Thanks, But...

What do you do when your uncle gives you the same mixer as the one gathering dust on your counter, or when you're given a ceramic figure so ugly that you have to stifle a yelp? Issue a warm thank-you - although you'll be mentally crossing your fingers behind your back in a couple of cases.

Awful Gifts:

So how do you react to that jaw-dropper someone saw fit to give you? It's all very well to say, "It's the thought that counts," but sometimes we have to secretly wonder what the giver was thinking. The last thing you want to do in a case like this is hurt the person's feelings. While your thank-you should be gracious, you don't want to lie. Noncommital comments such as "The bowl is so unique" or "You really do have the most original ideas!" may pass as praise for some people, but others may be onto your game. A better tack may be to avoid describing the gift in any way, stressing your appreciation instead: "This is so thoughtful! The generosity of friends like you is something I really appreciate."

Duplicate Gifts:

If someone gives you something you already have or you are given the same two gifts at a party (say, a small kitchen appliance), you must handle the situation with care. If you already have the item and can easily exchange the duplicate, it's alright to do so without the giver's knowledge. Just don't lie if she asks how you liked your new hand blender: "I love those blenders so much I already owned one, and didn't think you'd mind if I exchanged it for the food mill I've always wanted. Thanks for making my life in the kitchen easier!"

If you receive the same two items, it's important not to offend either giver. Putting the duplicate away (assuming you'll eventually use it), is a safe way to go. Or, if one of the givers is a close friend who you're positive will be understanding, tell her directly: "We we given two hand blenders, and would love to exchange one for a coffeemaker. Would you mind terribly if we exchanged yours?"