabric into a seam rather than a pieced one.

If you are quilting your patchwork, do this before you start the bag construction with your patchwork and layer of batting (yes your machine will work without backing fabric, but if you're nervous use something thin or some ugly fabric you have acquired!))

Here's how to put it together

1   Make the straps

 I take a 3 inch strip and add 2 inches of medium weight interfacing down the centre
Fold in the two edges along the long side by approx. half an inch (use the edge of the interfacing as a guide

Fold the whole thing in half lengthways and stitch close to the edge. I sometimes also topstich the other side, to stabilise the strap or as a design feature.

(If you don't want to use interfacing, make your strip approx. 4 inches wide and fold the edges to the middle and then the whole thing in half. You effectively then have four layers of fabric for the strap. I tend to make the choice depending upon which fabric I'm using – liberty – I'll use interfacing to save the beauty of that extra inch for another project. Something more cheap and cheerful, I'd not worry about hiding an inch of it inside the strap! Weight also plays a part.
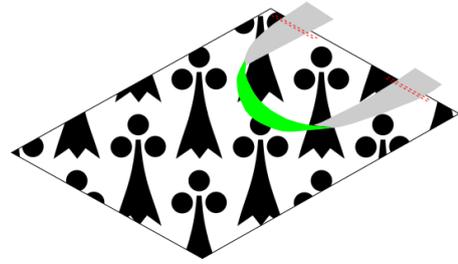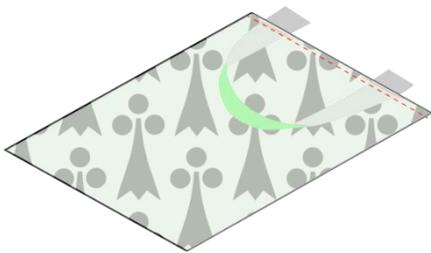
2   Add straps to bag

Pin the straps onto the bag outer (RS together and facing downwards) and sew across within the seam allowance a few times. (Straps are usually 5 inches apart when measuring the gap between their inner edges)
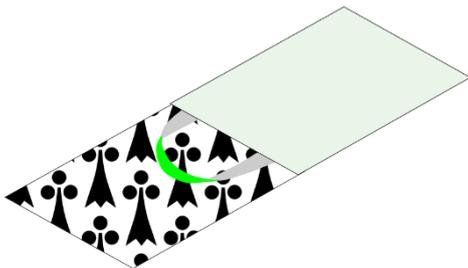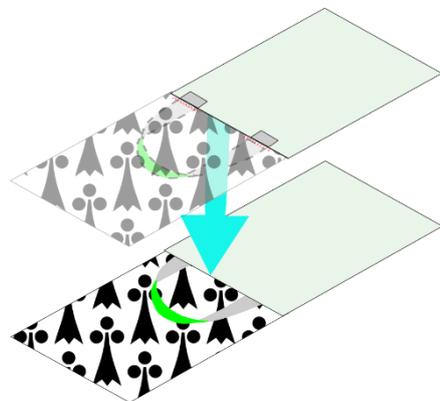

3   Add lining to outer

Place one lining piece on top. Sew the top edge of each outer piece right sides together Be careful to make sure the straps are facing downwards and are between the two layers (I also usually understitch this seam as it helps to keep the lining from rolling to the outside of the bag)
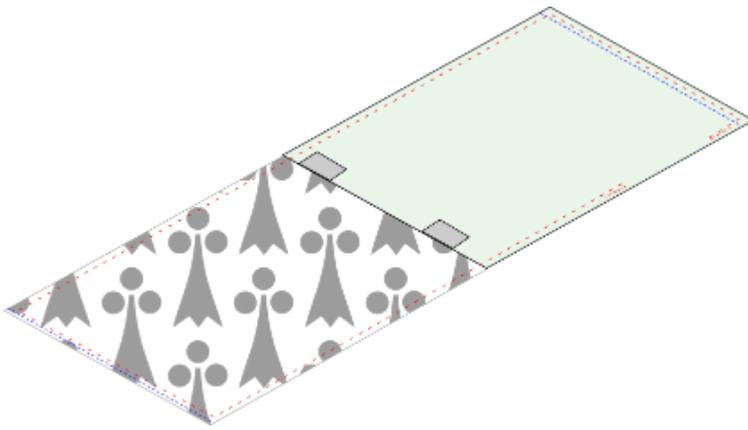
4   Create bag

You now have two pieces with lining and outer.   Open them both out

Place these right sides together making sure lining is on top of lining and outer on top of outer and pin each piece at the join so that when you sew this line matches.
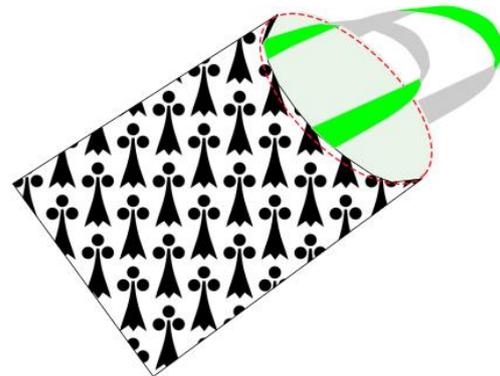
Starting just over half way down the long side of a lining piece sew all the way around heading towards the outer, and finish a good hand width before the start (to leave a turning gap. If you bag is bulky fabric or quilted consider leaving a little bit more. You might want to assess and mark these points before you start stitching.

I usually double stitch the bottom seams. On the outer I stitch inside the seam allowance so as not to accidentally stitch over any points on my patchwork, and on the lining further into the bag (so above the seam allowance. This makes your lining slightly smaller than the outer which can help it sit nicely when turned through. Turn it through and check, you can always do this again if it's still too big.

5   Finishing

Turn the whole thing through and top or slip stitch the turning gap closed. Put the lining inside the bag and topstitch around the top edge of the bag.

Ta-da!

In Summary
- Make straps
- Join outer and inner pieces at top edge, trapping handles, understitch
- Right sides together stitch round leaving turning gap
- Turn through, stitch gap closed
- Top stitch top edge