

The Road to Perfect Fat Singles: Slub Yarn

As new spinners, most of us unintentionally make slubs. As we gain skill and achieve the sought-after fine yarn, it gets harder to make a slub on purpose, and why would you want to anyway? When I learned to deliberately make slubs, it slowly dawned on me that I had found the secret to the one thing that is often so hard for the spinner who creates fine yarns — making fat singles. It just so happens that the progression from slubs to fat singles is easy and natural. That is why we all should spin slubs with joy! Just think of it. By learning one simple technique, you can trick your brain and hands into easily making the elusive, consistent fat singles!

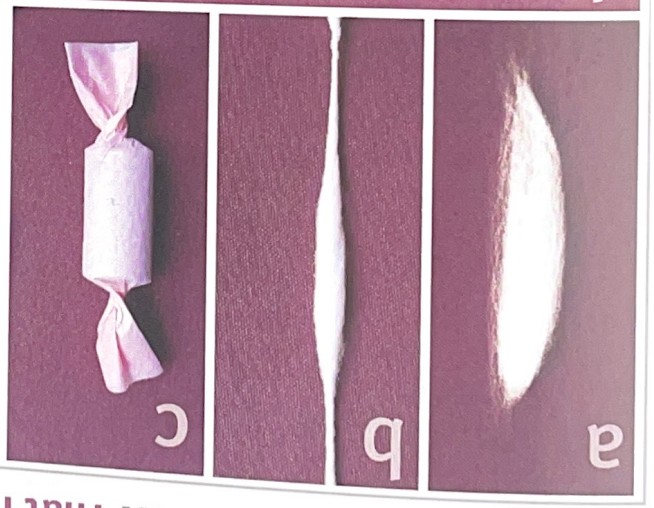
When you spin *slub yarns* and fat singles, once again the amount of twist you put into your yarn is critical. The singles discussed in this chapter will be plied, and you therefore need to add more twist to them than you would



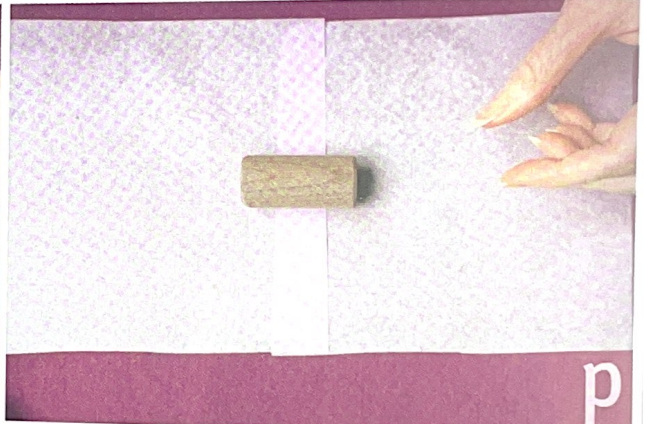
Slub yarn spun from Corriedale cross wool

if they were to remain singles. Pull out a length of yarn frequently as you spin and allow it to ply back on itself, then compare this bit to your control sample. (You *did* make a control sample, didn't you? See page 15.) Slub and fat yarns can be made from any fiber, but how the fiber is prepared affects how easy or difficult the spinning process is. Combed top is my first choice for spinning these yarns, because the fiber is all lined up straight. It is also the preferred preparation for spinning worsted, and I spin these yarns using a worsted drafting style. Purposeful slubs are all about staple length and twist. Any given slub will be just a little shorter than the staple length of the fiber you are spinning. In the photos on the facing page, compare one staple length of Falkland wool that my slub is spun from. Notice the length of both the slub and the staple. Because twist flows to the thinnest area, you can see that almost all of the twist in this yarn is in the thin area. The slub itself has almost no twist. It is sort of like the wrapping on a hard candy. The ends of the paper wrapper are twisted to hold the candy inside, but there is no twist in the center part of the paper wrapper. If the wrapper consisted of two pieces of paper, they would fall apart. The same holds true for the slub. If your slub is longer than your staple length, it won't have stability, because a slub is too thick to compete for twist with its thin little neighbor. The thin part sucks up all the twist, and the only hope of a slub staying together is the twist at both its ends (just like the candy wrapper).

SPINNING A SLUB YARN That Holds Together



The Falkland wool I used for this demonstration has a fiber length of about 5" (a); note that the slub in the yarn I spun from it (b) is a little shorter than the staple length. The slub has almost no twist; the thin area contains most of the twist. Now imagine that the paper wrapped around a piece of candy is a staple length of fiber (c). If the "fibers" on either side of the piece of candy aren't included in the twist at each end (d), the wrapper will come apart when pulled (e).



TWIST GOES WITH THE FLOW

Twist is not only like glue, as Judith Mackenzie describes. It also flows like water to the point of least resistance. You may notice that when you have a thin spot in your singles, it becomes very twisty, and the thicker parts have very little twist. Looking at thick areas next to thin areas will help you to understand that in order to have consistent twist, you must first have consistent diameter.



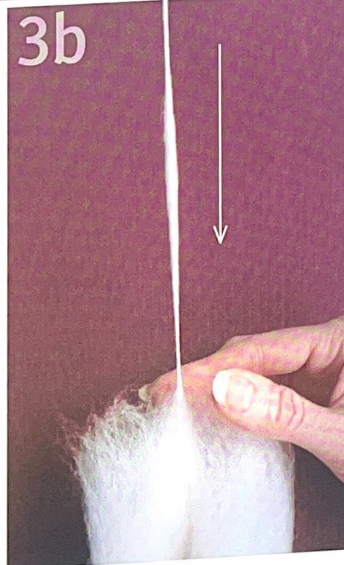
SPINNING Slub Yarn

To make a slub yarn, start with a large whorl or pulley so your flyer spins slowly. Treadle slowly when you first begin, and don't be afraid to stop often. Spinning teacher Rudy Amann has this great advice for new spinners: "When you're in trouble, stop treadling!" It's advice you'll need often when spinning unusual or novelty yarns, and slubs are no exception. The Falkland wool top I used for this demonstration is a medium wool with about a 5-inch staple; my singles has a Z twist.



STEP 1. Attach fleece to your leader and start spinning a medium yarn, just to get going. I'm spinning clockwise, which means I'm getting a Z twist.

STEP 2. When you're ready to make a slub, stop treadling and pinch off a pretty good piece of the top with your fingers (like taking a bite), then draft forward until you see a thin spot appearing in the top. This means you're getting close to the end of the staple length on the bite of fiber you are drafting out.

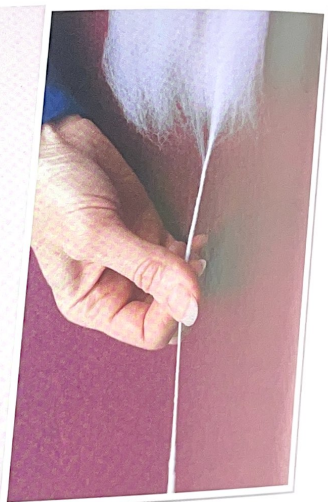


STEP 3. Stop and roll your thumb to the right (the same direction as the twist of the yarn) to add a bit of twist to the thin spot (a). Suddenly, you have defined your slub! This little thumb roll not only defines the slub, but the twist you just inserted into that thin spot keeps it from coming apart as you move along in the spinning process. At this point, instead of sliding my drafting hand over the slub, I like to release my right-hand grip and jump right over the slub (b). Depending on the fiber you're using, sliding down the slub can mess up the alignment of the fibers and make it fuzzier than it has to be.

STEP 3. Stop and roll your thumb to the right (the same direction as the twist of the yarn) to add a bit of twist to the thin spot (a). Suddenly, you have defined your slub! This little thumb roll not only defines the slub, but the twist you just inserted to that thin spot keeps it from coming apart as you move along in the spinning process. At this point, instead of sliding my drafting hand over the slub, I like to release my right-hand grip and jump right over the slub (b). Depending on the fiber I'm using, sliding down the slub can mess up the alignment of the fibers and make it fuzzier than it is to be.

STEP 1. Attach fleece to your leader and start spinning a medium yarn, just to get going. I'm spinning clockwise, which means I'm getting a Z twist.

STEP 2. When you're ready to make a slub, stop treading and pinch off a pretty good piece of the top with your fingers (like taking a bite), then draft forward until you see a thin spot appearing in the top. This means you're getting close to the end of the staple length on the bite fiber you are drafting out.



TROUBLESHOOTING. When learning this technique of jumping over the slub, many spinners have a tendency to land on the thin area of the yarn instead of where they can take a bite of fiber and draft out the next slub. If you do this and try to draft forward at this point, you'll end up with a thin stretch of yarn instead of another slub.

With just a little practice, this technique will become a fluid motion. Once this happens, you can speed up, forget the "stop treading" part of step 2, and this yarn will fly onto your bobbin. With practice, you will undoubtedly develop a way to make slubs that works best for you.

- SLUB MANTRA**
- Take a bite
 - Draft forward until you see the thinning
 - Give a little twist
 - Release the fiber
 - Jump over the slub
 - Repeat

STEP 4. If you want to space your slubs out, now is the time to spin some small diameter singles until you insert another slub. If you're making a yarn other (a really great yarn, by the way), go back immediately to step 2, and take another bite of fiber to create another slub. When your hand comes back to the yarn, grab the fiber behind the thin spot to take the next bite of fiber that will be your next slub.

On to Fat Singles

Consistent fat singles are more difficult to make than thin singles for this reason: If you're spinning thin yarn and accidentally create a fat spot, you can simply draft out further to correct the inconsistency. But when you spin fat yarn, areas that are too thin are much more difficult to fix seamlessly. To correct your error, you have to stop, untwist and remove the thin area, and then make a join. It's not unlike what a woodcarver faces when a similar thing happens: in a too-thick area, he can just slice off the excess material, but when an unfortunate slip of the knife creates a too-thin spot, he has to glue on more wood to correct the problem.

Now that you know how to make slubs, however, singles that aren't teeny will be a piece of cake. Your wheel should still be set up with a large whorl and enough tension so that too much twist doesn't build up in the singles.

Begin by going back to step 2 of Spinning

Slub Yarn (page 66) where you draft forward until you see thinning. If drafting a long way forward causes a thin spot after a thick slub, consider what you would have to do to make a singles that's as thick as the slub — that is, without the thin spot.

The solution is that you would need to considerably shorten the length of the forward draft. (See Troubleshooting Fat Singles on the facing page.) This gives you a fairly dense and consistent worsted-type fat singles.

If you notice that you're getting thin spots in your singles, check that your drafting distance is short enough to prevent thinning. It's important, too, to be consistent about the size of the bite, or amount, of fiber you draft. This, even more than the drafting length, determines the diameter of your yarn. If you normally spin fine yarns, it may take spinning a couple of skeins to get used to drafting fat yarn, but practice (and using a control sample to help with consistency) will train your brain to do something other than fine singles.

I don't believe that spinners *always* return to their default yarn when spinning a quantity of yarn. At least for me, practice in spinning different-diameter yarns has given me a better ability to choose to spin whatever diameter



Fat singles spun from Corriedale cross wool



I desire. I had spur takes a l it does anyon Pay a dian spi ya

g back to step 2 of Spinning
6) where you draft forward until
If drafting a long way forward
after a thick slub, consider what
do to make a singles that's as
- that is, without the thin spot.
t you would need to consid-
length of the forward draft.
ng Fat Singles on the facing
u a fairly dense and consistent
ngles.

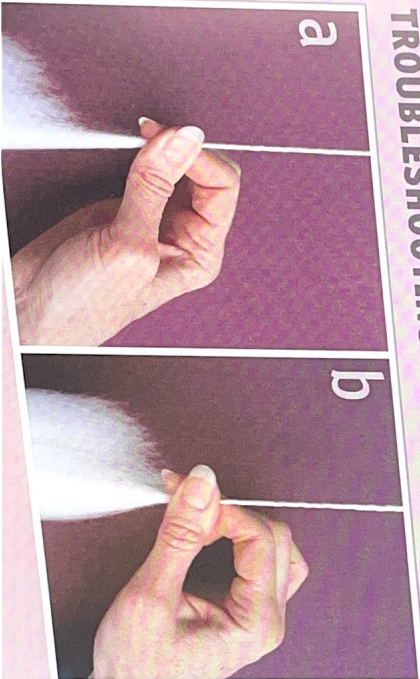
at you're getting thin spots in
that your drafting distance is
vent thinning. It's important,
: about the size of the bite, or
i draft. This, even more than
determines the diameter of
rmally spin fine yarns, it may
le of skeins to get used to
t practice (and using a control
i consistency) will train your
thing other than fine singles.
ve that spinners *always*
ir default yarn when spin-
nity of yarn. At least for
ctice in spinning different-
eter yarns has given me a
etter ability to choose to
spin whatever diameter



This hand-dyed yarn is spun as a fat singles; the swatch features nicely graduated bands of clear color.

I desire. This ability didn't click in for me until I had spun many pounds of fat singles. Of course it takes a lot less time to spin a pound of fat yarn than it does to spin a pound of thin, and I didn't have anyone around to tell me the secrets of fat success. Pay attention to your drafting when spinning a diameter that is a challenge for you. The more you spin, the more control you'll have with whatever yarn you choose to make.

TROUBLESHOOTING Fat Singles



TO MAKE SLUB, the distance you drafted (pulled) the fiber forward was almost as long as the staple itself (a). For fat singles, you must draft forward only about one-third the staple length (or even less) before you take another bite of fiber to draft forward (b).