

Understanding scale on maps

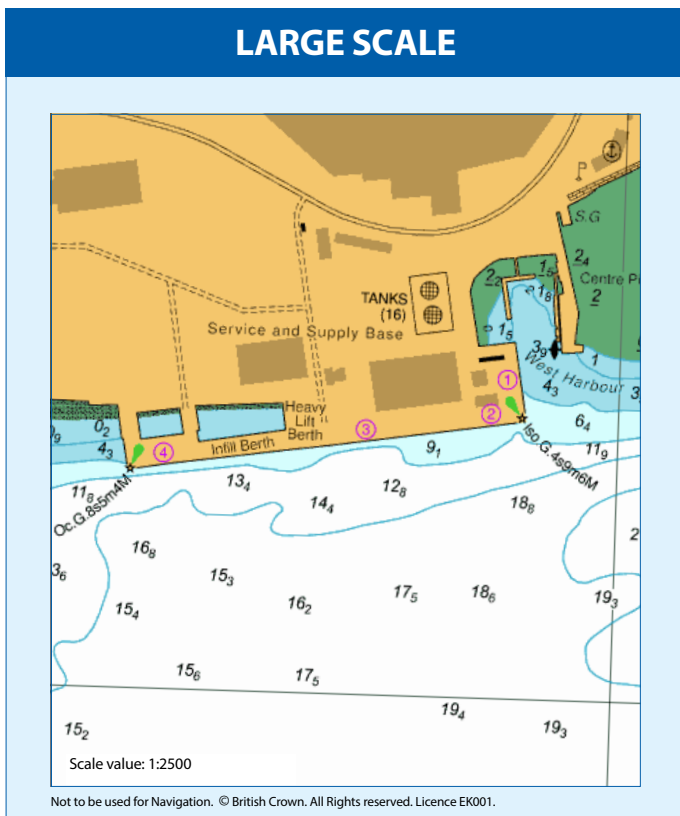
Scale on maps is often confusing. Terms such as 'large scale' and 'small scale' are used and numbers represent scale but what do they mean in practice?

When you think of a small number most people think of a number less than one hundred, and a large number could be 100,000.

It is a common misconception that the small number relates to a small scale, and a large number to large scale, whereas it is actually the other way round.

Scale is often written as 1:[number] where 1 unit of measurement on the map is [number] of units in the real world.

Here's an example of each type of scale:



Scale value: 1:2500

1cm on the map = 2½m in the real world

To show a particular jetty you would use a large scale to see features like bollards, cranes and buildings.

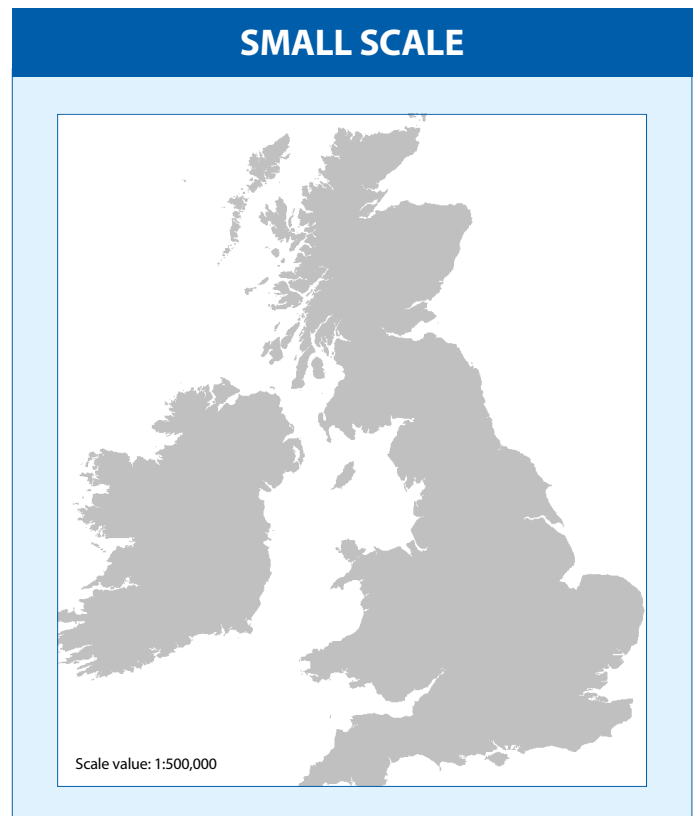
Large scale

=

Lots of detail

=

Small number
small area



SMALL SCALE

Scale value: 1:500,000

Scale value: 1:500,000

1cm on the map = 500,000cm (or 5000 metres) in the real world

To show the whole of the UK you would use a small scale and there wouldn't be much detail visible.

Small scale

=

Low on detail

=

Large number
large area