

# Guide to Flag Ceremonies

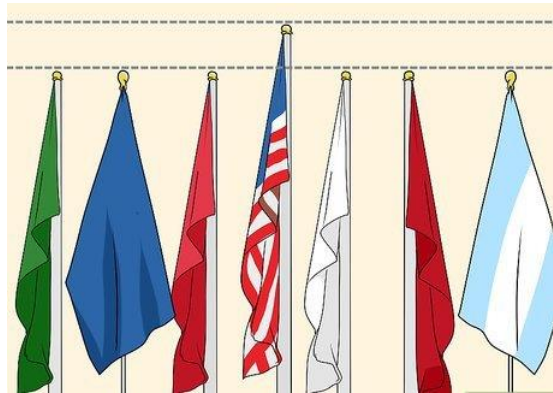
**girl scouts**   
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## Proper American Flag Etiquette

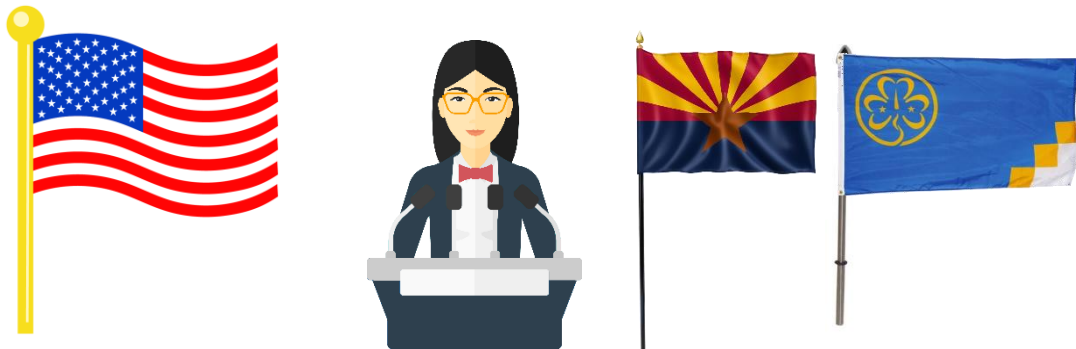
Display and handling of the American flag is governed by law known as the United States Flag Code. You can find the full US Flag Code here: <https://uscode.house.gov/>

Below are rules from the Flag Code that Girl Scouts should be cognizant of when performing flag ceremonies or handling the flag.

- The American flag must be placed in the center and higher up when it is displayed in a group of flags.



- If flags are positioned to either side of a stage or speaker, the American flag should always be on its own right (the far left of the audience).



- The flag should be displayed from sunrise to sunset when outdoors, and only displayed at night if properly illuminated.
- The flag should be higher than all other flags when being carried and when posted in a flag stand. Other flags being carried in a Color Guard procession should be tilted forward to remain lower than the American flag. The American flag should remain upright.

- The flag is to be hoisted briskly and lowered slowly with dignity.
  - If the flag is to be raised at half-mast, it should be raised to the top of the flagpole before lowering to half-mast.
  - If the flag is to be lowered from half-mast, it should be raised to the top of the flagpole again before completely lowering.
- The flag should never be allowed to touch anything beneath it, including the ground, floor, water, or a base.
- The flag should never be displayed with the union (the blue field of stars) facing down, unless in extreme cases of distress.
- The flag should never be carried flat or horizontally and should always be aloft and free (unless folded properly).
- Never use the flag as a cover, place anything on top of it, use it as part of merchandise or clothing (except as official patches or pins), or modify the flag in any way.
- When carried in a procession with other flags, the American flag should be on the right of the marching order. If in a horizontal line, the flag must be in the front and center. The American flag should always be first in a single-file line.
- If the flag is displayed in a building or window, the union (blue field) should be on the flag's own right – the observer's left when looking in from the outside. This is true whether the flag is hung vertically or horizontally.



- Any American Flag that is damaged or dirty should not be displayed. Damaged flags should be retired in a formal Flag Retirement Ceremony.

## Folding the American Flag

Special care should be taken that no part of the flag touches the ground. The flag is carefully folded into the shape of a tri-cornered hat, emblematic of the hats worn by colonial soldiers during the war for independence. In the folding, the red and white stripes are wrapped into the blue, as the light of day vanishes into the darkness of night.



1. To properly fold the flag, begin by holding it waist high with another person (or persons) so that its surface is parallel to the ground.



2. Fold the lower half of the stripes section lengthwise over the field of stars, holding the short edges of the flag securely.



3. Fold the flag again lengthwise with the blue field on the outside.



4. Make a triangular fold by bringing the striped corner of the folded edge to meet the open edge of the flag.



5. Turn the outer point or end point inward, parallel to the open edge, to form a second triangle.



6. The triangular folding is continued until the entire length of the flag is folded in this manner.



7. When the flag is completely folded, tuck any trim inside of the open edge of the blue field. Only a triangular blue field of stars should be visible.



8. The Flag Bearer carries the flag from the front and center (or on the Color Guard's right) with the point forward away from the carrier's body. Flag Bearer's may also carry the flag held tight to their chest, over their heart, with the point upward.

# Flag Ceremony

A flag ceremony is a respectful, solemn occurrence that is often used to open and close events. Flag ceremonies may take place in meeting rooms, outdoor settings, large auditoriums, on stage, or in many other formats. All flag ceremonies share one thing – respect for the flag.

Flag ceremonies are perfect opportunities for girls of all ages to practice leadership and ceremony. Those holding a flag ceremony should consider the following questions:

- Who will carry the flag (Color Bearer or Flag Bearer)?
- Who will be the Color Guards?
- Who will give the directions for the ceremony (Caller, Announcer, Girl Scout in Charge)?
- Will a song, poem, or quotation be included?
- After the Pledge of Allegiance, will the Girl Scout Promise and Law be said?
- In what order will the parts of the ceremony take place?
- When will the group practice?
- Where will the flags be placed (see above guidelines)?

Some common terms for flag ceremonies are:

- Color Bearer or Flag Bearer – the person who carries the flag. There is one Color Bearer for each flag used in the ceremony.
- Color Guard – a team that guards the flags. Any even number of guards may be used to encourage participation in the ceremony, but usually four or six girls are sufficient.
- Caller or Girl Scout in Charge – a designated Girl Scout who announces or calls each part of the ceremony.

Some other considerations for flag ceremonies include:

- Silence should be maintained throughout the entire presentation except for the commands given by the Caller and any joint recitations.
- Humor or improvisation should be avoided during a proper flag ceremony.
- Never fasten or tie back the American flag, always allow it to fly free.
- Accidents happen – if the American flag does touch the ground, the American Legion states it does not need to be retired. Flags can be cleaned and still used as long as they are not torn or tattered.

# Flag Ceremony Commands

Flag ceremony commands may be simplified or added to as needed. There are no universal rules for a flag ceremony beyond it being performed with respect and dignity. Below are some common commands for the Caller to give during the ceremony.

## Opening Ceremony

Girl Scouts Attention  
Color Guard Attention  
Color Guard Advance  
Color Guard Post the Colors  
Color Guard Salute the Colors  
Please join me in the Pledge of Allegiance  
Please join me in the Girl Scout Promise/Law  
Color Guard Dismissed  
Girl Scouts Dismissed

## Closing Ceremony

Girl Scouts Attention  
Color Guard Attention  
Color Guard Advance  
Color Guard Salute the Colors  
Color Guard Retire the Colors  
Color Guard Dismissed  
Girl Scouts Dismissed

It is appropriate for the Master of Ceremonies or the Caller to ask the audience to stand for the presentation or retiring of the colors before the ceremony begins. After calling attention, be sure to wait until the audience is quiet before continuing with the ceremony. Commands may be added, modified, or dropped to make the ceremony work best for you. Additionally, closing songs such as "Taps" may be added during the Color Guard advancement or the retiring of the colors when desired.

Below are some optional commands for more complex or formal ceremonies, if desired:

Color Guard Halt  
Color Guard Prepare to Post the Colors  
Color Guard Honor Your Flag (alternative to Salute the Colors)

Color Guard Reassemble  
Color Guard About Face  
Color Guard Retreat

## Color Guard Notes

- When performing a flag ceremony on an outside flag pole:
  - At least two Color Guards should work to attach/detach the flag to the halyards (connectors that tie to the rope used to hoist the flag) while ensuring the flag does not touch the ground.
  - At least one Color Guard should hold the tail edge of the flag as it is unfolded and should continue holding it until the flag is hoisted clear of her grasp.
  - As each Color Guard completes their task, they should stand quietly at attention, but not salute until commanded to do so.
- Members of the Color Guard stand quietly at attention when they are not actively preparing for raising or lowering of the flag. They do not say the Pledge of Allegiance, Girl Scout Promise or Law, or sing any songs. They may give a brief salute in unison if commanded by the Caller.
- If members of the color guard wear red sashes (optional) the Flag Bearer(s) wear the sash over the right shoulder and tied in a square knot at the waist on the left side. The Guards and Caller may wear red sashes tied around the waist, with a square knot on the left side.
- At the flag ceremony, the Flag Bearer enters and exits first, followed by the Guards.
- The entire color guard is responsible for unfolding and folding the flag. All should be involved in the folding/unfolding or holding their arms under the center of the flag to ensure it does not droop. Once they are no longer needed, they should step back at attention.
- When posting flags inside in flag stands, the American flag should always be posted first and removed from the flag stand last.

# Flag Retirement

A flag must be permanently retired when it is torn, tattered, or faded.

*“The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning.” US Flag Code, Section 4(k)*

It is also permissible to bury a flag. You may modify this ceremony for a flag burial, placing the field and stripes in a box to be buried or directly into the ground.

**\*\*Polyester flags should not be burned as they can emit toxic fumes\*\***

Note - For retirement ceremonies with burning of the flag, some prefer that a fire is used that has not had any cooking (like s'mores) performed in that firepit. Official flag code does not have this restriction, but the flag retirement ceremony should be a distinct part of any fire program, with no other activity overlapping. If a fire pit is used for a flag retirement as well as any food, be sure any residue from cooking is completely burned before proceeding with the flag ceremony or that the flag is completely burned and ashes and gromets removed before proceeding with any food.

## BEFORE FLAG RETIREMENT:

A fire should be safely built in a grill or fire pit; it must be burning strongly when the ceremony begins. Have your water buckets and a shovel or rake nearby. (Or, if the flag is being buried, have a hole dug in an appropriate place – one that will not be walked over, for example.) A tree, shrub or flowers may be planted over the spot where the flag or the flag's ashes are buried.

If the ceremony is being held in a public area, be sure you have all the necessary permissions. Girl Scouts should be in official uniforms.

## AFTER FLAG RETIREMENT:

Clear out the ashes from the flag retirement and dispose of properly. This may include passing out ashes in the Girl Scout tradition. Any metal gromets from the burned flags should be collected and may be presented to a special guest (e.g. Camp Director, Camp Manager, participants of the ceremony, etc.)

**Remember** – This is just one example of a Flag Retirement Ceremony. The content may be changed, but it should always be a respectful ceremony that honors the separate parts of the flag.



# Flag Retirement Ceremony

Girl Scouts and guests stand quietly in a horseshoe formation, facing the fire. (Have chairs available for those unable to stand.)

CALLER: "Color Guard, advance." (Other commands may be included from a traditional flag ceremony as desired).

If the flag is being flown on an outdoor pole or carried on a flag staff, the Color Guard should present the colors and lead the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

If the flag is folded, the Color Guard simply faces the audience.

CALLER: "Our flag has been honored and is no longer a fitting emblem to display, so we are respectfully burning it."

Lower the colors or unfold the flag.

Cut off stripes one at a time, saying one statement with each stripe.

FIRST STRIPE: The 13 stripes stand for the original 13 colonies which are: Massachusetts, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, Georgia, and New Jersey.

SECOND STRIPE: The white stands for purity

THIRD STRIPE: The red stands for courage

FOURTH STRIPE: "Never underestimate the power of dreams and the influence of the human spirit. We are all the same in this notion: The potential for greatness lives within each of us." – Wilma Rudolph

FIFTH STRIPE: "Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you." - Ruth Bader Ginsburg

SIXTH STRIPE: "Technique and ability alone do not get you to the top; it is the willpower that is most important." - Junko Tabai

SEVENTH STRIPE: "Every great dream begins with a dreamer" -Harriet Tubman

EIGHTH STRIPE: "The probability that we may fail in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just." – Abraham Lincoln

NINTH STRIPE: "The potential for greatness lives within us all." - Wilma Rudolph

TENTH STRIPE: - "When they go low, we go high." – Michelle Obama

ELEVENTH STRIPE: “As women achieve power, the barriers will fall. As society sees what women can do, as women see what women can do, there will be more women out there doing things, and we’ll all be better off for it.” - Ruth Bader Ginsburg

TWELFTH STRIPE: “The time is always right to do what is right.” – Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

THIRTEENTH STRIPE: “We are the ones we have been waiting for” – Alice Walker

CALLER: “Each state is represented by a star on a field of blue, which signifies a new constellation being formed.”

“As we place it into the fire, let it burn brightly and remind us how truly our flag represents our country.”

“Will you please join us in saying the Pledge of Allegiance and singing The Star-Spangled Banner and then Taps.”

### Other Possible Quotes

“The way I see it, if you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain” – Dolly Parton

“I am thankful for my struggle because without it, I wouldn’t have stumbled across my strength” – Alex Elle

“Think like a queen. A queen is not afraid to fail. Failure is another steppingstone to Greatness” –Oprah Winfrey

“My mission in life is not merely to survive but to thrive and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style.”-Maya Angelo

### Morning Taps

Thanks and praise for our days

Neath the sun, neath the stars, neath  
the sky

As we go, this we know

God is nigh.

### Evening Taps

Day is done, gone the sun

From the lakes, from the hills,  
from the sky

All is well, safely rest

God is nigh.