

Down the Rabbit Hole

Description

Why is it that as we grow older, some of us stop being all consumed by curiosity? When I was a kid, two of my favorite words were “why?” and “what?”. Well, and “howcome?” is another but that’s sort of a form of “why?”. I find that now when I learn new terms, I focus on the relevant definition without asking for the back story. And/or, if I can’t Google and immediately answer the “why?” questions, I let it go.

So it has been with learning the crochet and yarn terms. Some of them are obvious; others not so much. I have been searching/researching/googling for the past two days trying to find out definitively from whence a couple of terms/names came. Shouldn’t be that hard to discover, I mean, instant knowledge should be mine via the internet. Right?!

Yarn comes in all sizes. Some are “single”, meaning they are just one spun strand. Others are more complex; 2 ply, 3 ply, and over various thicknesses. You might have single strands that are very thick and multi-ply yarns wound so tightly they are the same diameter as a thin single ply.

Fortunately for all of us, there is a standard yarn weight classification chart that is easily found and used. It starts at 0 (which is very tiny) and goes all the way up to 7 (jumbo size). Here’s where the rabbit hole appeared. All the numbers also have common usage names. Size 3 is also called DK weight and size 4 is called worsted, Aran or Afghan. I had never seen an explanation for these terms and have been struggling to remember what they mean in context to size. Couldn’t wrap my head around terms that had blank space behind them in my brain. But, life goes on and I just pulled out the chart every time I needed to know whether Worsted was bigger than Fingering or were Worsted and Aran the same size. The latter is not intuitive. But then again the others aren’t really either.

Turns out that DK stands for double knitting. Double knitting can be a fabric, aka the double knit pants men wore decades ago. It can also be a way of knitting where you knit two things at the same time (and that, my friends started me down another path that I had to abandon). Never did find the true etymology of that term but my guess is that this size yarn was used way back when for the double knitting process (with needles not for gross men’s slacks).

Moving up in size to #4 Worsted. I *have* been able to root out the origin of this term. Back in the 1200’s, there was a huge region of craft folks who raised sheep, spun fibers, etc., in an area called Worstead that was part of Norfolk in England. The method of spinning these yarns called for processing the fibers so that they were all parallel to each other. These yarns made a fabric that was and is also called worsted. Over time, it became the term for the size of these yarns as well as those produced without attention to the fiber direction but of the same size.

Still considered a #4 but slightly bigger in diameter and heavier than Worsted, is Aran. This term came from the sweaters made specifically on the Aran islands that are located off the west coast of Ireland.

There are a couple more of these terms that aren't exactly intuitive but I haven't been able to come up with any explanations. I will continue to look. Hopefully, I can find a good reference book.

If you are still curious, these are links to some of the information I have found:

- [Merriam-Websters list](#) of interesting knitting terms
- [Wise Geek's information](#) on Aran yarn
- my go-to [yarn weight chart](#) from the Craft Yarn Council - lots of great information on their website.
- And of course, if you are a Wikipedia fan, you can find some of the information there.

My next couple of posts are going to be about some other aspects of yarn and method that jumped onto my screen while I was looking for these answers. S/Z, English/Continental and warp/weft all factor in. Until then, happy yarning!

And just in case you're wondering, the saying "down the rabbit hole" comes from Alice in Wonderland ð???

Category

1. Uncategorized

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