

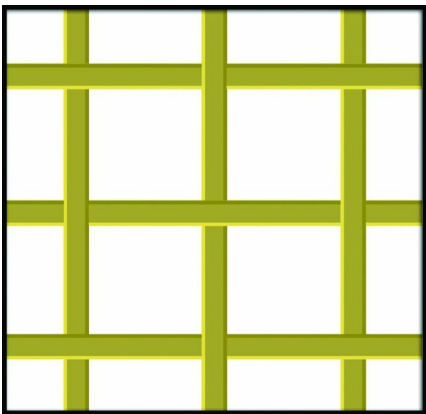
Product Profiles: Canvas Terminology

Ask the Expert: "The supply list for painting class says we need to get "numbered duck or double fill canvas". I've looked online and have found conflicting explanations for what these terms mean. Is there a difference between what my teacher wants us to get and just plain cotton duck?"

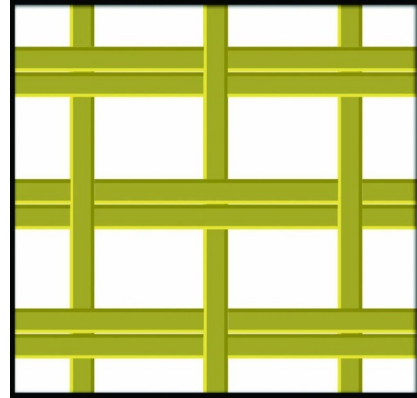
A: "Numbered duck" and "double fill" are textile industry terms borrowed by artists and art materials dealers. The terms themselves don't have the same precise meaning or grading systems associated with them as they once did, but we still use them to describe different grades of canvas.

Artists became more broadly aware of terms like "numbered duck" at a time when heavy cotton canvas wasn't always as easily available as it is today. In the first half of the 20th century when the Abstract Expressionists in New York began seeking out large-scale, heavy fabric supports, cotton duck was still primarily a utility fabric, not expressly sold for painting. Artists learned that certain weights and weaves performed better than others and began using the traditional numbering systems and weave terminology already in place for the heavy utility cloth they had adapted for use in the studio.

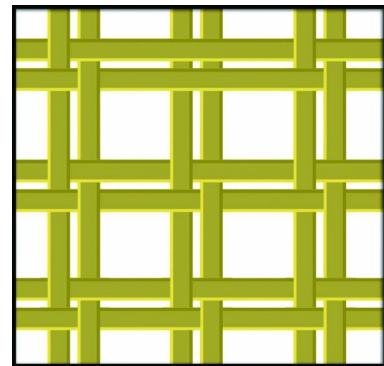
Today, canvas is mainly graded by weight per square yard and weave. Artist's cotton duck is available in three weaves:



Single Weave: Single ply weft and warp. Balanced, open weave. Generally lighter and more porous; good for small sketches and for making canvas panels.



Combination Weave: Multi ply weft and single ply warp. Combination of single and double threads balances the difference in gauge between warp and weft. Good, all-purpose fabric for paintings of average scale.



Double Weave: Multi-ply warp and weft. Strong and balanced in both dimensions, good for large-scale work. Resists sagging on the stretchers and is tightly woven, preventing strike-through of the primer.

Warp, Weft and Fill: Warp yarns run the long dimension of fabric, and weft threads run left to right (Remember: 'weft to right'). "Fill threads" are the same as "weft threads" so "double fill" doesn't necessarily say anything about the warp yarns.

Ounce Fabrics and Number Weaves: Terms like "ounce-fabric" and "number duck" are relics from past systems, and while the meaning of these terms may not be as precise as it once was, sometimes this language is still used today for a general classification of lighter weight vs heavier, more densely woven canvases. Some artists still refer to single-weave canvas made using

lighter yarns with only a single weft thread as “ounce fabrics”, and refer to all heavier types of canvas as “number weaves”.

Traditionally, "Numbered Ducks" would have all had multiply warp and weft. Numbers were organized in descending order as weight went up, from #12 to 0. Fabric heavier than 0 was 00, 000, etc. The difference in weight between numbers was 1 ounce per yard 22" wide.

Historical "Ounce-Ducks" weighed 6 to 15oz/yd from a 28-30" wide bolt. "Double fill ounce duck" used 2-ply weft and single-ply warp yarns, and "single fill ounce duck" was made using 1-ply warp and weft. The heaviest double-weave ounce-duck was called "Army Duck" or "Artillery Duck" and was tightly woven for impermeability.

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