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**a•weath•er** (ə-wēth/ər) *adv.* To the windward side.

**a•weigh** (ə-waɪ) *adj.* Nautical Hanging clear of the bottom. Used of an anchor.

**awe•some** (ə-wəzəm) *adj.* 1. Inspiring awe; an awesome thunderstorm. 2. Expressing awe. 3. Slang Remarkable; outstanding. —**awe•some•ly** *adv.* —**awe•some•ness** *n.*

**awe•struck** (ə-wēstrʊk) also **awe•strick•en** (-strɪk/ən) *adj.* Full of awe.

**aw•ful** (ə-wʊfəl) *adj.* 1. Extremely bad or unpleasant; terrible. 2. Commanding awe: "this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath" (Herman Melville). 3. Filled with awe, esp.; a. Filled with or displaying great reverence. b. *Obsolete* Afraid. 4. Formidable in nature or extent. **✦** *adv.* Informal Extremely; very. [ME *aweful*, awe-inspiring, blend of awe, awe; see AWE, and *ayfull*, awful (< OE *egfull*: ege, dread + *-full*, -ful).] —**aw•ful•ly** *adv.* —**aw•ful•ness** *n.*

**a•while** (ə-waɪl, ə-wɪl) *adv.* For a short time.

**USAGE NOTE** *Awhile*, an adverb, is never preceded by a preposition, such as *for*, but the two-word form *a while* may be preceded by a preposition. In writing each of the following is acceptable: *stay awhile*; *stay for a while*; *stay a while* (but not *stay for awhile*).

**a•whirl** (ə-wɜrɪl, ə-wɜrɪl) *adj.* 1. Having a whirling motion; spinning: leaves *awhirl* in the wind. 2. Being in a state of excitement or confusion. —**a•whirl** *v.*

**awk•ward** (ək-wɜrd) *adj.* 1. Not graceful; ungainly. 2a. Not dexterous; clumsy. b. Clumsily or unskillfully performed. 3a. Difficult to handle or manage. b. Difficult to effect; uncomfortable: an *awkward* pose. 4a. Marked by or causing embarrassment or discomfort. b. Requiring great tact and skill. [ME *awkward*, in the wrong way: *awke*, wrong (< ON *afugr*, backward; see *apo-* in App.) + *-ward*, -ward, -ly] —**awk•ward•ly** *adv.* —**awk•ward•ness** *n.*

**awl** (ɔl) *n.* A pointed tool for making holes, as in wood or leather. [ME *awl*, prob. blend of OE *æl* and OE *awel*, fleshhook.]

**awn** (ɔn) *n.* A slender, bristlelike appendage found on the spikelets of many grasses. [ME *awne* < ON *afn* or < OE *agen*; see *ak-* in App.] —**awned** *adj.* —**awn•less** *adj.*

**awn•ing** (ɔ'nɪŋ) *n.* A rooflike structure, often made of canvas or plastic, that serves as a shelter, as over a storefront, window, door, or deck. [?]

**a•woke** (ə-wəʊk) *v.* A past tense of *awake*.

**a•wok•en** (ə-wəʊkən) *v.* A past participle of *awake*.

**AWOL** or **awol** (ə-wəʊl) *adj.* Absent without leave. **✦** *n.* One who is absent without leave.

**a•wry** (ə-wraɪ) *adv.* 1. In a position that is turned or twisted toward one side; askew. 2. Away from the correct course; amiss. See *Syns at amiss*. —**a•wry** *adj.*

**ax** or **axe** (æks) *n., pl. ax•es* (æks'ɪz) 1. A tool with a bladed head mounted crosswise on a handle, used for felling trees or chopping wood. 2. A similar implement used as a cutting tool or weapon. 3. Informal A sudden termination of employment. 4. Slang A musical instrument, esp. a guitar. **✦** *tr.v.* **axed**, **ax•ing**, **ax•es** 1. To chop or fell with or as if with an ax. 2. Informal To remove ruthlessly or suddenly. —**idiom:** **ax to grind** A selfish or ulterior aim. [ME < OE *ax*.]

**ax<sup>2</sup>** (æks) *v.* **axed**, **ax•ing**, **ax•es** Nonstandard Variant of *ask*.

**OUR LIVING LANGUAGE** *Ax*, a common nonstandard variant of *ask*, is often identified as an especially salient feature of African American Vernacular English. While it is true that the form is frequent in the speech of African Americans, it used to be common in the speech of white Americans as well, especially in New England. This should not be surprising since *ax* is a very old word in English, having been used in England for over 1,000 years. In Old English we find both *āscian* and *æscian*, and in Middle English both *asken* and *axen*. Moreover, the forms with *cs* or *x* had no stigma associated with them; Chaucer, for example, used *asken* and *axen* interchangeably. The forms in *x* arose from the forms in *sk* by a linguistic process called *metathesis*, in which two sounds are reversed. The *x* thus represents (*ks*), the flipped version of (*sk*). Metathesis is a common linguistic process around the world and does not arise from a defect in speaking. Nevertheless, *ax* has become stigmatized as substandard—a fate that has befallen other words, such as *ain't*, that were once perfectly acceptable in literate circles.



axolotl

**ax.** *abbr.* 1. axiom 2. axis

**ax•el** (æks'əl) *n.* A jump in figure skating that is initiated from the outer forward edge of one skate, followed by one and one-half midair turns and a return to the outer backward edge of the other skate. [After Axel Paulsen (1856–1938), Norwegian figure skater.]

**Axel Hei•berg** (hɪ'burg) An island of N Nunavut, Canada, in the Arctic Ocean W of Ellesmere I.

**Ax•el•rod** (æks'əl-rɔd), Julius b. 1912. Amer. biochemist who shared a 1970 Nobel Prize.

**a•xen•ic** (ə-zɛn'ɪk, ə-zɛ'nɪk) *adj.* Not contaminated by or associated with any other living organisms. *Usu.* used of cultures of microorganisms. [*A-* + Gk. *xenikos*, foreign (< *xenos*, stranger; see *ghos-ti-* in App.)] —**a•xen•ic•al•ly** *adv.*

**ax•es** (æks'ɪz) *n.* Plural of *axis*.

**ax•es** (æks'ɪz) *n.* Plural of *ax*<sup>1</sup>.

**ax•i•al** (æks'ɪ-əl) *adj.* 1. Relating to, characterized by, or forming an axis. 2. Located on, around, or in the direction of an axis. —**ax•i•al•ity** (-ɪ-əl-ɪ-ti) *n.* —**ax•i•al•ly** *adv.*

**axial skeleton** *n.* The bones constituting the head and trunk of a vertebrate body.

**ax•il** (æks'ɪl) *n.* The upper angle between a lateral organ, such as a leafstalk, and the stem that bears it. [Lat. *axilla*, armpit.]

**ax•ile** (æks'ɪl) *adj.* Situated along the central axis of an ovary having two or more locules: *axile* placentation. [AX(IS) + *-il*.]

**ax•il•la** (æks'ɪ-lə) *n., pl. -il•lae* (-sɪ-lə) 1. The armpit. 2. A body part analogous to the armpit, such as the hollow under a bird's wing. [Lat.]

**ax•il•lar** (æks'ɪ-lər, æks'ɪ-lər) or **ax•il•lar•y** (æks'ɪ-lər-ē) *n., pl. axillars* or *-les* One of the feathers in the axilla of a bird's wing.

**ax•il•lar•y** (æks'ɪ-lər-ē) *adj.* 1. *Anatomy* Of, relating to, or located near the axilla. 2. *Botany* Of, relating to, or located in an axil.

**axillary bud** *n.* A lateral bud.

**ax•i•ol•o•gy** (æks'ɪ-ol-ŏ-jē) *n.* The study of the nature of values and value judgments. [Gk. *axios*, worthy; see *ag-* in App. + *-logy*.] —**ax•i•ol•og•i•cal** (-ŏ-lŏ-j-ŏ-kəl) *adj.* —**ax•i•ol•og•i•cal•ly** *adv.* —**ax•i•ol•o•gist** *n.*

**ax•i•om** (æks'ɪ-ŏm) *n.* 1. A self-evident or universally recognized truth. 2. An established rule, principle, or law. 3. A principle that is accepted as true without proof as the basis for argument; a postulate. [ME < OFr. *axiome* < Lat. *axiōma*, *axiōmat* < Gk. < *axios*, worthy. See *ag-* in App.] —**ax•i•o•mat•ic** (-ŏ-măt'ɪk), **ax•i•o•mat•i•cal** (-ɪ-kəl) *adj.* —**ax•i•o•mat•i•cal•ly** *adv.*

**ax•i•on** (æks'ɪ-ŏn) *n.* A hypothetical boson having no charge or spin and small mass, proposed to explain the existence of certain symmetries of the strong nuclear force. [AX(IAL) + *-on*.]

**ax•is** (æks'ɪs) *n., pl. ax•es* (æks'ɪz) 1. A straight line about which a body or geometric object rotates or may be conceived to rotate. 2. *Mathematics* a. A line serving to orient a geometric object, esp. a line about which the object is symmetric. b. A reference line along which coordinates are measured. 3. A center line to which parts of a structure or body may be referred. 4. An imaginary line to which elements of a work of art are referred for measurement or symmetry. 5. *Anatomy* a. The second cervical vertebra. b. Any of various central structures, such as the spinal column or standard abstract lines used as a positional referent. 6. *Botany* The main stem or central part about which plant parts are arranged. 7. One of three mutually perpendicular lines that define the orientation of an aircraft. 8. A line through the optical center of a lens that is perpendicular to both its surfaces. 9. One of three or four imaginary lines used to define the faces of a crystal. 10a. An alliance of powers, such as nations, to promote mutual interests and policies. b. *Axis* The alliance of Germany and Italy in 1936, later including Japan and other nations, that opposed the Allies in World War II. [ME < Lat.]

**axis deer** *n.* A deer (*Axis axis*) of central Asia having a brown coat with white spots. [Lat. *axis*, a spotted Indian quadruped.]

**ax•i•sym•met•ric** (æks'ɪ-sɪ-mɛt'ɪk) also **ax•i•sym•met•ri•cal** (-ɪ-kəl) *adj.* Having symmetry around an axis. —**ax•i•sym•met•ri•cal•ly** *adv.* —**ax•i•sym•me•try** *n.*

**ax•le** (æks'əl) *n.* 1. A supporting shaft or member on or with which a wheel or a set of wheels revolves. 2a. The spindle of an axletree. b. Either end of an axletree. [ME *axel* < ON *axull*.]

**ax•le•tree** (æks'əl-tre) *n.* A crossbar or rod supporting a vehicle, such as a cart, that has terminal spindles on which the wheels revolve. [Blend of ME *axel*, axle; see AXLE, and ME *axtre*, axletree (ax < OE *eax* + *tre*, tree; see TREE).]

**ax•man** (æks'mən) *n.* 1. One who wields an ax. 2. Slang One assigned to perform a task involving ruthless reduction, as of a work force.

**Ax•min•ster** (æks'mɪn'stər) *n.* A carpet with stiff backing and a soft, colorful cut pile usu. arranged in a complex pattern. [After Axminster, a town of southwest England.]

**ax•o•lotl** (æks'ə-lɔt'l) *n.* Any of several salamanders of the genus *Ambystoma*, native to Mexico and the western United States, that become sexually mature without undergoing metamorphosis. [Nahuatl.]

**ax•on** (æks'sɔn) also **ax•one** (-sɔn) *n.* The process of a nerve fiber that conducts impulses away from the body of the nerve cell. [Gk. *axōn*, axis.] —**ax•on•al** (æks'sə-nəl, æks'sɔn'əl) *adj.*

**ax•o•neme** (æks'sə-nɛm) *n.* 1. The bundle of fibrils that constitutes the central core of a cilium or flagellum. 2. The axial thread of a chromosome. [Gk. *axōn*, axis + *nēma*, thread; see (s)nē- in App.] —**ax•o•neme•mal** *adj.*

**ax•o•no•met•ric** (æks'sə-nŏ-mɛt'ɪk) *adj.* Of or relating to a projection in which an object is drawn with its horizontal and vertical axes to scale but with its curved lines and diagonals distorted. [*axonometry*: Gk. *axōn*, axis + *-metry*.]

**ax•o•plasm** (æks'sə-pləz'm) *n.* The cytoplasm of an axon. [Gk. *axōn* + *-plasma*.] —**ax•o•plas•mic** (-pləz'mɪk) *adj.*

**Ax•um** (æks'sŏm) See *Aksum*.

**ay** (ɪ) *interj.* Used before *me* to express distress or regret.

**ay<sup>2</sup>** (ɪ) *n. & adv.* Variant of *aye*<sup>1</sup>.

**ay<sup>3</sup>** (ə) *adv.* Variant of *aye*<sup>2</sup>.

**a•yah** (ə'ya, ə'o, ɪ'o) *n.* A native maid or nursemaid in India.