

We Put the “Fun” in Function

A Function is easier to illustrate than define.

The function of an apple peeler is to peel apples.



The function of a car wash is to wash cars.



The function of a hair dryer is to dry hair.

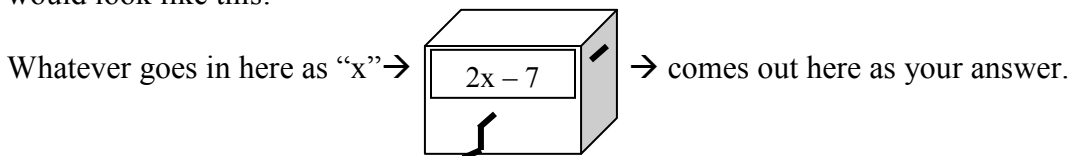


Simple enough, right? Then in Algebra, we tell students that “A function is a **relation** from a domain set to a range set, where each element of the domain set is related to exactly one element of the range set.”

Huh?

Just picture a function as being a box-like machine with a crank on the side and a label above the crank to tell you what it does (like “Car Wash”).

Given the function $f(x) = 2x - 7$ (That’s the same as $y = 2x - 7$, but in “function” form.) It would look like this:



So:	1	becomes	-5, and
	2		-3, and
	3		-1, and
	-6		-19, and
	8		9, and so on.

If all functions are drawn as machines such as this, students see that when they solve a function, they will put values into the function, then do whatever is needed, then get a result out. The input is your “x” and the result is your “f(x)” or “y.” Together, they make an ordered pair which you can graph.

Whenever we solve a function, our input values replace the x (or other variable) in the algebraic expression (which we have written on our box). Then we do the math and get our result (answer.) If we start with a function, each input (x) produces only one output.

Functions are a whole lot more fun when we understand them. If I had to explain the word “function” in plain English, I would ask, “What does it do?”

What is the function of an algebra teacher?