

# Word(s) of the Month

October 2010

Practise – verb / practice - noun

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**practice / practise, advice/advise, licence / license** (Spelling words have a noun and verb function.)

❖ **practise:** Common usage as a verb includes 'perform repetitive actions' (e.g. The politician *practised* her speech. )

❖ **practice:** Common usage as a noun includes a habit, regular exercise, a usual way of doing, a professional business

(e.g. The law *practice* was supposed to follow the *practice* of not employing politicians, but in *practice* this was ignored.)

Forte

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*n.*

1. Something in which a person excels.
2. The strong part of a sword blade, between the middle and the hilt.

[French *fort*, from Old French, strong, from Latin *fortis*. See [fort](#).]

**SYNONYMS** *forte, métier, specialty, thing*. These nouns denote something at which a person is particularly skilled: *Writing fiction is her forte. The theater is his métier. The professor's specialty was the study of ancient languages. Mountain climbing is really my thing.*

**USAGE NOTE** The word *forte*, coming from French *fort*, should properly be pronounced with one syllable, like the English word *fort*. Common usage, however, prefers the two-syllable pronunciation, (fôr'tā'), which has been influenced possibly by the music term *forte* borrowed from Italian. In a recent survey a strong majority of the Usage Panel, 74 percent, preferred the two-syllable pronunciation. The result is a delicate situation; speakers who are aware of the origin of the word may wish to continue to pronounce it as one syllable but at an increasing risk of puzzling their listeners.

**for·te<sup>2</sup>** (fôr'tā')  *Music.*

*adv. & adj. (Abbr. f)*

In a loud, forceful manner. Used chiefly as a direction.

*n.*

A note, passage, or chord played forte.

## Disinterested

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*adj.*

1. Free of bias and self-interest; impartial: "*disinterested scientific opinion on fluorides in the water supply*" (Ellen R. Shell).
2.
  - a. Not interested; indifferent: "*supremely disinterested in all efforts to find a peaceful solution*" (C.L. Sulzberger).
  - b. Having lost interest.

**disinterestedly** *dis·in'ter·est·ed·ly* *adv.*

**disinterestedness** *dis·in'ter·est·ed·ness* *n.*

**USAGE NOTE** In traditional usage, *disinterested* can only mean "having no stake in an outcome," as in *Since the judge stands to profit from the sale of the company, she cannot be considered a disinterested party in the dispute*. This usage was acceptable to 97 percent of the Usage Panel in our 2001 survey. But despite critical disapproval, *disinterested* has come to be widely used by many educated writers to mean "uninterested" or "having lost interest," as in *Since she discovered skiing, she is disinterested in her schoolwork*. Oddly enough, "not interested" is the oldest sense of the word, going back to the 17th century. This sense became outmoded in the 18th century but underwent a revival in the first quarter of the early 20th. Despite its resuscitation, this usage is widely considered an error. In our 2001 survey, 88 percent of the Usage Panel rejected the sentence *It is difficult to imagine an approach better designed to prevent disinterested students from developing any intellectual maturity*. This is not a significantly different proportion from the 89 percent who disapproved of a similar usage in 1988.

## Ad hoc

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*adv.*

For the specific purpose, case, or situation at hand and for no other: *a committee formed ad hoc to address the issue of salaries*.

*adj.*

1. Formed for or concerned with one specific purpose: *an ad hoc compensation committee*.
2. Improvised and often impromptu: "*On an ad hoc basis, Congress has . . . placed . . . ceilings on military aid to specific countries*" (New York Times).

[Latin : *ad*, to + *hoc*, neuter accusative of *hic*, this.]