

Wordsmithing with Bryan Garner . . .

From his June 22<sup>nd</sup> blog posting, Bryan Garner reminds us of the distinction between “**capacity**” and “**capability**”:

Do you find the distinction between these two terms unclear? Garner writes that the two “overlap, but each has its nuances.”

*Capacity* refers to the power or ability to receive, hold, or contain something (e.g. The jar was filled to capacity.) Figuratively, it refers to mental faculties, meaning “the power to take in knowledge” (e.g. Following the trial, he had no capacity to receive instructions.) In law, “capacity” is frequently used in the sense “legal competency or qualification” (e.g. He had the capacity to enter into the contract).

By contrast, *capability* refers to (1) power or ability in general, whether physical or mental (e.g. He has the capability to play first-rate golf.). Or, it can mean (2) the quality of being able to use or be used in a specified way (e.g. The country has undeclared nuclear capabilities).

Please send me your linguistic errors, queries or bugbears! I’d be delighted to discuss them in future blog postings!