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## Awesome!

OK, I get it. Popular expressions come and go—and especially quickly in this global mass media “Information Age.” I would not expect to hear the expression “23 skidoo” these days. Wikipedia: “. . . an American slang phrase. . . [that] generally refers to leaving quickly. . .” It’s from the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Fortunately the word “cool” is adaptable and according to Wikipedia “has no single meaning. . . has endured in usage for generations” and apparently “is not confined to one particular ethnic group or gender.” So, I can say something is “cool” without my grandkids thinking I’m too “square.” Well, if they think that they keep it to themselves, anyway.

For those of us raised on Emily Post (*who?*), the polite response to “thank you” is “you’re welcome.” Not these days. Now it’s “no problem,” a phrase that is used in many other ways, too. I was going to write an article on “no problem” but Bill Flanagan’s opinion piece on CBS *Sunday Morning* was so good I couldn’t top it. You can find the video of it at <http://www.cbsnews.com/videos/opinion-stop-saying-no-problem/>. It’s well worth viewing.

Writers, poets and other lovers of language can be picky, pedantic and even priggish about how words are used. This article notwithstanding, I am fairly tolerant and flexible (or so I like to think) about English language usage, especially in everyday speech. But at the risk of sounding grumpy (some would say not for the first time in my life), I wish to declare I am annoyed by the misuse of the word *awesome*. For example, I was in a store paying for a routine purchase and told the clerk I would pay using my credit card. Her quick, smiling and pleased response was “Awesome!” I’m fairly certain

I was not the first one of her customers to pay with a credit card. I paid and left.

Nowadays, “Awesome!” is the response to *many* things: new shoes, body piercings, a party, a movie, savings on a purchase, a new video game, a new vehicle, the latest hit rap or popular song, a new dress, pancakes for breakfast, tattoos, and so on.

Here are some definitions of that 15th century word: (a) inspiring an overwhelming feeling of reverence, admiration, or fear; causing or inducing awe: *an awesome sight*; (b) showing or characterized by reverence, admiration, or fear; exhibiting or marked by awe; and (c) from the *Urban Dictionary*: Something Americans use to describe *everything*. (I added the italics.)

My thesaurus offers various synonyms: astonishing, astounding, staggering, stunning, stupendous, sublime, wonderful, wondrous. Something or some event may be excellent, admirable or amazing but not be awesome; for example, a perfectly executed Olympic ice skating program, Vladimir Horowitz playing Chopin, an accomplished seven-year-old violinist, a savant’s total recall or exceptional mathematical ability.

If you haven’t yet turned the page to another article, you may be wondering what *is* awesome to me, when would I use that word? Well, the Grand Canyon comes to mind, as do Hubble Telescope photos of our Universe, the giant Redwood trees of California, mushroom clouds from nuclear weapon explosions, pictures of Earth from outer space (I hope we won’t destroy our planet), and witnessing the birth of my child.

I know, I know, you may quibble with me about all this, dear reader. And I freely acknowledge your experience about what is awesome will differ from mine. You may even be among those who think a new video game is awesome. But let’s be peaceful about this and agree it’s just a word. . . .

