

Rules are rules are rules. Are rules?

This is a fire drill. Please walk quietly and calmly to the nearest exit.

Yes, this is a fire drill. We are walking to the nearest exit; the students are in high spirits, the staff unfazed. We march out and without alarm—those are the rules.

But this is a fire *drill*.

If the tone of the announcement during a raging fire matched the students' sentiment, it would likely go along the lines of: *Get out as fast as you can! Trample as many people as necessary to get out! Use the windows or kick down the doors. There's a FIRE and you're gonna survive it, dammit!*

Fact 1: Rules are made for *smart* people. People who know what is best for their own good.

But it would seem that the makers of such rules have portentous consequences and impractical solutions in mind. Who of us, no matter how normal or intelligent, truly follows all the rules that pass by us? It is understandable that the procedure for a fire drill is meant to prevent stampeding and collateral damage; however, no student with a inferno on his or her heels will walk quietly and calmly out of the building at the expense of his or her life for the benefit of others. Likewise, the most safety-conscious will someday break the speed limit or jaywalk or take a call while driving. As for me, against Goldstein's will and the rules in the Learning Commons, I've played computer games (but only once) and broken the quiet with a chatty crowd of chemistry classmates cramming for a test and forgotten to sign in or out.

Can one be blamed for such usually undisruptive, usually productive disobedience? Yes.

Fact 2: Rules should not be considered guidelines that can be broken out of convenience. Otherwise they would be denominated "guidelines."

Though a school fire would be localized and inconsequential, a global situation would be catastrophic and uncontrolled. In the case of a false positive of an alien signal in 1997, the news triggered a global chaos in which the researchers hastily made an attempt to publish the rumors without boiling it down to hard evidence, thus breaking SETI's (Search for ExtraTerrestrial Intelligence) protocol for such occurrences. Had it not been for the quick discovery of the source of the signal—a NASA satellite—the ensuing conspiracies and chaos may well have consumed the globe. And as an astronomer at SETI noted, if the rules were broken so easily then, "there's no hope that if a signal were detected today you'd be able to confirm it first and *then* announce it. Not in the age of social media."

Fact 3: Some rules are meant to be broken. *Artfully*. Not only in English class.

Although it seems to contradict all that has been stated and all that makes sense about rules, it is sometimes desirable to break the rules. Grammatical rules are some of them. The rule that all rules are rules are another. And then, in all paramount cases of global change in history, some sort of illegal boycott or violence or assassination has been committed.

Another interesting case of this would be the precedence of conflicting laws. National law may declare the smoking of marijuana illegal, but individual states may assert its legality, citing its economic benefit and its freedom for the individual. It is also interesting that while murder is an international crime, the global community has deemed death on the battlefield of clearly-defined nemeses as lawful. In either situation, a subsequent rule naming an inconsistency or deficiency in a previous law brings to question the immutability of true law. Which brings up the last point.

Fact 4: Rules are dynamic.

This is true even in science, which is perceived as set-in-stone. No scientific theory or law can be considered "proven," because true science has no such concept. Rather, everything is to be evidenced as a potential truth; if it gets refuted by subsequent findings, then it is replaced. As science is the language of Nature, Man should follow its example: everything is falsifiable.

When intuition and education plays to the side of the rule, it should be followed. But when it is really necessary to play the role of the revolutionary—that is, when there is a clearly discernible flaw or when it can be advantageous and tactical to deliberately do so—the lines are arbitrary for a reason.

Rules are rules are rules. It's up to oneself to follow them.