

A Brief Guide to Yarn Counts

Yarn counts are how weaving yarn sizes are defined, (knitters generally use terms such as 4 ply, Double Knitting, Bulky etc to define their yarn sizes).

Yarn counts often appear as fraction-style numbers and letters. They can be very confusing as there are so many systems which have grown up around yarn production in specific regions and/or fibre type being processed. However the count system works, there is always a relationship between length and weight, and the skinnier the yarn the more metres/yards you get to the KG/lb and the fatter it is the less length you get to the KG/lb!

Yarn information often gives an indication of how a yarn has been constructed as it frequently builds upon the count/size of an individual strand within the yarn. The information will also indicate how many of these strands have been plied together to make the finished yarn. In some yarns several of the plied yarns are then folded together to make the final yarn, this is also included in the yarn description.

Let's look at how this works with one of our mercerised cotton yarns - 3x2/16ne
We can break this 'code' into digestible little bites of information (3x 2/16 ne)
So, working right to left;

ne the yarn size is being defined using the English cotton numbering system

16 this means 16 multiplied by the count of 1 in the defined system - see chart below
We now know that 1 strand in our yarn = 16 x 840yds
So to make this strand, 1lb of fibre was spun out into a length of 13,440 yards (16 x 840) - this is also known as its yield

2/ two of the single strands have been plied together

3x three of the plied yarns have been folded together to make the finished yarn

If you count them up, this yarn has 6 individual strands and 3 'levels' of twisting!

This style of description is fine when all of a yarn's constituent strands are consistently of the same texture, fibre and count. For yarns which do not easily fulfil this criteria an overall count for the complete yarn size is usually given i.e. 5.5nm

The following abbreviations are used in our yarn descriptions

- **den** the denier system, based on the weight of 9000 metres tex weight in grams per 1000m length
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- **ne** the English cotton numbering system, based on the number of 840 yd strands per lb
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- **nel lea**, the English linen numbering system, based on the number of 300 yd strands per lb
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- **nm** the metric system, based on the number of metres per gram
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- **wc** worsted count, the most common wool numbering system, based on the number of 560 yd strands per lb
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- **ysw** Yorkshire, based on the number of 256 yard strands per lb

Good to know

- At Handweavers we try to spell out in all cases which count system is being applied to the specific yarn you are buying (letters after the number/s).
- To enable you to compare yarns, and to calculate your needs more easily, wherever possible we not only give the length of yarn on a particular spool weight, but also the number of diameters/wraps per inch/wpi or per centimetre/wpcm that we arrived at.*

This information is available on our in-store shelf-edge labels, and will increasingly appear in the webshop.

* Practical Help: How and why to wrap a yarn



Wraps; A useful yarn comparison method generally used by hand spinners and weavers.

The yarn is wrapped neatly around a ruler, or special measure, for the distance of either an inch or centimetre - each strand should be wrapped side by side with no gaps between them. The number of wraps are then counted. The fatter the yarn diameter, the lower the number of wraps will be.

If you don't have access to a yarn count converter, or shy away from using one, the resulting number of wraps can be used to compare yarns of different counts, and to assist in determining an appropriate sett/density of warp ends for your intended project.