

Ancient Egyptian Measurements

Ancient Egyptians didn't measure things using centimetres and metres. They used cubits, spans and fingers.

A cubit is the measurement from the tip of your longest finger to the bottom of your elbow.

A palm is the distance across your palm.

A finger is the width of your finger.

Your Challenge:

Draw 3 lines on this stele showing a cubit, palm and finger.

Measure five things in your house using ancient Egyptian measurements. (Hint: find things with straight sides because it will be easier!)

Now get a grown up to measure them using their cubits, palms and fingers.

Why do you think they are different from yours? How do you think the Ancient Egyptians solved this problem?

If you needed to measure a distance that went round a curved shape, it would be difficult to do if you tried to use your own arm. What could you do instead? (hint: you might need a piece of string to help you with this)

Rules:

1. Asking a grown up to tell you the answer is cheating.

When you've had a think about the questions, have a look at the answers.



Stele of Hay 13.62 CC Glasgow Museums

Answers:

1) Why are measurements different?

Hold your arm up and measure your cubit against your grown up's one... they are different sizes so the measurements will be different.

The ancient Egyptians solved this by measuring the pharaoh's arm and this was called the "royal cubit". Measuring rods of this length were made and builders could use these to make sure their buildings were the right size.

If you want to measure round a corner, measure cubits along it and put a bit of tape on the string after each cubit. You now have an ancient Egyptian measuring tape!



These are the hieroglyphs for a royal cubit

Ancient Egyptian Numbers

This is a really good website to tell you about how ancient Egyptians wrote their numbers.

<https://discoveringegypt.com/egyptian-hieroglyphic-writing/egyptian-mathematics-numbers-hieroglyphs/>

When you've had a look at the website, see if you can work out what the hieroglyphs next to the arrows mean.



Stele of Wep 13.184 CC Glasgow Museums

This is from the tomb of a man called Wep who lived in Egypt when the pyramids were being built. The hieroglyphs say what how many birds he wanted to have forever in the afterlife.

How many can you see?

Look closely at the big picture. Can you see more of this symbol?