

## Editorial Graphics and Publishing Services

### The Word Usage Dilemma

Here are some of the word usage dilemmas that some of our staff have had to face recently.

#### **First come, first serve or first come, first served**

Correct: The backpacks are available on a *first come, first served basis*.

Incorrect: The backpacks are available on a *first come, first serve basis*.

Think of it as, He who is FIRST COME is FIRST SERVED

#### **Into or in to**

*Into* is a preposition meaning starting from outside and going inside something.

Example: Step into the parlor and have some tea.

*In* is a preposition, followed by the infinitive *to* before a noun or verb.

Examples: Log in to the network (noun).

He walked in to the room.

#### **Oral or verbal**

*Oral* refers to the spoken word. It also refers to taking something by mouth (e.g., medication).

Example: Students also take *oral* exams.

*Verbal* refers to expressing something using words.

Example: *Verbal* communication means communication through words.

#### **Farther or further**

*Farther* is used when referring to physical distance (think “far”).

Example: Her house is *farther* than mine.

*Further* is used when referring to time (figurative distance).

Example: I refuse to continue this conversation any *further*.

If there is any ambiguity in what is meant (physical or figurative distance), you can chose *further*. *Further* is often acceptable use for either physical distance or figurative distance.

#### **Altogether or all together**

*Altogether* means “completely.”

Example: I am *altogether* finished grading these exams.

*All together* means “in a group.”

Example: The cheerleaders were gathered all together on the football field.

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### **Disinterested or uninterested**

*Disinterested* means “impartial, not taking sides.

Example” The referee is *disinterested* in the debate teams.

Uninterested means “indifferent” or “having no interest in something.”

Example: Nina’s husband is *uninterested* in going antiquing with her.

Your dictionary is your first line of defense to check to make sure you choose the correct word usage. When in doubt, check it out in your Webster’s dictionary. Or, send your dilemma to the Editorial Help Desk [Donna\_M\_Marks@mcpsmd.org]. We will help you figure it out.