I have a job that references GA-214 “Levels of Gypsum Board Finish” for the appropriate gypsum board finish. The specifications call for a flat paint finish. I think “Level 4” is appropriate, however a passage in the description of “Level 5” concerns me. That passage reads: “This level of finish is highly recommended where gloss, semi-gloss, enamel or ‘non-textured flat paints are specified . . . .” What is meant by “non-textured” flat paint? I would like to provide a Level 4 finish because it is considerably less costly in time and materials than Level 5.

—S.C., New Jersey

I must confess that even after working for a paint manufacturer for 10 years, the term “non-textured” flat paint was unfamiliar to me. My experience with flat paints led me to believe that under normal lighting conditions, Level 4 (tape embedded in a layer of joint treatment compound, with two additional layers of compound) should do the trick. But just to be certain, I contacted the Gypsum Association and the Painting and Decorating Contractors of America to confirm my understanding of the document “GA-214 Levels of Gypsum Board Finish.”

The Gypsum Association says that the term “non-textured flat paint” was meant to describe flat paint that has been applied in such a fashion that there is no texture in the dried paint film imparted by the method of application. This is a practical impossibility, since all conventional methods of applying paint over gypsum board surfaces impart some texture to the dried paint film.

What is probably of greater concern, is the severity of the lighting conditions in the intended location. PDCA explains that a low wattage light source placed at a severe angle can reveal enough imperfections in the surface to necessitate a Level 5 finish (requiring an additional skim coat of material to provide a uniform profile to the dried paint film). On the other hand, a high wattage light source positioned perpendicular to the surface may reveal no noticeable imperfections, even when using a paint with a discernable sheen or gloss so that a Level 4 finish may be successfully used.

Under normal circumstances, a Level 4 finish is sufficient when using flat paint. However, to avoid any disagreement later on, it is best to have an approved mock up using the intended finishes that are illuminated using the intended lighting before finishing the entire project.

I’m working on the specifications for a stucco job where we’re using metal lath over a concrete solid base. In “Table 1 Nominal Plaster Thickness for Three- and Two-Coat Work,” in ASTM C 926, there are two possible ways offered to apply the stucco. One calls for both the first and second coats to be three-eighths of an inch thick, and the other calls for the first coat to be a half-inch thick and the second coat to be a quarter-inch thick. Both are finished with a third coat that’s one-eighth of an inch thick. What’s the difference? —C.G. Clearwater, FL

I took this one up with several stucco savvy folks, because at first glance, at one-eighth of an inch either way didn’t strike me as particularly monumental. What I was told, however, was that attempting to apply a brown coat (the second coat) consistently at a quarter-inch would be a major challenge for even the most skilled trowel man. And even if he were to succeed, there is a strong likelihood that so much of its moisture would be soaked up by the first coat that it would be almost impossible to tool properly. In other words, to avoid unnecessary frustration on the part of the stucco applicator, and for a better looking final product, three-eighths of an inch thick for both the first and second coats is the better way to go.

About the Author
Lee G. Jones is AWCI’s director of technical services. Send your questions to him in care of Construction Dimensions, or send your e-mail question to jones@awci.org.