



CREDIT: SHUTTERSTOCK

Sewing yarn numbers

A sewing thread is built up from yarn twists that consist of at least one or, more usually, two or more yarns. How this has been done determines its final properties which are specified by several factors. Its construction defines the individual thread type, its twist which defines its sewing performance and its ply which identifies the number of single yarns it contains and how they are combined. Specific codes are used to identify these yarn counts.

METRIC (NM)

This indicates metres of yarn per gramme – eg: Nm 120/1 = 120 m/gram. The number to the right of the diagonal stroke denotes number of individual yarns (folding number) in a ply-yarn – eg:

- Nm 80/2 = two yarns each of 80mt total weight 2g
- Nm 120/3 = three yarns each of 120mt total weight 3g

Both have the same cross-section but individual yarns of different length and both weigh 25g/1000.

**The same length and weight give the same cross-section.*

LABEL (NO.)

This was developed from Nm but does not indicate folding number from the quantity of individual threads in the ply-yarn. Used to describe the thickness of a thread without providing technical details, it is based on the cross-section of a three-ply ply-yarn even when it involves a different folding number – eg:

- No. 120 may be Nm 80/2 or Nm 120/3
- No. 100 may be Nm 65/2 or Nm 100/3
- No. 75 may be Nm 50/2 or Nm 75/3

**The lower the number, the coarser the yarn.*

ENGLISH COTTON (NEB)

This is used to classify cotton yarns and shows how many 840yd (768.08m) hanks weigh one pound (451.59g) – eg:

- NeB = number of 840yd hanks
1lb

(NeB 60 indicates 60 hanks of 840yd)

A label number is based on the cross-section of a three-ply yarn even when there is a different folding number. A three-ply yarn can also be

shown as NeB 40/3, so the system is still often used for synthetic yarns, regardless of their raw material. Because synthetic yarn is usually two-folded, NeB 40 is the usual way to express NeB 40/2 as against a two-folded cotton yarn which will always have the full mark NeB 40/2. It is normally used in Asia for polyester threads manufactured by the cotton or three cylinder spinning technique.

TEX (TEX)

This represents an effort to concentrate the various classifications of yarns and ply-yarns. Based on the SI units system, it shows how many grammes 1,000 metres of a single yarn weighs, so one tex is the size at which a one kilometre strand or yarn weighs one gramme (1 tex = 1g/km) – eg:

- One yarn is Nm 40 (40m = 1g), so 1,000m is 25 tex (1,000 ÷ 40 = 25g).

**The higher the tex the coarser or stronger the yarn; the lower it is, the finer it is.*

Sewing thread is a surprisingly complex subject, so it is wise to seek expert advice. 🧵