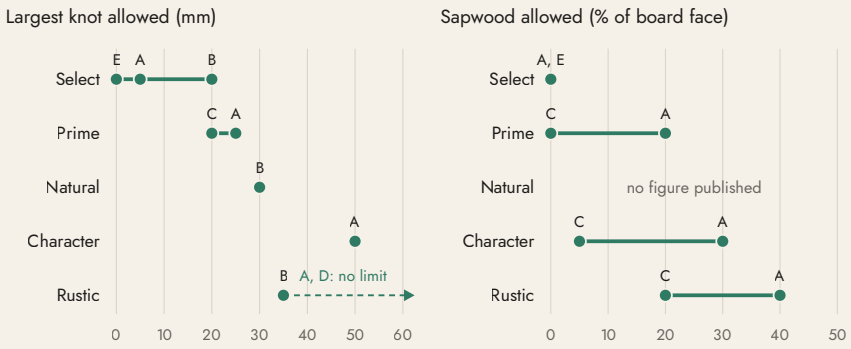
Wood flooring *grades*: what the names mean and how to specify one

No standard we could read fixes what Prime, Select, Natural or Rustic mean in the UK: suppliers write their own, and the limits differ. Specify a grade by a signed sample board and a stated percentage allowed outside it.

AT A GLANCE

Grade name	What most suppliers mean	Largest knot published	Sapwood published (% of face)	Where sources disagree
Prime (often AB)	The cleanest regular grade: few small knots, little colour variation	20 mm (C), 25 mm (A); few or no knots elsewhere	None (C) to 20% (A)	Whether any sapwood is allowed at all
Select (often ABC)	Clean to nearly clean	None (E), 5 mm (A), 20 mm (B)	None (A, E)	Top grade in A and E; below Prime in B, D and F
Natural or Classic (often ABCD)	The middle of the range	30 mm (B)	No figure published	D uses "natural" as another name for Rustic
Character	More knots and sapwood, still controlled	50 mm (A)	5% (C) to 30% (A)	Sapwood limit differs six times over
Rustic (often CD), Tavern	The widest range: knots, sapwood, checks and filler accepted	35 mm (B); no limit (A, D)	20% (C) to 40% (A)	Rustic in B (35 mm) is tighter than Character in A (50 mm)
Super rustic	Large splits accepted as a feature	No figure published (F)	No figure published	Only one source uses the name

Letters are the sources listed under "The same name, different limits". Millimetres are the largest knot the source allows. Percentages are of the visible board face. Figures are what each source printed, not a standard.



Published limits by grade name. Each dot is a figure printed in one source (letters as in the table above); a line joins sources that give different figures for the same name. Where nothing is shown, no source printed a figure. Original drawing by Make Bespoke Studio from the sources listed.

SPECIFICATION WORDING

GRADE BY APPROVED SAMPLE

Grade: as the approved range panel ref [FL-GR-01], [oak], [pre-finished / finished on site] in [finish ref], signed by [designer], [main contractor] and [flooring contractor] on [date] and held at [location]. Names such as Prime, Select, Natural or Rustic do not define the grade on their own. Not more than [x]% of boards, by [area / number], may fall outside the range shown. Boards outside the range are to be set aside before fixing and replaced at no cost to the project.

GRADE BY WRITTEN LIMITS

Grade: [supplier]'s written grading rules ref [ ] dated [date], issued with the tender. In the absence of a stated limit the following apply: knots [sound only / sound or filled], not larger than [20] mm across; sapwood not more than [10]% of the visible face of any board; checks [none / hairline and sound]; colour variation within the range of approved sample [FL-GR-01]; filler [permitted in listed defects only], colour matched to the sample. Board length and width as [schedule ref].

INSPECTION AND ACCEPTANCE

Boards to be inspected on delivery and before any board is fixed, by [flooring contractor] with [designer / contractor], from a normal standing position in the lighting to be used in the room, against the approved sample. Boards are laid from not fewer than [three] packs at a time. Boards fixed in place are accepted only if they were inspected under this clause. Record of inspection to be issued to [designer] within [two] working days.

TERMS USED

Grade (wood flooring)

A supplier's appearance category for floor boards, based on knots, sapwood, colour variation and fillers; there is no UK standard, so the same name can mean different things.

Sapwood

The pale outer wood of a tree beneath the bark; in floors it shows as lighter streaks next to the darker heartwood and is controlled or excluded by grading.

Knot

The base of a branch cut across in a board. A sound knot is tight and solid; an open knot has a hole or a crack and is usually filled.

Range panel

A board or panel of floor boards chosen to show the full spread of colour, knots and sapwood that a grade is allowed to contain, signed and dated so it can be used to judge the delivery.

Quarter-sawn

Timber cut so the growth rings meet the face at roughly 60-90 degrees, producing straighter grain, ray fleck in oak, and generally better dimensional stability.

STANDARDS AND SOURCES

- No standard we could read fixes the names Prime, Select, Natural or Rustic: eight UK supplier definitions were read, A to H; none cites a standard for its grades.
- NWFA/NOFMA International Standards for Unfinished Solid Wood Flooring: National Wood Flooring Association (US). Read in full. Solid unfinished flooring only; the cover is marked revised April 2009 and the pages April 2018. Used here only to show what a written grade looks like.
- BS EN 13226 and BS EN 13489: solid and multi-layer parquet product standards, with appearance clauses. Named; text not read; edition status to confirm.
- BS EN 14342:2013: wood flooring and parquet: characteristics, conformity and marking. Named; not read.
- BS EN 942:2007: timber in joinery, general requirements (J classes). Cited by one supplier's example specification; not read.

Full guide: https://makebespoke.com/trade/technical/wood-flooring-grades. Make Bespoke Studio coordinates manufacture through its partner workshops. Figures are guidance only and your specification governs; some may be superseded, so contact the studio to verify.