Functions of Nouns
A Brief Introduction for Students learning German

Examples of Functions

(Follow the word dog in these examples and see how the dog operates differently in each example.)

1. The dog chased the squirrel out of our yard.
   performer, actor, do-er, agent = subject

2. The neighbor girls petted the dog all afternoon.
   acted on, victim, do-ee, patient = direct object

3. The boys tossed a cookie to the dog.
   recipient, getter of a gift, = beneficiary / indirect object

4. (The boys tossed the dog a cookie. - alternate of no. 3)
   (recipient, getter of a gift= beneficiary / indirect object)

5. Jody painted the dog's hut last week.
   owner, possessor of something = possessor

6. Barb shook some flea powder over the dog.
   location, destination = locative / destinative

7. That ball of fur is really the dog.
   re-names, equal to, same as = predicate nominal

8. Suzette walked to the park with the dog.
   together with, companionship = accompaniment

Cases associated with Noun Functions in German

There are more functions of nouns than there are cases in German to represent those functions. Therefore, each case can represent multiple functions.

function	*associated case*
subject	nominative
direct object	accusative
beneficiary	dative
predicate noun	nominative
possessive	genitive
locative	dative
accompaniment	dative
target	accusative

Definitions:

function:
how nouns and pronouns operate in a sentence - the manner in which they perform in the context of a sentence (performer, victim, recipient, etc.)

noun:
a word that names something – can take words such as *the* or *this* – are capitalized in German – can take description using adjectives *(the red book)* – nouns must take function within a sentence

pronoun:
a short word that replaces a noun along with all the other words associated with that noun – *it* replaces the following three words: *the red book*

nominal:
generic term for *nouns and pronouns*

verb:
a word that shows *action, process* or *state of being* – typically takes endings and always agrees grammatically with the subject

agent:
the element in a sentence that performs the action indicated by the verb

subject:
the grammatical element in a sentence to which the verb agrees – the subject is always in the nominative case – in active-voice sentences, the subject and agent are the same

patient:
an element in a sentence that is acted on - the agent acts on the patient via the verb

direct object:
an element in a sentence that is acted on by the subject – the direct object is nearly always in the accusative case – in active-voice sentences, the direct object and patient are the same

beneficiary:
a recipient, typically a person – receives the direct object from the subject through the action of the verb

indirect object:
another name for *beneficiary*

predicate nominal:
an element in a sentence that re-names the subject – an additional word in the sentence that is equal to or becomes the subject

oblique object:
any nominal element that is not the subject, neither direct nor indirect object, not a predicate noun – the object of a preposition is an oblique object