

The Unwritten Rules of Yoga

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There are some sports and institutions that have rules that everyone knows about but are not written down in any official rule book. These are called the "unwritten rules" and are expected to be followed just like the official rules. For instance, in the sport of baseball there are many unwritten rules. Never throw the bat at the pitcher even if he just hit you with a 100 mile an hour fast ball. Never run over the pitcher's mound when returning to the dugout. Never break up a "no hitter" by bunting.

Yoga too has many unwritten rules that are seldom spoken of publicly but everyone should know about them. These unwritten rules help yoga to be a smooth and enjoyable experience for everyone. Here are some of the unwritten rules of yoga.

- Yoga was the original "safe space." The yoga class is a place where people can come to forget about the stress and the conflicts of their world. It is a place designed to quiet the mind, expand the body and allow one's emotions to flow. In order to keep this atmosphere intact it is important to lower your voice and speak softly, keep your dramatic conversations under wrap and refrain from gossip or politics.**
- Arrive on time. When you make something important you give it the proper time and space allotments. There is nothing more distracting than students who regularly arrive late for class. Teachers need to move students around to accommodate those arriving late and the class flow is halted in the meantime. Plan on traffic being heavy on your commute and arrive early. Stop making excuses about why you are always late.**
- You do not own a space. Many students believe that they own a certain space on the floor and each time they come to class that space belongs to them. If someone else unknowingly takes their space they are frazzled and even possessive of the spot on the floor. Do not practice territorialism and be open to moving around from place to place. Practice open mindedness as the teacher will often have to move you around to accommodate others.**
- Stay for the entire class. Some people leave before *Shavasana* and miss the relaxation experience that they need the most. If you do need to leave early make sure that you leave before *Shavasana* and not during *Shavasana* so that other students will not be disturbed.**

- **Avoid stepping on someone else's mat. Yoga mats are like tooth brushes; they are sacred and you would not want to share one with someone else. Who knows what kind of germs are living on the bottoms of your feet that might spread to someone else's mat. Who knows what kind of germs are living on others' mats that might spread onto your feet. This sacred space is where you will spend a good deal of time, like an office chair or car seat. Honor and respect it. Your yoga mat is not a walkway or an elevator.**
- **Avoid perspiring on some else's mat. Once again, some people are more germ phobic than others. Try to keep your river of sweat over your mat and not let it cascade onto someone else's mat. If you perspire heavily than bring extra towels and avoid a river of sweat from traveling outside your little kingdom.**
- **Do not rush into a room as if the Red Sea had just parted and if you did not escape quickly you would be drowned. Allow those in the class before you to have ample time to collect their belongings before you stampede in. People leaving might be in a serene state and the last thing they need is a stampede of over zealous students fighting to get their spot. After all, yoga should not be like Wal-Mart on Black Friday where frantic parents rush into the store to grab their favorite consumer items at deep discounts.**
- **You are allowed to make new friends. Some people might spend years practicing next to the same person and not even know their names. How rude might that be? Introduce yourself to your neighbor when you first arrive. Who knows, it might become a lifetime friendship.**
- **Leave the gum chewing behind. Yoga class is not an assembly line at a chocolate factory. While you might feel normal while chewing gum others might feel irritated listening to the snapping of your jaw. Learn to breathe efficiently through your nose. Gum chewing might make breathing difficult. Gum chewing is often a sign of nervousness. Learn to relax through yoga.**
- **Come to class "scent-neutral". Keep all of the perfumes and wild scents at home. Even leave off the body washes as they too can create many offensive smells. Some students have allergies and you are certainly doing them no favors by wearing perfumes or strong scents.**

- **No animals. Leave your dog at home. Students have brought their dogs in class or tied them up outside only to whine throughout the entire class. Small dogs have even been discovered hiding in someone's purse. Yoga is not the time to have a family reunion with your animals.**
- **Wash your yoga mat regularly. Sweat and germs collect on your mat after each yoga session. Some mats are so full of germs and bacteria that they would qualify as a science experiment. Keep your mat clean to ensure your safety as well as others. Imagine not washing your toothbrush after each use.**
- **Roll your mat out quietly when first arriving to class. You are not a Turkish rug salesman trying to display a number of carpets for sale in as quickly a time period as possible. Have a ritual of slowly opening up your mat and don't treat it like your lawn mower or your vacuum.**
- ***Starbucks* is for after class and not during class. If you need to drink liquids during class make sure that it is just plain water. Fancy prepared beverages should wait until class is over.**
- **Turn your phone off and leave it off. No text messaging in the corner of the room. No sneaking out to answer a call in the middle of class. If you cannot be undisturbed for an hour or so then maybe you should stay home. Treat the yoga room as a sanctuary and not as a second office.**
- **Props are your friend. Use them. A prop is a blanket, bolster, strap, towel, block or any other yoga accessory. A prop is a bridge that helps you get from the place where you are to the place where you are trying to get to. Don't feel as if you are beyond props or you do not require any help. This is like saying that you can live a solitary life and never require assistance from anyone else.**
- **Ask for help. A simple conversation with an instructor will help. If you have questions about a pose or an injury that you are dealing with then speak with the instructor about how he or she can guide you. Yoga teachers do not read minds so ask them when you might have a question or require help.**
- **Do not fall on anyone else. Have a clear sense of your abilities and the space around you. If you fall while pushing yourself you might not just injure yourself but several others as well. Do not**

practice reckless yoga. This is not a skateboard park and you are not Tony Hawk (skateboard champion).

- **Be quiet while waiting in hallways outside of yoga rooms. Sound travels and doors do not become invisible force-fields that block noise. A class full of tranquil students reclining in *Shavasana* do not want to hear your cackling and loud voices. Be respectful.**
- **Enter and leave the yoga studio with reverence and grace. There is nothing more irritating than a stressed out yoga student running into class with a cell phone in one ear and an energy drink in the other hand. This student rushes into class like a bull in a China shop. She is the first one to leave as well, pushing and hurrying to get out to her next task at hand. Yoga is not just another workout; it is a way to transform the mind. Treat it as such.**
- **Inversions (where the head is lower than the heart) are not for everyone. In fact, research shows that there is very little benefit to many of the inversions that have been touted for so many years by the yoga community (i.e. headstand, shoulder stand. See article by Jon Burras: <http://jonburras.com/pdfs/EIGHT-MYTHS-OF-INVERSIONS-2017.pdf>) Respect any health issue (like high blood pressure, history of heart disease or stroke) before engaging in an inversion.**
- **This is not sixth grade. You are not the room temperature monitor and it is not your job to adjust the temperature based on your needs. Each teacher will adjust the temperature to where he likes it. If the room is too warm then do not take that class again. If there is a fan blowing on you then move to a different corner of the room. If you have specific health issues (panic attacks, hot flashes etc.) that require more air flow then speak with the instructor to see if there is a way to accommodate you like placing you near the door or a crack in a window. One person likes it hot and another likes it cold. A teacher is in an impossible situation trying to please everyone. It is not up to you to touch the thermostat and change the room temperature or to turn a fan off or on.**
- **If you are sick then stay home. Your germs will tend to infect everyone around you. You are doing no one any good if you come to class sick. If you start to cough during *Shavasana* then leave. What could be more annoying than an entire class trying to relax when someone starts to cough and continues to do so**

for five to ten minutes. Have the courage to leave the room until your coughing attack subsides.

- **Sometimes it takes more courage to do less than to do more. Resting is allowed. Taking breaks is allowed. Failure is always an option. Pushing too hard often leads to injuries and fatigue. Take an inventory of where you are.**
- **Check in with the front desk before entering class. Yoga is still a business and you still must be charged for your participation. Many times students will fly past the front desk and assume that they are seen and checked off. Make sure the staff knows that you are in attendance.**

Resources

Inversions:

<http://jonburras.com/pdfs/EIGHT-MYTHS-OF-INVERSIONS-2017.pdf>

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