When there is a dispute as to what a statute means, the courts step in and interpret the meaning. A published decision an Appellate Court, or Supreme Court, with an interpretation of a statute, is controlling on lower courts, unless or until, the Legislature amends the statute, or a higher court overturns the lower court's interpretation, or another appellate court in another district issues a contrary, published opinion.

Because there have been disputes over the meaning of statutes since written law was invented, the courts have developed rules for "Statutory Construction" (aka rules for how to analyze and interpret statutes).

Adjudicatory bodies of administrative agencies must interpret statutes pursuant to the rules of statutory construction. Their interpretations are reviewable by courts of law, under the same rules of statutory construction which constrain and guide courts of law.

**General Rules (32 of a hundred rules)**

1. When the language is clear, the court should follow its plain meaning, except in the case of uncertainty, or if necessary to avoid absurd results.¹

2. The literal meaning of the statute may be disregarded to avoid absurd results or to give effect to manifest purposes that, in light of the statute's legislative history, appear from its provisions considered as a whole.²
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Statutory terms should be construed in accordance with the usual or ordinary meaning of the words used.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Significance should be attributed to every word and phrase of a statute, and a construction making some words surplusage should be avoided.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>A statute is to be taken and considered as a whole, so that seeming inconsistencies are reconciled and that it is construed to give force and effect to all its provisions.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td><em>Ejusdem Generis</em>: where general words follow an enumeration of persons or things, having a specific or particular meaning, those general words are to be construed to apply only to persons or things of the same general kind or class as those specifically mentioned.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>The enumeration of things coming within a statute will preclude the inclusion by implication of other things.</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>This construction is based on an application of the rule of construction referred to as the rule of last antecedent, where &quot;relative and qualifying words, phrases, and clauses are to be applied to the words or phrases immediately preceding and are not to be construed as extending to or including others more remote.&quot; The rule of last antecedent is usually applied when from the punctuation of the sentence in question some doubt arises as to whether a modifying phrase is applicable only to the immediately preceding words, e.g. in the absence of a comma separating those words and the modifying phrase. In the absence of the above, the ordinary rules of grammar should be followed if they do not lead to absurdity.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>The numbering of sections in statutes is a purely artificial and unessential arrangement resorted to for purposes of convenience only, and should not be allowed to hinder the correct construction.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>A provision of codified law will yield to a provision of general law subsequently passed relating to the same subject when they are necessarily in conflict.</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>In construing a statute, the courts may consider the consequences that may flow from a particular interpretation. They will construe the statute with a view to promoting rather than to defeating its general purpose and the policy behind it.</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Where a statute is susceptible to two constructions, the one that leads to the more reasonable result will be followed.</td>
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13. The courts will not ascribe absurd consequences to a statute when it is susceptible to another, more logical construction.\textsuperscript{15}

14. It is a fundamental rule of statutory construction that, unless the Legislature clearly expresses its intent to the contrary, a statute will be construed to operate prospectively and not retroactively.\textsuperscript{16}

15. A particular or specific provision will take precedence over a conflicting general provision (except where the general statute is enacted after the specific statute and repeals it by implication).\textsuperscript{17}

16. Exceptions to a statute are to be narrowly construed.\textsuperscript{18}

17. A statute is to be construed so as to harmonize its various parts within the legislative purpose of the statute as a whole.\textsuperscript{19}

18. A statute should be interpreted with reference to the system of law of which it is a part.\textsuperscript{20}

19. A statute should be construed so as to harmonize, if possible, with other laws relating to the same subject.\textsuperscript{21}

20. Specific Terms:\textsuperscript{22}  \textsuperscript{23}
   
   "includes" is a word of enlargement.
   "may" is purely permissive
   "notwithstanding" means 'without prevention' or obstruction from, or by, or "in spite of"
   "Notwithstanding any other provision of law" makes that statute sui generis (controlling over both statutory and decisional law).
   "Or" indicates an alternative, but sometimes has the same meaning as "and"

21. Both the legislative history of a statute and the wider historical circumstances of its enactment may be considered in ascertaining legislative intent. Extrinsic evidence is not controlling, however, since legislative intent must, at the last analysis, be derived from the language of the statute.\textsuperscript{24}

22. The construction of a statute by the officials charged with its administration generally will be given great weight, because their opinion may be relevant and material evidence of the probable general understanding of the times and of the opinions of the persons who probably were active in the drafting of the statute.\textsuperscript{25}
23. Public officials are compelled to obey the law.\(^{26}\)

24. Two different governmental entities may not exercise the same power for the same purpose within the same territory.\(^{27}\)

25. The Legislature's declaration of statutory purpose is not controlling; the court is required to inquire into the real, rather than ostensible, purpose of a statute in determining its scope and effect.\(^{28}\)

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3. People ex rel. Younger v. Superior Court, 16 Cal. 3d 30, 43; Moyer v. Workmen's Comp. Appeals Bd., 10 Cal. 3d 222, 230; Estate of Richartz, 45 Cal. 2d 292, 294.
8. Board of Port Commissioners of the City of Oakland v. Williams, 9 Cal. 2d 381.389.
16. In Re Estrada, 63 Cal. 2d 740, 746.
20. People v. Comingore, 20 Cal. 3d 142, 147.
26 Wirin v. Parker, 48 Cal. 2d 890, 894.