

Flag Ceremonies

Honoring the American Flag



A flag ceremony is a way of showing love and respect for one's country. Flag ceremonies may be used for:

- Opening or closing meetings
- Opening or closing special events
- Beginning or closing a day
- Honoring a special occasion or special person
- Retiring a worn flag

Flag ceremonies may take place in meeting rooms, in outdoor settings, in large auditoriums, on stage, even on horseback. All flag ceremonies share one thing in common—respect for the flag.

Flag Ceremony Guidelines

Keep it simple. Emphasis should be on respect for the flag rather than on the commands or techniques. Ask these questions when planning:

1. Who will carry the flag?
2. Who will be the color guards?
3. Who will give the directions for the ceremony?
4. What song will be sung? Who will sound the pitch and start the song?
5. Will a poem or quotation be included? Who will say or read it?
6. After the Pledge of Allegiance, will the Promise and the Law be said?
7. In what order will the parts of the ceremony take place?
8. When will the group practice?
9. Where will the flags be placed at the end of the ceremony?

Terms Used in a Flag Ceremony

The **color bearer** (or flag bearer) is the person who carries the flag. There is one color bearer for each flag used in the ceremony.

The **color guard** is a team that guards the flags. Any even number of guards may be used, but usually four or six girls are sufficient.

The **Girl Scout in-charge** (or caller) is a designated Girl Scout who announces or calls each part of the ceremony.

Possible Commands for a Flag Ceremony

"Girl Scouts, attention." Used to announce that the flag ceremony is to begin.

"Color guard advance." This signals the color guard to advance with the flags, or advance to pick up the flags.

"Color Guard, post the colors." This directs the color guard to place the flag in flag standards, or to attach the grommets to a flag pole rope.

"Color guard, honor your flag." The color guard salutes the American flag.

"Please join us in saying the Pledge of Allegiance." (Followed by an appropriate song, quotation or poem, if so desired.)

OR

"Color guard, honor your flag." The color guard salutes the American flag.

"Color guard, retire the colors." This asks the color guard to remove the flag from standards, or to lower the flag, detach from the rope, and fold prior to being dismissed.

"Color guard, dismissed." The color guard leaves in formation, with or without the flag.

"Girl Scouts dismissed." Girls may leave in formation or be at ease where they have been standing.

Handling the American Flag

The display of the American Flag is governed by law to ensure that it will be treated with the respect due the flag of a great nation. This is known as the Flag Code. Some of the rules most useful for Girl Scouts are:

- The American Flag should be placed in the center, and higher, when displayed with a group of state, local, or organizational flags flown from staffs. It may also be positioned to the right of other flags (if you were to hold the flag while facing your audience, your right side would be the flag's own right).
- "When displayed from a staff in a church or public auditorium, the flag of the United States of America should hold the position of superior prominence, in advance of the

audience, and in the position of honor at the clergyman's or speaker's right as he faces the audience. Any other flag so displayed should be placed on the left of the clergyman or speaker or to the right of the audience." *

- The flag should be hoisted briskly and lowered slowly with dignity.
 - The flag should never be allowed to touch anything beneath it, nor should it ever be carried flat or horizontally—always aloft and free.
 - Never use the flag as a cover or place anything on top of it.
 - No disrespect of any kind should be shown to the flag of the United States. It should be kept clean.
 - The flag, when carried in a procession with other flags, should be either on the marching right or, if there is a line of other flags, in front of the center of that line.
 - When you display the flag on a wall or in a window where people see it from the street, it should be displayed flat with the blue part at the top and on the flag's own right (which is the observer's left).
 - When displayed after dark, the flag should be illuminated.
- Retiring a Worn American Flag

Retiring an American Flag is a special ceremony that ends with burning the flag and disposing of the ashes in a respectful manner. For further information, check with [*Let's Celebrate! Girl Scout Ceremonies*](#) or your council training or program staff.