



Pocket Guide to Flag Etiquette and Ceremonies

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

BASIC FLAG ETIQUETTE.....	4
Retiring Worn-Out Flags	
FLAG CEREMONY BASICS.....	5
Terms Used in a Flag Ceremony	
PLEDGES AND OATHS	6
Pledge of Allegiance	
Scout Oath	
Scout Law	
Outdoor Code	
FOLDING THE U.S. FLAG	7
INDOOR FLAG CEREMONIES	9
Presentation of Colors	
Retiring of Colors	11
Diagrams of Flag Positions.....	12
OUTDOOR FLAG CEREMONIES.....	15
The Salute	
Flying the Flag at Half-Staff	
HANDHELD FLAGPOLE	16
Presentation of the Colors	
Retiring of Colors	18
STATIONARY FLAGPOLE.....	19
Presentation of the Colors	
Retiring of Colors.....	21
FLAG RETIREMENT CEREMONIES	22
REFERENCES	27

BASIC FLAG ETIQUETTE

Public Law 94-344, known as the Federal Flag Code, contains rules for handling and displaying the U.S. flag. While the federal code contains no penalties for misusing the flag, states have their own flag codes and may impose penalties. The language of the federal code makes clear that the flag is a living symbol.

Traditional guidelines call for displaying the flag in public only from sunrise to sunset. However, the flag may be displayed at all times if it is illuminated during darkness.

The flag should not be subject to weather damage, so it should not be displayed during rain, snow and windstorms unless it is an all-weather flag.

It should be displayed often, but especially on national and state holidays and special occasions.

Retiring Worn-Out Flags

As a Good Turn, scouts can volunteer to help retire faded and tattered flags in their communities and conduct flag retirement ceremonies.

A national flag made of cotton or wool that is worn beyond repair may be burned in a fire. A ceremony if performed should be conducted with dignity and respect, and the flag burned completely to ashes. Synthetic flags (nylon or plastic) should not be burned but recycled or disposed of properly.

FLAG CEREMONY BASICS

When in uniform, stand at attention and salute with your right hand.

When not in uniform, stand at attention and place your right hand over your heart. You should remove your non-uniform hat.

When in uniform, with your head covered or uncovered, either indoors or outdoors, stand at attention and salute with your right hand when the U.S. national anthem is played, the colors are raised or lowered, the Pledge of Allegiance is recited, or the U.S. flag passes by in a parade.

The reason the color guards do not participate in saluting, singing, or saying the Pledge of Allegiance with the group is because their job is to guard the flag at all times. They should salute after the U.S. flag is posted.

The U.S. flag is posted on the left, as you look toward the front.

Terms Used in a Flag Ceremony

The **color bearer** (or flag bearer) is the person who carries the flag.

The **color guard** is a team that guards the flags.

The **caller** is a designated scout who announces or calls each command or part of the ceremony.

PLEDGES AND OATHS

Pledge of Allegiance

"I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Scout Oath

"On my honor I will do my best
To do my duty to God and my country
And to obey the Scout Law;
To help other people at all times;
To keep myself physically strong,
Mentally awake, and morally straight."

Scout Law

"A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent."

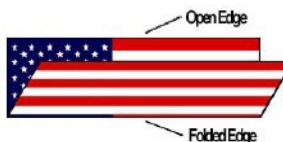
Outdoor Code

"As an American, I will do my best
To be clean in my outdoor manners,
To be careful with fire,
To be considerate in the outdoors,
And to be conservation-minded."

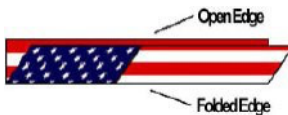
FOLDING THE U.S. FLAG



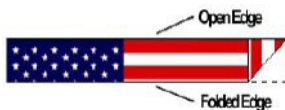
Folding Flag – Start



Step 1: Fold the lower striped section of the flag over the blue field.



Step 2: Folded edge is then folded over to meet the open edge.



Step 3: A triangular fold is then started by bringing the striped corner of the folded edge to the open edge.



Step 4: Outer point is then turned inward parallel with the open edge to form a second triangle.



Step 5: Triangular folding is continued until the entire length of the flag is folded in the triangular shape with only the blue field visible.



Folding Flag – Completed

INDOOR FLAG CEREMONIES

Presentation of Colors

“Attention. Will the audience please rise?”

(Pause.) The color guard waits in the back of the room for the audience to stand and become quiet.

“Color guard, advance.”

The troop flag guards and bearer are on the left, and the U.S. flag guards and bearer are on the right. With the U.S. flag in the lead, they walk in and cross so that the U.S. flag will be on the left side of the room when you look toward the front. The bearers and guards take their positions near the flag stands, facing the audience and holding the flags vertically.

“Scout salute.”

Everyone, with the exception of the flag bearers and guards, salutes.

“Please recite with me the Pledge of Allegiance.”

The bearers and guards stand at attention and continue to hold the flags. The troop flag is lowered slightly so that the U.S. flag stands taller. The flag guards and bearers do not salute or say the Pledge of Allegiance.

“Two.”

The troop drops its salute. The troop flag is raised to its vertical position again.

“Color guard, post the colors.”

The troop flag is placed in its stand. Its guards and bearer step back into place. The U.S. flag is then posted. Its guards and bearer salute it and step back into place.

“Scout Sign”

“Scouts, recite with me the Scout Oath and Law”

All scouts stand at attention and recite Scout Oath and immediately followed with Scout Law.

“Scouts, recite with me the Outdoor Code”

All scouts remain at attention and recite Outdoor Code”

“Two.”

All scouts drop the scout sign.

“Color guard, dismissed.”

The U.S. flag guard leads the procession to the back of the room with the narrator following last.

“Audience at ease.”

Note: When the U.S. flag is carried with another banner (such as the troop flag), it should always be on “its marching right” in the procession.

If there is only a narrow aisle, the procession follows this order in single file: U.S. flag guard, U.S. flag bearer, troop flag bearer, troop flag guard.

Retiring of Colors

“Will the audience please rise?” (Pause.)

The color guard waits in the back of the room for the audience to rise and become quiet.

“Color guard, advance.”

The U.S. flag guard and bearer and troop flag guard and bearer walk down the aisle and to the flags. They stand behind the flags, facing the audience.

“Color guard, salute.”

The guards and bearers salute.

“Color guard, “Two.”

“Color guard, retire the colors.”

The U.S. flag is removed first (just slightly ahead of the troop flag).

“Scout salute.”

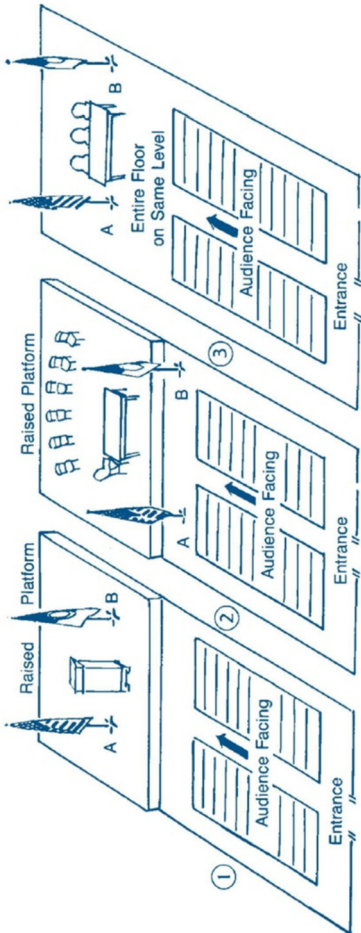
Everyone, with the exception of the guards and bearers, salutes. The U.S. flag stays on its “marching right” as the guards and bearers proceed down the aisle to the rear of the room.

“Two.”

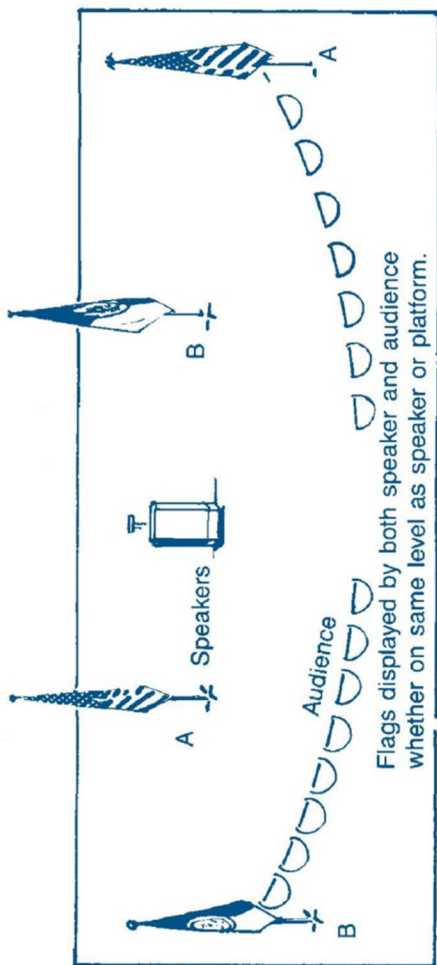
Everyone drops the salute.

“Audience dismissed.”

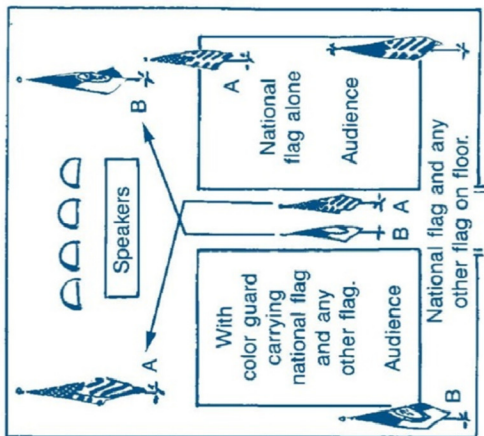
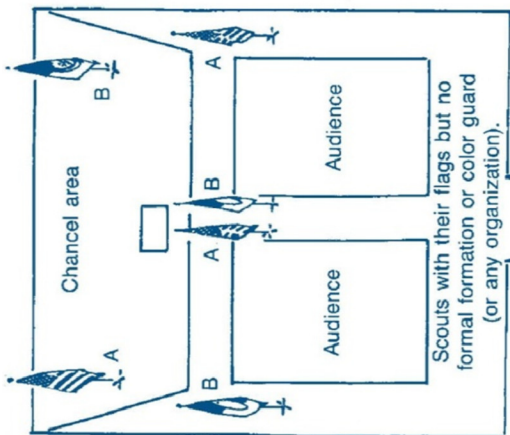
Diagrams of Flag Positions



A Stands for the National Flag.
B Stands for any other flag.



A Stands for the National Flag.
B Stands for any other flag.



A Stands for the National Flag.
B Stands for any other flag.

OUTDOOR FLAG CEREMONIES

A proper color guard requires two people per flag to raise and lower the colors. If more than the U.S. flag is being used, the U.S. flag is raised first in the morning and lowered last in the evening. Use the commands to cue the bugler, if one is used.

The Salute

The salute is held only while the flag is moving on the pole. Once it reaches the top of the pole or is touched by a member of the color guard, the command "Two!" is given. Scouts should salute the pole itself, not follow the flag while it is moving up or down the pole.

Flying the Flag at Half-Staff

When flying the flag at half-staff, the flag should be briskly run up to the top of the staff before being lowered slowly to the half-staff position.

Similarly, when retiring the colors, the flag should be briskly run up to the top of the staff before being lowered all the way down as normal.

The term half-staff means the position of the flag when it is one-half the distance between the top and bottom of the staff. The term half-mast is used when the flag is being flown on a ship.

On Memorial Day the flag should be flown at half-staff from sunrise until noon only, and then raised briskly to the top of the staff until sunset, in honor of the nation's battle heroes.

HANDHELD FLAGPOLE

Presentation of Colors

“Color guard, attention!”

The color guard comes to attention.

“Audience (camp), attention!”

The audience stands at attention.

“Color guard, advance!”

The color guard moves toward the flag stands (in front of the audience) and stops on arrival.

“Color guard, present colors!”

The U.S. flag is raised high and held; any other flags are dipped forward.

“Scout salute.”

Everyone, with the exception of the flag bearers and guards, salutes.

“Please recite with me the Pledge of Allegiance.”

The bearers and guards stand at attention and continue to hold the flags. The troop flag is lowered slightly so that the U.S. flag stands taller. The flag guards and bearers do not salute or say the Pledge of Allegiance.

“Two.”

The troop drops its salute. The troop flag is raised to its vertical position again.

“Color guard, post the colors.”

The troop flag is placed in its stand. Its guards and bearer step back into place. The U.S. flag is then posted. Its guards and bearer salute it and step back into place.

“Scout Sign”

“Scouts, recite with me the Scout Oath and Law”

All scouts stand at attention and recite Scout Oath and immediately followed with Scout Law.

“Scouts, recite with me the Outdoor Code”

All scouts remain at attention and recite Outdoor Code.

“Two.”

All scouts drop the scout sign.

“Color guard, dismissed!”

Color guard returns to the starting point behind audience.

“Audience (Camp), at ease!”

The audience relaxes from attention. Any announcements, awards, or recognition may be done at this point.

“Audience (Camp), dismissed!”

The ceremony is ended and the audience disperses.

Retiring of Colors

Note: Any announcements, awards, or recognition may be done after the audience has assembled but before the flag is retired.

“Color guard, attention!”

The color guard comes to attention.

“Audience (Camp), attention!”

The audience stands at attention.

“Color guard, advance!”

The color guard moves toward the flag, stands (in front of audience), and stops on arrival.

“Color guard, present the colors!”

The flags are removed from their stands; the color guard turns toward the audience and waits.

“Scout salute!”

All except the flag bearers salute.

“Color guard, retire the colors!”

The U.S. flag precedes all others and they exit (back of audience). When they are clear of the audience:

“Two!”

All drop salutes.

“Audience (Camp), dismissed!”

The ceremony is over; and the audience disperses.

STATIONARY FLAGPOLE

Presentation of Colors

“Color guard, attention!”

The color guard comes to attention.

“Audience (Camp), Attention!”

The audience stands at attention.

“Color guard, advance!”

The color guard advances to the flagpoles.

“Color guard, prepare to raise the colors!”

The line is unwound. The flag is unfolded and attached to the halyard.

“Scout salute!”

Everyone, with the exception of the flag bearers and guards, salutes.

“Color guard, raise the colors!”

(Optional: “Bugler, sound off!”)

The flag is raised briskly to the top of the pole. (Optional: Bugler plays “To the Colors.”)

“Please recite with me the Pledge of Allegiance.”

The bearers and guards stand at attention and continue to hold the flags. The flag guards and bearers do not salute or say the Pledge of Allegiance.

“Two!”

All drop salute and remain at attention. The color guard ties the halyard to secure the flag. The process is repeated with any other flags being raised together; no salute is given, and the bugler does not play. When the halyard is secure:

“Scout Sign”

“Scouts, recite with the Scout Oath and Law”

All scouts stand at attention and recite Scout Oath and immediately followed with Scout Law.

“Scouts, recite with me the Outdoor Code”

All scouts remain at attention and recite Outdoor Code.

“Two.”

All scouts drop the scout sign.

“Color guard, dismissed!”

Color guard returns to the starting point.

“Audience (Camp), at ease!”

The audience relaxes from attention. Any announcements, awards, or recognition may be done at this point.

“Audience (Camp), dismissed!”

The ceremony is ended and the audience disperses.

Retiring of Colors

Note: Any announcements, awards, or recognition may be done after the audience has assembled but before the flag is lowered.

“Color guard, attention!”

The color guard comes to attention.

“Audience (Camp), attention!”

The audience stands at attention.

“Color guard, advance!”

The color guard moves toward the flag, stands (in front of audience), and stops on arrival.

“Color guard, present the colors!”

The flags are removed from their stands; the color guard turns toward the audience and waits.

“Scout salute!”

All except the flag bearers salute.

“Color guard, retire the colors!”

(Optional: “Bugler, sound off!”)

The U.S. flag precedes all others, and they exit (back of audience).

(Optional: Bugler plays “Retreat”)

When they are clear of the audience:

“Two!”

All drop salutes.

“Audience (Camp), dismissed!”

The ceremony is over, and the audience disperses.

Flag Retirement Ceremony (1)

“Color guard, present the colors for inspection!”

The color guard moves with the flags, stands (in front of audience), and stops on arrival.

“With folds of white and scarlet, a field of royal blue stands the symbol of our great nation. The land where liberty was born, commands respect of all creation, may your virtues live forever, and our hopes of peace abide, may justice and right prevail, as we gaze on with pride.”

“As we look before us, we see a canvas. A canvas begun long ago, but still not finished.”

“It’s a picture of our land. It’s a picture of our works, and we see great cities and throbbing industries, busy seaports, and millions of farms.”

“It’s a picture of our people; over 300 million of them. They are part of the picture that we are helping to paint. To this picture we would add the portraits of those, who will add lives of substance and who will add to that history of noble actions, that which is our heritage.”

“Fellow scouts and guests; the picture of our country is the flag of our country. Please join us as we pledge our allegiance to our heritage.”

“Scout salute!”

All except the flag bearers salute.

“Please recite with me the Pledge of Allegiance.”

The bearers and guards stand at attention and continue to hold the flags. The flag guards and bearers do not salute or say the Pledge of Allegiance.

“Two!” (Optional: “Please be seated.”)

All drop salutes.

“We sometimes say “Old Glory”, or “she’s a grand old flag”, she’s just a piece of cloth, but she’s our country’s flag. She has flown from the highest mountain, and from the capitol dome, from atop a pole in a school yard, or the window of a home, or she may cover the casket of a soldier laid to rest.

“As you can see, this banner of peace and freedom before you is torn, tattered, and soiled from use. Her love is no longer afire but is now faded. The white from the purest snow is now tinged from age. The blue from crystal clear waters is now soiled from the elements. She has flown proudly to stand and represent us through times both good and bad.”

“It is prescribed that a flag, to be retired from service, be burned by fire, to return to ashes, to be returned to the dust from which she was made, and that a new flag fly, to once again demonstrate the strength of our great nation.”

“Color guard; raise the flag over the fire” (pause)

“Whenever she floats on high, a symbol of the brave, recall, she stands for freedom, long may she wave!”

“Color guard; lower the flag on the fire and burn it completely.”

The guard places flag(s) on the fire.

“Color guard, dismissed!”

Color guard returns to the starting point behind audience.

“Audience dismissed. Please leave in silence.”

Flag Retirement Ceremony (2)

"Color guard, present the colors for inspection!"

*The color guard moves with the flags,
stands (in front of audience), and stops
on arrival.*

"I was born on the 4th of July. I am more than just cloth shaped into a design. I am the refuge of the world's oppressed people. I am the silent sentinel of Freedom. I am the emblem of the greatest sovereign nation on the earth. I am the inspiration for which American patriots gave their lives and fortunes. I have led your sons into battle from Valley Forge to the deserts of Iraq."

"I walk in silence with each of your honored dead, to their final resting place beneath the silent tombstones - row upon row. I have flown through peace and war, strife and prosperity, and amidst it all. I have been respected. My red stripes symbolize the blood spilled in defense of this glorious nation. My white stripes signify the burning tears shed by Americans who lost their sons. My blue field is indicative of God's heaven under which I fly. My stars, clustered together, unify 50 states as one, for God and country."

"Old Glory" is my nickname, and proudly I wave on high. Honor me, respect me, defend me with your lives, and your fortunes. Never let my enemies tear me down from my lofty position, lest I never return.

"Scout salute!"

All except the flag bearers salute.

"Please recite with me the Pledge of Allegiance."

*The bearers and guards stand at
attention and continue to hold the flags.
The flag guards and bearers do not
salute or say the Pledge of Allegiance.*

“Two!” (Optional: “Please be seated.”)

All drop salutes.

“As I say the words to the Pledge of Allegiance, repeat them silently to yourselves.”

I PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE

As our founding fathers pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to a new nation, so do we pledge our devotion and our loyalty.

TO THE FLAG OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

An honored symbol of a nation's unity, its hopes, achievements, glory, and high resolve - - red for courage, white for purity, and blue for vigilance, perseverance, and justice.

AND TO THE REPUBLIC FOR WHICH IT STANDS

Where sovereign power resides in a body elected by, representative of, and responsible to this nation's citizens.

ONE NATION UNDER GOD

From the Atlantic to the Pacific; from Canada to Mexico; we are united as one under the One to whom we turn for guidance, whose blessings we ask, and who watches over us - for in His spirit America was founded.

INDIVISIBLE

The citizens of this great country come from different racial backgrounds, have different traditions, and often worship in different houses. Because the people of America are so varied and so rich in heritage, the whole of this nation is far greater than the sum of its parts.

“Color guard; raise the flag over the fire” (pause)

“We have both the right of freedom and the responsibility to respect and protect the freedom of others. From Revolutionary times to the present day, men have defended our flag with their blood and with their lives. Our flag is a symbol of the people, of all the people, the people of the United States of America.”

“Color guard; lower the flag on the fire and burn it completely.”

The guard places flag(s) on the fire.

“Color guard, dismissed!”

Color guard returns to the starting point
behind audience.

“Audience dismissed. Please leave in silence.”



REFERENCES

American Legion

“Unserviceable Flags Ceremony”

<https://www.legion.org/flag/ceremony>

Boy Scouts of America

Basic Adult Leader Outdoor Orientation, 2017

Cub Scout Ceremonies for Dens and Packs, 2010

Disabled American Veterans

DAV Magazine, “Honoring Old Glory”

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U.S. Department of Defense

“How to Properly Dispose of Worn-Out US Flags”

<https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/story/article/2206946/how-to-properly-dispose-of-worn-out-us-flags/>

U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs

“Guidelines for Display of the Flag”

<https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/celebrate/flagdisplay.pdf>

Veterans of Foreign Wars

“Flag Etiquette”

<https://www.vfw.org/community/flag-etiquette>

