

# Keep your English up to date

## Wicked

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Wicked! Note the intonation. It means 'wonderful', 'great', 'cool', 'splendid'. It came into English from United States' black slang in the 1980s or maybe earlier. Certainly it arrived in Britain in the late 1980s.

It was part of a trend which goes back decades to use bad words to mean good concepts, or the other way round. I mean you might remember saying, 'that's great!' meaning 'it isn't great'. And always there's been this use of the word 'naughty' to mean 'nice'. So it's part of a general trend.

It's mainly used as an adjective in front of a noun, you know, 'we had a wicked time!' Or, of course, you can use it on its own, just saying, you know, 'wicked!' as a reaction – that's how youngsters use it. And youngsters, of course, knowing that grown ups are now using it as well have decided to use other bad words in the same sort of way – I've heard from young people in recent years, the last couple of years, words like 'evil' meaning 'good', you see, or 'brutal' meaning 'good'.

Wicked is still around. It's meant, of course, that the traditional sense of wicked is now being squeezed out, much as 'gay' made it difficult to use the traditional sense of 'merry' or 'cheerful' when it started to be used in reference to homosexuals. So with wicked, tone of voice is the only way to make the distinction between the old meaning and the new meaning, and even that's ambiguous sometimes, so you have to be careful, and pay very careful attention to the context.

And notice that the word is extending its use. The other day, for the first time, I heard somebody say, 'wicked cool' meaning 'very cool'.



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