



Work to Rule Explainer

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Working to Rule

A rank-and-file explainer for the post-TRO phase of the spring 2024 strike

“Work to rule” is a common and effective on-the-job action in which employees do exactly what is stated in the written rules, procedures, and the contract—but nothing more—to put pressure on their employer. You might also think about it as malicious compliance or “quiet quitting.” In our first assembly since the temporary restraining order (TRO) was issued, we democratically determined as a rank-and-file caucus that we will, at minimum, work to rule for this post-TRO phase of the strike, and will organize our coworkers to do the same.

The basic idea is that we follow all official working rules, expectations, and hours in order to reduce our efficiency and delay for as long as possible—ideally past the June 24 grading deadline or the end of our work appointments—submitting any grades or research deliverables. If you’re working to rule, you can communicate with your supervisor as usual (e.g., you can let them know you’re doing your best but you have a lot to get through and it might take a while, or let them know you’re taking paid leave). But because the TRO explicitly prohibits labor withholding and picketing, [we](#)



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- Only working for your contracted hours (generally 20 hours/week for TAs, max 40 hours a week), and not a moment more
- Working very slowly and carefully, focusing on one email and/or one assignment
- Taking the time you need to figure out the best way to respond to an email
- Taking your contractually guaranteed leave time (if you have some you can spare), particularly on days with scheduled meetings or lab presentations
- Booking up your calendar so you can't be reserved for appointments
- Doing all of the readings and watching all of the lectures you missed since the strike started—maybe more than once, just to be sure you caught everything
- Providing extensive feedback on student papers or exams
- If you have to meet with your PI, only presenting the bare minimum amount of data to satisfy them
- Being really bad at experiments. Doing low-stakes experiments that don't waste precious materials and doing them poorly. Shit happens!
- "Working" from home if your lab is remote or if no one will notice
- Scheduling use of communal lab equipment (eg. confocal microscope) or



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- Holding off on conducting experiments, or, if your PI is not supportive, collecting necessary data but waiting or slowly starting to analyze or organize results
- Prioritizing taking care of animals/cell lines/etc.
- Only doing minor or grammatical edits on grants or papers, or spending time searching for future grants or conferences to apply to
- Telling your supervisor you need to catch up on literature, spending time organizing Mendeley/Zotero and downloading articles
- Taking a personal enrichment data analysis course, eg. Python, MATLAB, C++ (Coursera and some universities have free options)
- Reading very long data sheets for electronic components very slowly
- Spending a lot of time researching error messages in code or firmware
- Keeping a very clean lab space! Look visible while not doing much
- Building new lab furniture, or making a very tidy, detailed lab notebook

There's so much to catch up on from the past few weeks and so little paid time to do it—we couldn't possibly finish everything before our appointments are up!



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