

# The Unwritten Rule Of Instagram

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5-7 minutes

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Every social app has its own culture that goes beyond the buttons and features of the app itself. It may only permeate certain corners of the community, or affect different groups in different ways, but it's there. This etiquette wasn't developed by the app makers, but by the people who obsessively use these services.

There's something about how people use Instagram that I wanted to do a little digging on. It's an unwritten rule, but openly known among high school and college-aged kids. Do you know what it is?

## Rule #1: One Photo Per Day

You're probably thinking of the people you follow on Instagram, and whether they adhere to the rule. Business accounts, celebrities, and friends and family who are 22+ likely don't. In the case of business accounts, they post way more than one photo per day, while "older" friends likely post fewer than one per day. Guys are also less likely to post than girls — everyone uses it, but it's really a female-dominated community.

Instagram has become the go-to app for kids between the ages of 14–22. I work part-time with children, and I know that middle school students use the app, but not with the ferocity of high school and college kids. Older millennials (23–30) use Instagram, but generally balance their time a little more between other social media apps.

Snapchat is massive and still growing at an incredible rate among the Instagram demographic, but it's the less public option. Yes, there are Stories that allow anyone who follows you to see what you're up to, but there are no metrics for them to look at — they can't see how many likes you've gotten, there are no comments, they can't see who follows you, etc. In fact, that's a big reason why Snapchat is growing — there's simply less pressure.

But that pressure is also why kids so obsessively monitor Instagram.

Anyway, I wanted to know if this rule really existed, so I talked to a handful of people I know within that Instagram target demographic. **Not only does the one-post-per-day rule exist, but there are a number of other weird quirks regarding how kids use Instagram.**

## **Rule #2: Post at the Perfect Time**

“[Kids] post at prime times during the day to get the most likes, and if you don’t get enough fast enough, you delete it and post it later.”

“People tend to post pictures around the same time, 8–10 pm, because that is the ideal time period for getting the most likes because people are usually unwinding and checking their phones.”

“My sophomore year in high school, I was told, ‘the prime time to post on Instagram is between 8:30–10:00. Because it’s when people are done with sports, finished dinner, and are in bed. You’ll get more likes this way.’”

## **Rule #3: Likes or Die**

“If you only put one photo out, people are more inclined to like just that one. If you put 2 or 3 out, people are more likely to like the first one they see, but not the rest of them. Then you don’t get many likes on the other one and look ‘uncool.’”

“Another unspoken rule of Instagram is liking [others’] pictures back to do each other a favor.”

“[Some kids] separate their posts out, and even mark when to post on their calendars, and what times of the day to post.”

“If you post two pictures in a short time window, people may not like either of them out of annoyance, unfollow you, or at the very least judge you a little bit.”

“You’re only supposed to share the most exciting thing of the day so that you maximize your likes.”

## **Rule #4: Choose the Right Photo**

“Some girls even have a group chat named, ‘Should I Post this on Insta’ and everything that they talk about is what selfie, lighting, filter, etc. to use. They also debate when people post too much and what they’re posting too much of.”

“I’ve had people ask me ‘why do you double post, delete it, you look like you’re only looking for attention.’ But I want my Instagram to reflect who I am. To me your social media is about you, and how you celebrate yourself.”

“Instagram is to show off good moments in your day or things you are proud of. It’s about making sure people are aware of you and your interests/life/talents.”

“A lesser output of higher quality pictures is the best way to go with Instagram, as it increases the quality of your account and portrayal of your own life.”

We evaluate apps by their features, their financial success, and how many and how often people use them. As social media continues to mature (Facebook came out almost 12 years ago,) I think it’ll be important to also consider the cultural dynamics within social apps, and how they affect the behavior of those that use them.

While it probably seems like a toy to most of us, it’s clear that in the social lives of high school and college students, Instagram is serious business.

Studies tend to group “social media” into a single category, but as we spend more and more time on these apps, we should have more granular studies about how these services are affecting us. While they may share similarities, the way we use them can vary dramatically from app to app. It would be interesting to see how, for example, 15 minutes on Vine makes us feel, versus 15 minutes on Snapchat.

In the mean time, check out your Instagram feed tonight, and see who’s following the unwritten rule, posting between 8:00 and 10:00 PM. And remember to throw them a like — they may need it, and who knows — you may get one back.