

Knotty Lady YARN S

Dissecting Yarn!

To some, yarn can all simply be...well yarn! For the more experienced yarn enthusiasts, we all have varying degrees of knowledge. Yarn can have various weights, plys, and qualities. As we have learned so far, yarn can be made up of any material. This material and its qualities helps determine the next best steps for the fiber. So, lets start with how yarn is "graded".

Grading yarn can be confusing since there are multiple systems built off each other and all contain numbers. In 1311, the town of Bradford, England was the center of the wool industry and where the Bradford Count, or spinning count, was established. Originally meaning one pound of wool could be spun into a certain number of hanks of yarn, with a hank being 560 yards. The finer the wool the more hanks you would get out of one pound of wool, for approximately 80 - 90 hanks per pound (and very coarse yarn coming in around 36 hanks per pound). The concern with this method is the inconsistency, not only of the grader but the fleece as a whole.

To try and improve this method, the United States started using the blood system in the early 1800's. While merino sheep were being imported and cross bred, the sheep's blood would categorize the wool. The results would go from 1/2 blood meaning fine to low, 1/4 (or common) meaning coarse, and ending with braid or very coarse. Luckily this system is hardly used anymore.

To sort the quality of fiber in a more objective way the micron system became easier to use. The micron system requires sending a sample of fiber out to a lab to measure the average diameter of the fiber and assign a number. Micron counts range from an average of 17 - 41, or fine to coarse, respectively. The tricky part to this system is this count varies year to year, since fleece regrowth can be inconsistent.

The last system is the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) Grade, which takes the micron count and the Bradford count to make a wool grade. In this process the USDA was attempting to turn the objective Bradford system into a new objective system. The USDA also measures for the decimal fragmentation, standard deviation and grease versus clean. Decimal fragmentation takes the diameter to 2 decimal places to be more precise. Standard deviation simply means the consistency throughout the fleece, which is also measured to two decimal places. Lastly, if a fleece is dirty or clean it

can affect the measurements. The USDA can measure either fleece, but the Bradford system is always based on a grease fleece.

Measure	The larger the number . . .
Bradford Count system	the thinner the fiber
Blood Count system	the thinner the fiber
micron system	the thicker the fiber
Denier	the thicker the fiber

Knotty Lady YARNS

Confused yet? The ultimate take home from grading is the larger the number in Bradford count and USDA Grade or the lower the micron count the finer the fleece. The best way to judge your fleece is by cleaning it up and using the best tool we all have...our hands!

From grading to cleaning, and since many steps have already been covered in past articles, let me briefly run through it. Once a sheep is sheared the fleece is cleaned of all debris, picked/de-haired of guard hairs, and carded to align the fibers to finally be able to spin. Spinning turns roving to yarn using a variety of methods and techniques. When the initial spinning is complete, you will have single-ply yarn. Single ply yarn can range in thicknesses and twist and have a tendency to break or tear easily.

When spinning yarn you will twist in one direction and keep your strand uniform. If you take two single-ply yarns and twist them in the opposite direction you now have a stronger and thicker 2-ply yarn. This process can be repeated with however many strands one desires. So why is plying important? Not only does it add strength but also texture, thickness, durability and helps prevent that pesky pilling.

Yarn weight is more what we crafters are interested in. We each have our favorite weights to work with and possibly to avoid. Yarn weights can also determine what project we can go for and which ones we have to scale our needles or hooks either up or down for. Us Knotty Ladies have 7 different yarn weights we use knowing full well some yarns can flirt the line between several categories. We also know that there are some yarns that don't care to play by the rules. Our yarn weights are lace, fingering/sock, sport, DK, worsted, aran, bulky/chunky and super bulky/chunky. With each step up in weight, typically, there are more plies to make the yarn thicker and increasing the strength and durability.

From grading to sizing we can, and probably will, dissect yarn further. The more we know the better we can utilize our yarn for projects and family heirlooms. Or why not be like that one line of yarn that doesn't follow any of the rules!

