



COUNTER

Release 5.1

The Friendly Guide to

**Becoming
COUNTER
Compliant**

This is part of a suite of Friendly Guides demystifying Release 5.1 of the COUNTER Code of Practice

The complete series is:

- Introducing COUNTER Reports
- Introducing COUNTER Metrics
- COUNTER Attributes, Elements, and Other (Slightly) Techy Things
- COUNTER and Open Access
- Becoming COUNTER Compliant
- COUNTER for Consortia
- Changes in Release 5.1

Note: for ease of reading we have used plain English in all the Guides. For technical reasons, the Code of Practice itself uses underscores to link words – thus Data Type is actually Data_Type, and Total Item Investigations is Total_Item_Investigations.

There's a lot more information about our technical specification in the Code of Practice (<https://cop5.projectcounter.org/en/5.1>), so if you're looking for information about Return Codes, Double-Click Filtering, or our JSON schema, please hop over there!

What you'll find in this Guide

COUNTER membership	3
Getting started with COUNTER Reports.....	3
Tracking usage: it's complicated.....	3
Delivering COUNTER reports.....	4
Host Types	4
Demonstrating compliance.....	5
Use the COUNTER Validation Tool.....	5
Be audited	5
Tell your customers.....	6
What happens when we move?	7

COUNTER membership

COUNTER is a not-for-profit membership organization funded by membership fees and sponsorship. While you do not need to be a member to make use of the COUNTER Code of Practice or any of our educational materials, we do encourage you to join us!

Our membership – publishers, vendors and librarians – lead COUNTER. A Board of Directors has oversight of the financial matters and appoints the Executive Committee to oversee operations, while our Project Director is responsible for the day-to-day. We try to make sure that all parts of our community are represented on the Board and on the Executive Committee, as well as our other working groups.

Getting started with COUNTER Reports

There's a lot more information about our technical specification in the Code of Practice itself (cop5.projectcounter.org/en/5.1). This Guide only offers a summary and should not be used as a development tool!

Tracking usage: it's complicated

Usage can be tracked in several ways and we are agnostic about your approach. Page tagging, cookies and log file analysis are all perfectly valid ways to track usage.

This range of options means platforms all track usage slightly differently, so it is not possible for us to describe specific mechanisms for cleaning up the raw data. What we do is give you guidance about the rules we expect everyone to follow.

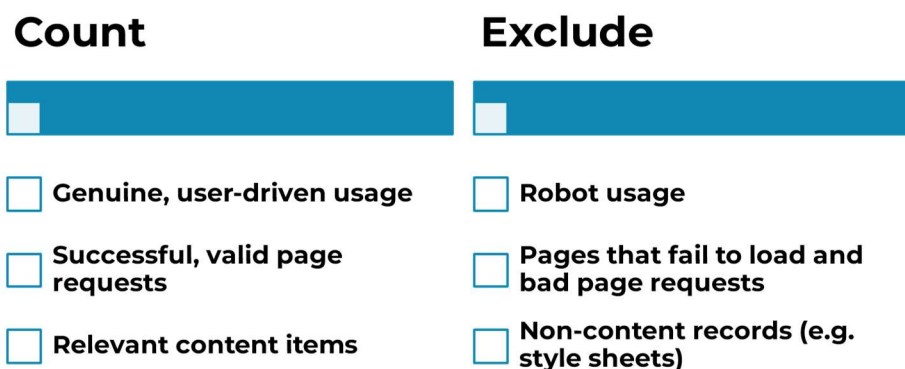


Figure 1. What to count and what to exclude when tracking usage.

Delivering COUNTER reports

All COUNTER Reports and Standard Views of COUNTER Reports must be available in our machine-readable JSON schema, downloadable via the SUSHI protocol, and in tabular form (e.g. as an Excel spreadsheet).

There are some key factors to remember:

- You must provide reports monthly, with data updated within four weeks of the end of the reporting period (so you need to be offering March data by the 28th of April).
- You need to be able to deliver reports for the current year to date, plus two back years (so January to March 2025, plus all of 2023 and 2024) – sometimes called YTD-plus-two.
- Librarians need to be able to call a report for specific months, but if they choose not to specify a date range the default is to deliver the YTD-plus-two data.
- Usage statistics must not be browser-dependent, and we expect publishers to support current versions of Google Chrome, Microsoft Edge, and Mozilla Firefox.

Typically, we ask publishers to provide COUNTER reports on a per-customer ID basis. For example, where a business school has a separate customer ID from its parent university *and* it is possible to distinguish the usage (e.g. through separate IP ranges), the school and the university should be sent separate COUNTER reports. There are two exceptions to this per-customer rule: first, open access reporting (see the *Friendly Guide to COUNTER and OA*), and second consortia reporting (see the *Friendly Guide to COUNTER for consortia*).

Host Types

As explained in other *Friendly Guides*, R5.1 includes four COUNTER Report and the reports you need to deliver is determined by your Host Type. Check out the *Friendly Guide to COUNTER Attributes, Elements, and Other (Slightly) Techy Things* if you want to know more about Host Types, but this is a quick reference table for which Host Types need to deliver each Report.

While it's not listed in the table, every Host Type is encouraged to provide a Global Item Report to highlight the usage of open access content. You can read more about that in the *Friendly Guide to COUNTER and Open Access*.

COUNTER Report	Standard Views	Host Types
Platform Report	PR_P1	All Host Types
Database Report	DR_D1 and DR_D2	A&I Database Aggregated Full Content Discovery Service eBook Collection Full Content Database Multimedia Collection
Title Report	All	Aggregated Full Content
	TR_B1, TR_B2 and TR_B3	eBook eBook Collection
	TR_J1, TR_J2, TR_J3 and TR_J4	eJournal
Item Report	None	Data Repository
	IR_A1	Repository Scholarly Communication Network Aggregated Full Content* eBook* eJournal*
	IR_M1	Multimedia

Demonstrating compliance

Use the COUNTER Validation Tool

We encourage every publisher to use the COUNTER Validation Tool (<https://projectcounter.org/validation-tool-preview>) to check whether your reports are valid before you start delivering them to libraries, and then every three to six months after that as a health check.

Be audited

An important feature of COUNTER is that compliant publishers and report providers are independently audited. Those who successfully pass an audit are listed in the COUNTER Registry (registry.projectcounter.org/).

Audits can take quite a long time – three months is the minimum – and they are valid for twelve months from the start of Stage two in the description below.

Stage one: pre-flight preparation. Run your COUNTER reports through the Validation Tool, and ideally seek feedback from one of our listed library groups in case they have identified any issues with your reports. If you can, you should fix any problems that are discovered before proceeding to Stage two.

Stage two: audit initiation. You and your auditor need to agree on the scope of the audit (at a minimum the reports you have to provide based on your Host Type, but preferably all the reports you offer), and you need to send your pre-flight documentation to the auditor.

Stage three: seeding – audit begins. The auditors will use your platform to 'seed' activity for usage reporting.

Stage four: report reconciliation. This is essentially matching up your reports with the seeding actions from Stage three. The auditors may issue either an Interim Report or a Pass Report. If it's an Interim Report, you have three months to fix the problems identified by the audit.

Stage five: audit complete. Once a Pass Report is issued, we will update the Registry to reflect your successful audit status.

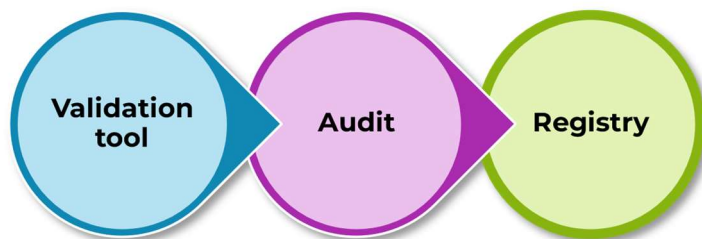


Figure 2. Steps to demonstrating COUNTER compliance.

There are three approved COUNTER auditors: ABC (abc.org.uk), BPA Worldwide (bpaww.com) and DEKRA (dekra.com). We will also accept an audit by any Chartered Accountant (UK), Certified Public Accountant (USA), or their equivalent elsewhere, provided they deliver their audit report using the correct forms from Appendix E of the Code of Practice.

Tell your customers

Librarians often tell us that they are unsure whether their reports are being provided by COUNTER-compliant publishers, or are just structurally similar. For R5.1 we're making it easier to check this by asking every publisher to include a link to their record in the COUNTER Registry, which provides details of every platform that offers audited, COUNTER-compliant usage reports. You can find out more at registry.projectcounter.org.

What happens when we move?

If you are moving to a new reporting service (for example, migrating between technology platforms, or upgrading to the latest COUNTER Code of Practice), you still need to offer the current year to date, plus two back years of usage data.

You do not need to recalculate your usage when you move – just make sure the old reports remain easily accessible.

We understand that when you move it's not always possible to deliver data in one report, so you can separate the reports out. If we consider a scenario where you've moved to a new publishing platform in February 2025 and a librarian is requesting their Title Report in April 2025, you may have to deliver one Title Report for February to April 2025, and a separate Title Report for 2023, 2024, and January 2025.

Wherever possible, we ask that you migrate between COUNTER releases or between platforms on the first day of a month.

Find out more

There is a lot more information in the full Code of Practice (<https://cop5.projectcounter.org/en/5.1>) and of course in the COUNTER Media Library (medialibrary.projectcounter.org).

If you have questions that haven't been answered elsewhere, please don't hesitate to email our Project Director:
tasha.mellins-cohen@counterusage.org



COUNTER

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