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Fabric Glossary

Listed below are basic definitions of some of the more common terms used to describe fabric within the bedding industry.

Absorbency - The ability of a fabric to take in moisture. Absorbency is a very important property, which affects many other characteristics such as skin comfort, static build-up, shrinkage, stain removal, water repellency, and wrinkle recovery.

Baffling - A "baffled" construction has fabric walls sewn between the top and bottom of the comforter cover, which both prevents the down from shifting and allows the down to fully loft.

Batting - Cotton, wool, or synthetic fiber used for stuffing furniture and mattresses and for lining comforters.

Blend - A term applied to a yarn of a fabric that is made up of more than one fiber. In blended yarns, two or more different types of staple fibers are twisted or spun together to form the yarn. An example of a typical blended yarn or fabric is polyester/cotton.

Calendering - A process for finishing fabrics in which such special effects as high luster, glazing, embossing, and moiré are produced.

Cellulose - A material derived from the cell walls of certain plants. Cellulose is used in the production of many vegetable fibers, as well as being the major raw material component used in the production of the manufactured fibers of acetate, rayon, and triacetate.

CFM - Cubic feet per minute per square meter (CFM) is a measure of the air permeability of a fabric. The higher the CFM, the greater the volume of air passing through.

Chambray - A plain-woven fabric that can be made from cotton, silk, or manufactured fibers, but is most commonly cotton. It incorporates a colored warp (often blue) and white filling yarns.

Comforter - Two pieces of fabric stitched along all four sides and filled with synthetic or natural filling.

Conjugate (Chemical) Crimping - A form of crimping that uses two different polymer fibers twisted together to create one fiber. As one polymer fiber cools more quickly than the other, the conjoined fibers warp to form a three-dimensional spiral pattern.

Continuous Filament Fills - Fibers are made with a highly specialized process that takes one continuous, long strand of fiber and laps it back and forth into a batt that will not clump, matt or shift.

Core Type - Core refers to the center of the fiber. There are three core types: solid, multi-hole and hollow.

Cotton - A unicellular, natural fiber that grows in the seedpod of the cotton plant. Fibers are typically ½ inch to 2 inches long. The longest staple fibers, longer than 1 ½ inch, including the Pima and Egyptian varieties, produce the highest quality cotton fabrics.

Crimping - Adding bends or waves into the fibers (vs. straight fibers). Crimping increases the spring and loft of the fiber. There are two methods of crimping that produce two very different patterns: mechanical and conjugate.

Cut Length - The length of each individual fiber. Shorter fibers (< 2 inches) are blown into a bedding product, creating a more shapeable and soft feel. Cluster fibers (three-dimensional fiber puffs) and micro-denier fibers are usually short fibers. Longer fibers (> 2 inches) are garneted (combed) into a batt and inserted into a bedding product, resulting in a loftier, more springy feel.

Damask - A patterned fabric: a reversible fabric, usually of cotton, linen, or silk, with a pattern woven into it.

Denier - A unit of measure for the linear mass density of fibers. It is defined as the mass in grams per 9,000 meters. In the International System of Units the **tex** is used instead. The denier is based on a natural standard: a single strand of silk is one denier. A 9,000 meter strand of silk weighs one gram. Applied to yarn, a denier was held to be equal in weight to 1/24th oz.

Dobby Weave - A decorative weave, usually geometric, that is woven into the fabric structure.

Down - The three-dimensional clusters that are found under the feathers of geese or ducks.

Duvet - A duvet is similar to a comforter and/or a quilt in that a duvet is also composed of two layers of fabric with an insulation substance between. However, the difference between a duvet and a comforter and/or quilt is that the duvet is to be placed inside a duvet cover.

Duvet Cover - A giant pillowcase-like covering that fits over a duvet. It is open on one end, typically closed by buttons, ties, Velcro, or a zipper.

Egyptian Cotton - Cotton grown exclusively in Egypt and the longest fiber staple in the world. This means less linting, more durability, more luster and a softer feel.

Feather Bed – Feather filled sacks made to fit under or on top of the fitted sheet.

Fiber - The basic entity, either natural or manufactured, which is twisted into yarns, and then used in the production of a fabric.

Fill - The material used to stuff items such as comforters or pillows. Natural down and man-made synthetics are examples of fill materials.

Fill Power - A measure of how many cubic inches one ounce of down will loft and expand to fill an empty space. Fill power usually ranges from 500 to 800 cubic inches. A higher fill power means that the down will loft more, insulate better and provide greater warmth and comfort.

Fitted Sheet - Has pockets at each of the four corners and an elastic band around the sheet.

Flat Sheet - Hemmed on four sides usually with a larger hem or cuff at the top of the sheet.

Garnet - Fibers are formed into a batt through a combing process and inserted into a product. Garnet fibers deliver exceptionally springy and resilient loft.

Gingham - A plain woven cotton and/or synthetic fabric. Most common patterns include checks, stripes or plaids.

Jacquard Weave - A weave structure that creates a variety of patterns, such as damasks, florals and geometric. Jacquard weaves have a varying drape ability and durability depending on which fibers are used.

JTU - Japanese Turbidity Unit grades on a scale ranging from 0-550, the higher the number, the cleaner the product.

Linen - A fabric made from linen fibers obtained from inside the woody stem of the flax plant. Linen fibers are much stronger and more lustrous than cotton. Linen fabrics are very cool and absorbent, but wrinkle very easily, unless blended with manufactured fibers. Linen is one of the oldest textile fibers.

Loft - Measured by fill power and is the ability of down to fill an empty space.

Long Staple Cotton - Cotton fibers are typically ½ inch to 2 inches long. The longest staple fibers, longer than 1½ inch, including the Pima and Egyptian varieties produce the highest quality cotton fabrics.

Mechanical Crimping - A form of crimping that uses pressure and heat to form a two-dimensional zigzag (saw tooth) pattern in the fiber.

Mercerization - Chemical finish for cotton. This finish imparts luster to the cotton, increases its strength by nearly 25% and improves dye affinity, producing brighter shades than unmercerized cotton. It also enhances fabric hand and drape ability.

Merino - A type of wool that originates from purebred Merino sheep.

Micro-denier - The term micro-denier is used to describe filaments that weigh less than one gram per 9,000 meter length.

Micro Modal - A natural fiber made of 100% beechwood cellulose.

Microfiber Fabrics - Microfiber specifically refers to any synthetic fiber that weighs less than one denier per filament. A filament of this fiber more than five miles long weighs less than one gram. Such filaments are much finer than a human hair. Because of the size of this fiber, many can be woven closely together to create a very tight, dense fabric.

NTU - Nephelometric Turbidity Unit grades on a scale of 0-20. 8-10 NTU is the industry average, the lower the number, the cleaner the product. The NTU turbidity measurement provides a less subjective means of measuring turbidity than the visual test used for JTU measurement.

Organic - Produced without the use of chemically formulated fertilizers, growth stimulants or pesticides.

Percalé - Smooth fabric: a smooth-textured closely woven cotton or polyester fabric used for bed sheets and clothing. It sometimes has a glazed finish.

Pima Cotton - A generic term for extra long staple cotton. (ELS) that is 1 3/8" or longer.

Pique - A crisp medium-weight fabric, either knit or woven, with raised dobby designs.

Plain Weave - A weave structure that has horizontal and vertical threads woven in a simple over under pattern with no variations such as twists or knots.

Polyester - A manufactured fiber. It is second only to cotton in worldwide use. Polyester has high strength, excellent resiliency, and high abrasion resistance. Low absorbency allows the fiber to dry quickly.

Quilt - Created by placing a layer of cotton or some other fill between two layers of fabric. Held in place by stitching or sealing in a regular, consistent, all-over pattern.

Rayon - A manufactured fiber composed of regenerated cellulose, derived from wood pulp, cotton linters, or other vegetable matter.

S Number - On the label of tailored wool apparel indicates the fineness of the wool fiber used in the making of the apparel. The numbers may also be found on wool fabric and yarn. The S numbers for fine wool products are intended to state, with precision, the fineness of the wool fiber used in the product, as measured in micrometers. Fiber fineness is one of the factors determining the quality and performance of a wool product. The S numbers may be used on products of 100 percent wool as well as on blends of at least 45 percent wool. The S number appears as a plural with an "s" or " 's " following the number, such as 100s or 100's. The International Wool Textile Organization (IWTO) *Fabric Labeling Code of Practice* defines the S number by correlation to maximum fiber diameter. For example, 80s must have maximum fiber diameter of 19.75 micrometers or finer and 90s, 19.25 micrometers or finer. This scale continues to the 210s at 13.25 micrometer or finer. Thus each step of ten (as from 80s to 90s or 90s to 100s) corresponds to 0.5 micrometer less in allowed maximum fiber diameter. It has been proposed to extend the scale to 250s at 11.25 micrometer or finer.

Sateen Weave - A weave structure having single vertical threads woven over four to eight horizontal threads and under one horizontal thread. This weaving method gives the fabric a smooth finish and shows off shiny threads.

Satin Weave - A basic weave, characterized by long floats of yarn on the face of the fabric. The yarns are interlaced in such a manner that there is no definite, visible pattern of interlacing and, in this manner; a smooth and somewhat shiny surface effect is achieved.

Sham Cover - A decorative pillow covering with envelope back closure.

Short Staple Fibers - Fibers are cut at a length equal or lesser than two inches for a more adjustable, softer finished product. Cluster fibers and micro denier fibers are usually made with short staple fibers.

Shearing - The process used to cut off surface fibers on fabrics.

Slickened - A treatment for fibers with a slickening agent, such as silicon, that provides a silky, smooth finish. A slickening treatment allows the fibers to slide against each other more easily for increased softness.

Super S - The S number often is used in conjunction with the word "super" which originally meant the best wool, (called choice wool in the United States). As now used Super means pure new wool and can also be used for fabrics made from wool blended with rare fiber (such as mohair, cashmere wool and alpaca), and also with silk. The inclusion of Elastane to give the fabric a stretch effect is permitted, as also is the inclusion of up to 5% non-wool yarn for decorative effects. For wool blend fabric descriptions, the word Super is not permitted. Subject to the wool content being at least 45%, the S number may be used.

Terry Cloth - A typical uncut pile weave fabric. This fabric is formed by using two sets of warp yarns. One set of warp yarns is under very little tension; when the filling yarns are packed into place, these loose yards are pushed backward along with the filling yarns, and loops are formed.

Terry Velour - A pile weave cotton fabric with an uncut pile on one side and a cut pile on the reverse side. Terry velour is valued for its soft, luxurious hand.

Tex - A unit of measure for the linear mass density of fibers and is defined as the mass in grams per 1000 meters. Tex is more likely to be used in Canada and Continental Europe, while denier remains more common in the United States and United Kingdom. The most commonly used unit is actually the decitex, abbreviated **dtex**, which is the mass in grams per 10,000 meters. When measuring objects that consist of multiple fibers the term "filament tex" is sometimes used, referring to the mass in grams per 1000 meters of a single filament.

Thread Count - Thread count is a measure of the coarseness or fineness of fabric. It is measured by counting the number of threads contained in one square inch of fabric or one square centimeter, including both the length (warp) and width (weft) threads. The thread count is the number of threads counted along two sides (up and across) of the square inch, added together. It is used especially in regard to cotton linens such as bed sheets and has been known to be used in the classification of towels. Thread count is often used as a measure of fabric quality, so that "standard" cotton thread counts are around 150 while good-quality sheets start at 180 and a count of 200 or higher is considered percale. Some, but not all, of the extremely high thread counts (typically over 500) tend to be misleading as they usually count the individual threads in 'plied' yarns (a yarn that is made by twisting together multiple finer threads). For marketing purposes, a fabric with 250 two-ply yarns in both the vertical and horizontal direction could have the component threads counted to a 1000 thread count although "according to the National Textile Association (NTA), which cites the international standards group ASTM, accepted industry practice is to count each thread as one, even threads spun as two- or three-ply yarn. The Federal Trade Commission in an August 2005 letter to NTA agreed that consumers 'could be deceived or misled' by inflated thread counts. In 2002, ASTM proposed a definition for "thread count.

Ticking - A tightly woven, very durable fabric, usually made of cotton, and used for covering mattresses, box springs and pillows. Down filled pillows require closely woven ticking fabric and calendered finish to prevent the fine down fibers from coming through the top or bottom layers.

Turbidity - Measures the cleanliness of down. It measures the amount of sediment or foreign particles present in the down sample. Better turbidity measurements mean cleaner products.

Viscose - The most common type of rayon.

Warp - In woven fabric, the yarns that run lengthwise and are interwoven with the fill (weft) yarns.

Weft - In woven fabric, the filling yarns that run perpendicular to the warp yarns.

Wool - Usually associated with fiber or fabric made from the fleece of sheep or lamb. However, the term "wool" can also apply to all animal hair fibers, including the hair of the Cashmere or Angora goat or the specialty hair fibers of the camel, alpaca, llama, or vicuna.