

# KewVisum Toner Coverage Guide

## Toner coverage and tiered pricing models

In the printer and multi-function device (photocopier) market, running costs are often presented using tiered pricing models based on estimated toner coverage per page.

These are commonly described as “**low colour / high colour**” or “**three-tier billing**” structures. On paper, they can appear attractive, particularly when a large proportion of printing is assumed to fall into a low-coverage band.

In practice, estimates suggesting that a significant share of output will qualify as “low colour” are often optimistic. While this can reduce headline costs in a quotation, it does not always reflect how documents are actually produced day to day.

Because these pricing models typically apply over long agreement periods, differences between estimated and real-world usage may only become apparent over time.

It is also important to understand how coverage thresholds are applied. Low-colour classifications are usually defined by **total toner coverage on the page**, often in the range of 1–5%, rather than by the presence of a small amount of colour alone.

This means that pages containing minimal colour elements may still exceed low-coverage thresholds once overall layout, formatting, and content are taken into account.

## How toner coverage is measured

Manufacturers publish toner yields based on standardised test methods, typically using **5% coverage of an A4 page** in line with ISO/IEC testing standards.

These tests are consistent and repeatable, allowing like-for-like comparison between devices. However, they rely on a fixed test document that does not reflect the variety of documents produced in everyday workplace use.

Factors that influence real-world toner usage include:

- Font type, size, and spacing
- Page layout and margins
- Use of graphics, shading, or images
- The mix of document types printed over time

Rather than trying to calculate each variable in isolation, it is more useful to understand what different coverage percentages actually look like in practice.

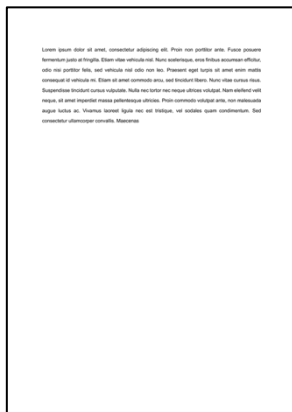
## What coverage percentages look like in practice

When viewed visually, 1% coverage is very low.

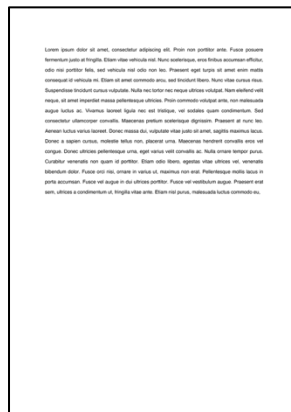
Even simple documents often exceed this level without appearing “heavy” to the user. A basic email or short letter printed in black text on a white background can equate to around **3–4% coverage**, depending on layout and formatting.

This helps explain why real-world toner usage frequently exceeds assumptions based on very low coverage estimates.

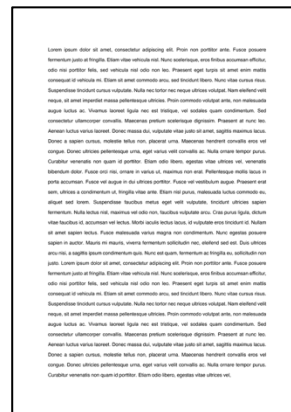
Below are thumbnails of various percentages of text (Arial 10pt) on an A4 page so you can see what they actually look like.



1%



2%



5%

## Why colour usage behaves differently

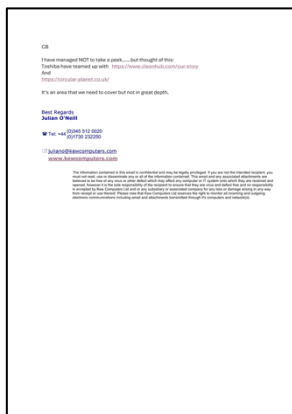
Documents that appear to be black and white often contain small colour elements.

Common examples include:

- Hyperlinks shown in blue
- Logos or icons in headers or footers
- Highlighted text or symbols

When any colour element is present, the device records the page as colour output. While the overall toner coverage may remain relatively low, colour toner is still used.

As a result, pages that look predominantly mono may still be treated as colour pages in reporting and billing systems.

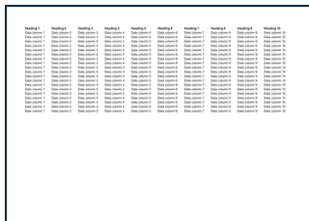


## Spreadsheets, images, and accumulated usage

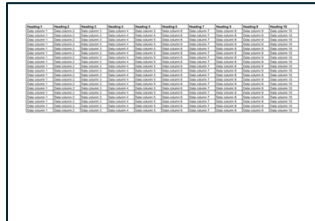
Certain document types consistently use more toner than expected.

For example:

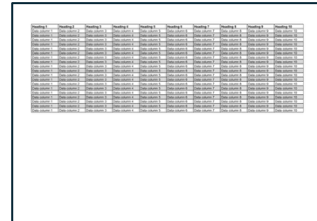
- Spreadsheet gridlines increase toner usage
- Shaded cells and headers increase coverage further
- Repeated low-coverage pages can accumulate significant usage over time



No gridlines 3.96%



With Gridlines 8.09%



Inc Gridlines & Shading 8.45%

Image-heavy documents have a much greater impact: when the image below is printed on an A4 page total toner coverage is 20%.



These effects are common in real-world use but are rarely reflected in headline cost estimates or tiered pricing assumptions.

To calculate the percentages of toner used in the examples shown we used: APFill - Ink and Toner Coverage Calculator.