How to Know the Difference between RULES and PROCEDURES

There is a BIG difference between RULES and PROCEDURES!

Too often I see teachers making the FATAL error of turning some procedures into rules and regretting it all year long! To be truthful, I made this error many times in my teaching career and lived to regret it every time! Each year I tried to come up with a better set of RULES!! I finally got it figured out so I could live with them the entire school year without kicking myself.

The main difference is this:

Rules MUST be responded to with a CONSEQUENCE. They must be “punished,” in a sense.

Procedures need to be RETRAINED! They never need to be “punished!”

This is why "they" tell you to have only four or five RULES. And a set of standard responses or consequences.

You need THE BIGGIES to be the RULES. The ones where, if broken, the rhythm of the classroom, the purpose for you all being there is impeded. The ones where you have a sense that the student is defying authority. In other words, YOU CAN’T TEACH AND THEY CAN’T LEARN!

Marcia's Science Teaching Ideas was founded by Marcia Krech, a retired Earth Science Teacher from Missouri, who believes passionately in passing on what she knows about good science teaching. I encourage teachers to use the active learning model including team games and foldables which puts the student to work and assigns the teacher the role of facilitator.

Email me with questions!
How to Know the Difference between RULES and PROCEDURES

THE BIGGIES:
So what are the BIGGIES? After many years of trial and error and many regrets, I finally decided for myself there really are only a few that stop you from teaching and students from learning.

Here are the CLASSROOM RULES I would recommend for a Middle School classroom:

1. Do not use vulgar language.
2. Listen when the teacher is talking.
3. Respect the rights and property of others.
4. No personal grooming in class.

These RULES worked for me and I believe they would work for you, too! These RULES cover the basics, where you can make a case-by-case decision: Is this a rule or not? Does this behavior stop the teaching and learning process from happening in my classroom. Do I need to apply a consequence?

BY THE WAY: The easiest First Consequence, is to say, "Rule Four, Janie!" She will know you've seen her with that mirror and lipstick. And usually stop!

Or if someone is constantly whispering while you are talking, "Rule Two, Sam!" He has a chance to stop without a consequence, but of course, you follow through if he continues to whisper!

Procedures are the classroom structure you use to ensure that teaching and learning moves along nicely. They are things like how to line up, how to pass papers in, what you are supposed to be doing when you enter the room, etc. If the class lines up noisily, you just say, "I'm sorry, did we all forget how to line up? Please sit down while we go over that Procedure! Then you project a clever, cutey image with type and discuss it and then have them try again.

YOU NEVER PUNISH A PROCEDURE! YOU RETRAIN!!

I urge all teachers to be very sure of the RULES you want to enforce. Are you sure you want to punish for every tardy? (The school probably already has one for this! Don't duplicate!) Are you sure you want a Be Ready with Book Open type of rule? This is more a Procedure and easily retrainable! Train your students from the very first minute of the very first class period! I train on the first day of school to walk in quietly, pick up the papers near the door on the Pick-Up Table, sit down, and quietly begin the Bellwork. IF THEY DON'T, I politely ask them to go back to the door and try again. In severe cases, I don't allow them to come in the room at all on the first day of school, but make them sit on a chair outside the door of my classroom. I have routines for just about EVERYTHING. And I consistently retrain my students if they "forget."

ABSOLUTELY NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THIS!! NOT EVEN YOUR ACTUAL SUBJECT MATERIAL!!!