

Measuring the Egyptian way

The Egyptians used the following units for measuring:

The digit = The width of a finger.


The palm
(of the hand) = Four digits.

The hand = Five digits.


The cubit = 28 digits (or the distance from fingertips to the elbow).

The fathom = Four cubits (or the height of a person from the ground to the hairline on the forehead).


1. Measure the width of your finger with a ruler to find the length of a digit.

One digit =  cm


2. Measure the distance across the palm of your hand to find the length of a palm.

One palm =  cm


3. Measure the distance across your hand to find the length of a hand.

One hand =  cm

4. Ask a friend to help you measure the length from your fingertips to your elbow. This is a cubit.

One cubit =  cm

5. Ask a friend to help you find the length of a fathom.

One fathom =  cm

6. Compare your measurements of digit, palm, hand and cubit. Do they match the information given at the top of this sheet?



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Age range

- Years 3/4 (SP4/5).
- Years 5/6 (SP6/7).

Resources

Copies of the worksheet, rulers.

Using the worksheet

If the students have completed the activities **8A** to **8D** they should be acquiring a sense of what it was like to be an ordinary Egyptian. This activity supports the others by helping the students realise that the Egyptians used a different measuring system to our own. When they have completed the exercise they should find out that using body parts for units of measurement is much less accurate than using centimetres.

Younger students

The students can work in pairs and compare their answers. They will see that there is a variety of measurements.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Understand that the Egyptians had a system of measurement which was different from our own.
- Make measurements.
- Compare measurements.

Older students

The students can work on their own. They could also estimate the dimensions of objects in units from the Egyptian system of measuring then make their measurements using these units. They can assess the accuracy of their estimations.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Understand that the Egyptians had a system of measurement which was different from our own.
- Make measurements.
- Compare measurements.
- Estimate lengths in units of measurement used by the Egyptians.
- Assess the accuracy of their estimates.