Control = Consistency

The first question I ask fellow spinners when they are looking to spin more consistently is, “Do you use a control card?” Quite often they won’t know what I’m talking about, so I share this helpful tool I use to be a more consistent spinner.

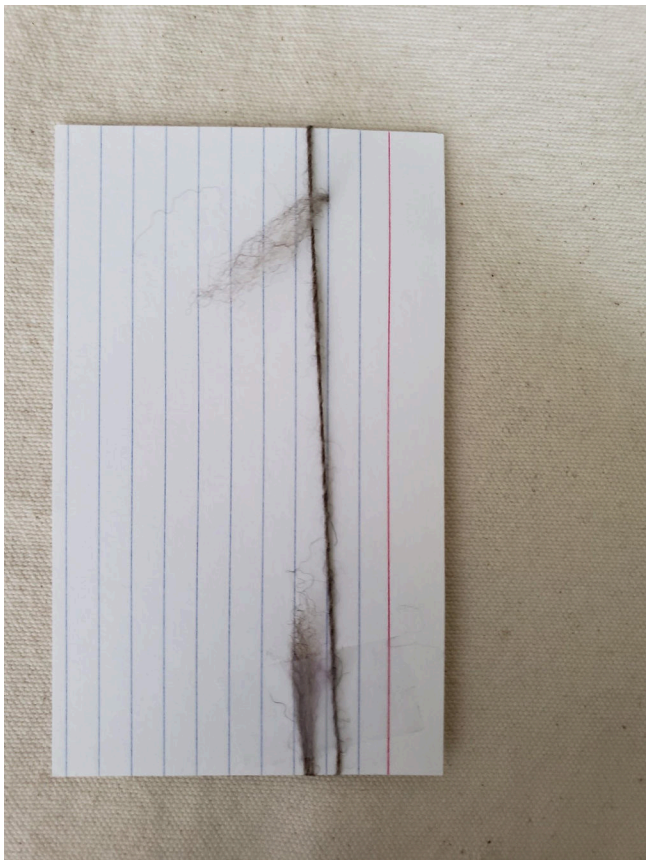
What exactly is a control card? It’s a reference tool containing key information about the feature and qualities of the yarn I am trying to spin. In my spinning workshops, I break down all of the characteristics of a yarn that a spinner needs to consider, and teach you how to create a control card to help you stay on track and on target when spinning. Key characteristics includes diameter of the singles, 2-ply sample (if plying is intended), a 3 or 4 ply sample if multiple plies will be used, twists per inch (TPI), twist angle, wraps per inch (WPI) if plying, fiber content, ratio of whorls used (traditional wheel), twist dial orientation (electric spinner), or spindles used and weight of spindle (drop spindle), drafting method, fiber source/vendor info, and the pattern the yarn is intended to be used in. I can begin to assemble my control card once all of that information is collected.

Materials needed:

- Writing utensil
- Index card (white for colored/dyed fiber and a colored index card for white fiber)
- A single, 2-ply and multi-ply plyback sample if plying is intended

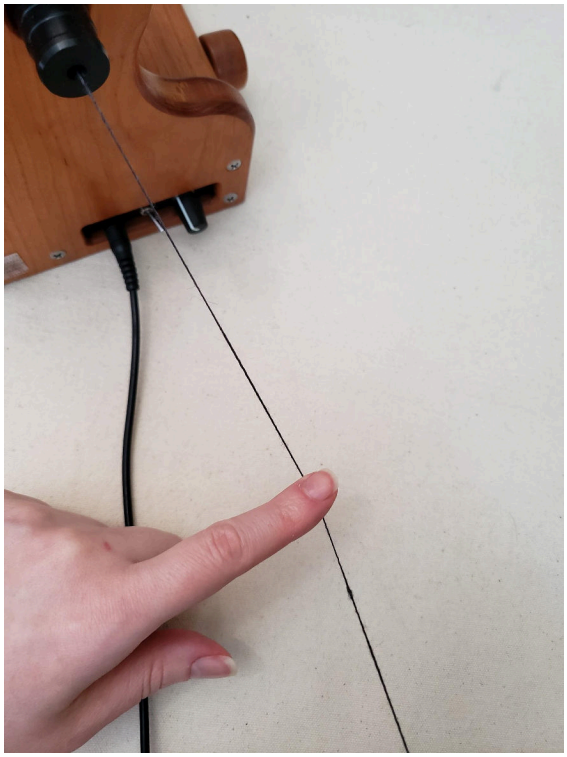
Before you start spinning, have a specific end use in mind for your yarn. I usually either have a pattern picked out for my handspun, or I have specific qualities or characteristics in mind that I will aim for (ex: a 3-ply sock weight yarn). To assemble the control card, first look at the pattern’s recommended yarn and use that as your target. Spin a single similar to the one

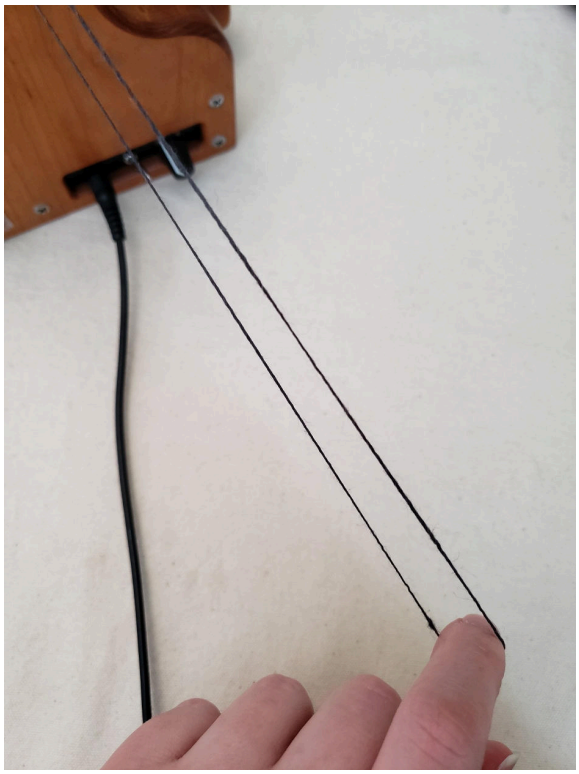
used in that yarn. Pull off a length of the single and wrap it around the index card. To secure it, make a ripped notch on the sides of the index card, or use tape.



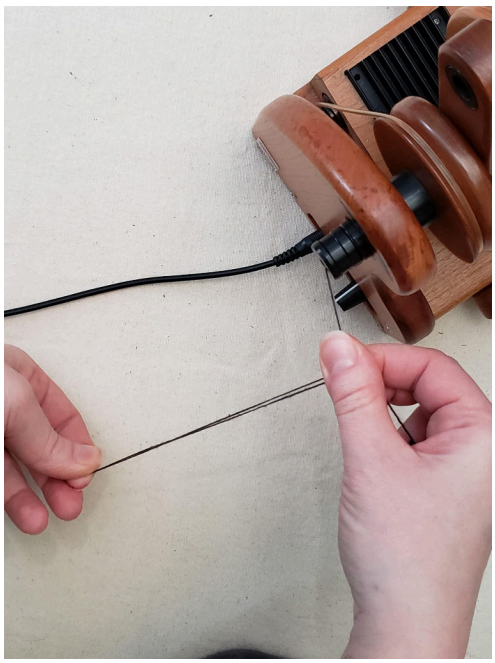
(Photo 1: notches on index card side)

Next, spin the same single as the one you ripped off and create a ply back sample. To do this, place your index finger on the yarn halfway between your backhand and the orifice,

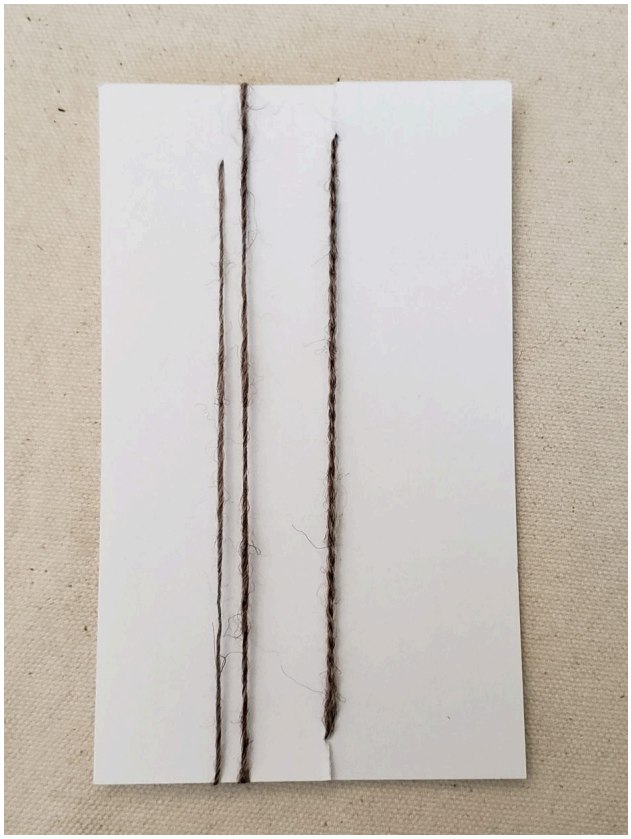




(photo 2) and bring your backhand towards the orifice **(photo 3)**. Then rotate the bottom part of the yarn with your forward hand's thumb, index, and middle finger to create a 2-ply yarn **(photo 4)**.



Break this off, wind it around the index card and secure it between 2 more notches.



(photo 5)

If you're intending on spinning a 3 ply yarn, repeat the steps from photo 1-3, but pinch the yarn by the orifice with your back hand, pull out more yarn from off the bobbin, and grab the single with your forward hand. **(photo 6)**

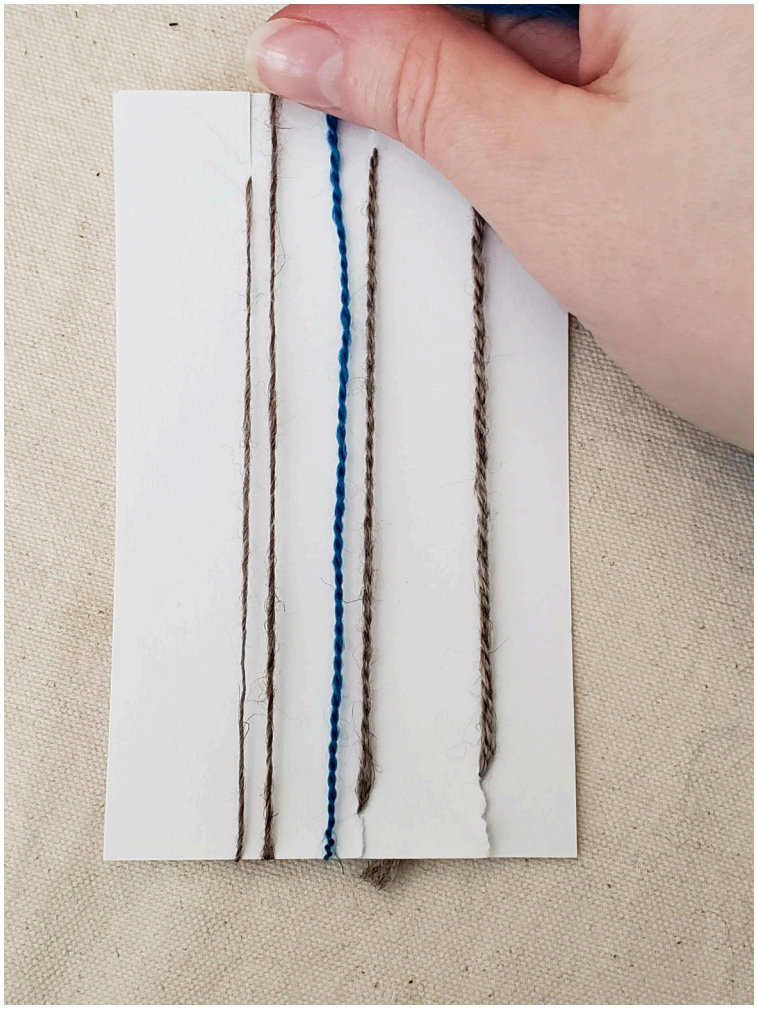
It’s important to keep holding tightly onto both ends of the plies and not let go until the very last step. Then, with a little bit of manipulation, break the yarn off near the orifice and twirl the 3 singles (in the opposite twist direction that was put into the singles) without releasing the twist in your forward hand until the three singles bind to one another and create a 3 ply yarn sample. Once this happens, let go.

(photo 7) Add this sample to the index card as well.

(photo 8)

Once these samples have been created, you now have a useful tool you can refer back to at any time during the spinning process to help you stay on target. In my spinning

projects, I will periodically take the yarn I'm spinning, create a 2-ply plyback sample, and lay it next to the one on the control card to assess how close my current spinning looks when compared to the original 2-ply plyback sample on the card.



(photo 9)

This makes it easy to assess if I need to add or decrease twist, draft thicker or thinner, etc. If I am spinning yarn for a 3-ply or higher yarn, I only have to check the yarn I'm spinning against the 2-ply plyback sample because I know if it matches my control card's 2-ply plyback sample, then it will also match that same single spun up as a multi-plied yarn.

By consciously comparing the yarn on the control card to the yarn you're currently spinning at any point throughout the project, you're able to have a great deal more control in spinning, and ultimately will achieve greater overall consistency. I like to think of a control

card as a recipe that has all of the ingredients and measurements needed to create a dish. If you try to make the same tomato sauce without a recipe, you might find that one time you add more garlic, the next time you add more salt, and each time it comes out different, just like the yarn on your bobbins between spinning sessions. A recipe, however, helps you be more consistent with your cooking, producing the same dish the same way each time you cook it. Using a control card will help you be more consistent with your yarn spinning. It helps ensure that each spinning session will produce the same consistent yarn throughout a project. As a bonus, if you save your control cards you can always go back and recreate your favorite yarns that you used in a project with great success, even when a lengthy gap of time has passed.

Here are a pair of socks that I spun to carry out two experiments. The first was a dye experiment; to observe how the same colors of dye applied to a wool top, but in different locations, would influence the way the colors appeared in a 4-ply yarn. The second was a wearability experiment; to observe if a cable plied toe and heel wear better than a traditional 4-ply plied yarn.

It's very important to keep the drafting consistent, especially in a 4-ply where the colors could be elongated or truncated depending on the amount of fiber consumed in each single. Using the control card throughout the project helped me maintain consistency, thereby allowing me to observe how the variations in dye application might be similar or different. I'm looking forward to wearing these socks to see which plying technique proves to be more durable!