

Nouns

Stereotypically: persons, places, things, ideas.

More clearly: the main bit of information you'd put on a can if you wanted to know about the contents of the can.

Logically: labels for categories (the can as a category)—'cat' doesn't designate any specific cat unless additional strategies are brought into the interaction; 'cat' designates a category, from which ideas and actual cats can be selected by using a variety of strategies.

Upshotly: nouns (and other words) label concepts or ideas, not things-in-the-world; categories are ideas about how reality or ideas are organized, and they can vary enormously across individuals and languages (see handout on reference)

Thousands upon thousands of nouns—but the language economy has many jobs available for them, and noun unemployment remains consistently at 0%.

- Subjects: always come with a verb, in some way—they do or are
 - The sky darkened; the cat ate; that woman is a nurse; the pumpkin is orange
- Direct Objects: affected by verbs, undergo change
 - The cat ate the cheese (the cheese was outside the cat; now it is inside)
- Indirect Objects: without a preposition and on behalf of/for/to
 - I gave my mother chocolate-covered cherries (the candies changed hands, for the benefit of my mother—and me; it never hurts to have a happy mom, but that's socially pragmatic, and a different handout)
- Objects of Prepositions:
 - I gave chocolate-covered cherries to my mother (the candies still changed hands, and my mother is now the object of the preposition 'to')
- Appositives:¹ provide additional information but don't fit some of the usual syntactic slots (they provide information that is positionally coordinated to the main information)
 - My brother, a chemist, is working as a nurse. (appositive is 'chemist')
 - They went their separate ways, the woman to her grave, and the man to his job as grave digger. (appositives are 'woman' and 'man')
 - They went their separate ways, looking for more adventure separately than they could have together (appositive is 'looking', a gerund)
- Predicate Nominatives: provide additional, nominal information after an intransitive verb
 - The lizard is a reptile.
 - That person is a philosopher.

¹ Q: Why haven't I ever heard of appositives before, despite slogging through years of high-level grammatical training?

A: Because they're not usually covered, and even if the textbook presents them, they're usually skipped.

Q: And who actually reads the whole textbook, even if it's not required, or seeks out additional information when the material covered in a textbook doesn't explain everything s/he sees nouns doing?

A: I'm pretty sure the answer is supposed to be no one, but here we are. Don't hate me because I'm thorough.