

United States Flag Etiquette

History

After the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, Americans realized they needed a national flag to take the place of all the individual banners carried by the various regiments-one that would symbolize the newly created union of the states. On June 14, 1777, the Continental Congress adopted the following resolution:

"Resolved, that the flag of the thirteen United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; That the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation."

From 1777 to 1912, the U.S. Flag was officially changed 24 times. On June 24, 1912, the arrangement of the stars and the relative sizes of the stars and stripes were standardized. Two more stars have added to the flag since 1912; Alaska was admitted to the union on January 3, 1959 and Hawaii was admitted on August 21, 1959.

The Flag Code

The Flag Code (Flag Etiquette) was drawn up at a National Flag Conference in 1923 as a guide for the proper use, display, and care of the flag. This was revised in 1924. In 1942, Congress adopted a resolution making this code a law, and amended it in 1976. It has been amended often. Public Law 94-344 is its present form. A section of the law specifies that, "It is the universal custom to display the flag only from sunrise to sunset; however, the flag may be displayed at night on special occasions when it is desired to produce a patriotic effect." If displayed at night, the flag should be illuminated.

Hoisting the Flag

The flag should be hoisted smartly. It takes two to hoist the flag properly. One to secure the flag to the halyard and hoist it, the other to keep it from touching the ground. Two flag raisers march, in step, to the flagpole. Number 1, on the right carries the folded flag. The flag is always kept folded when stored.

At the flagpole, number 1 continues to hold the folded flag while number 2 unfastens the halyard from the cleat on the pole. He quickly tests the halyard making sure it is running freely. The flag is always hoisted from the leeward side of the flagpole. Number 1 then loosens the folded flag and hands the hoist end to number 2, union first, being careful to hold his end of the flag so that no part of it touches the ground. Number 2 fastens the halyard to both grommets on the flag's hoist, and then starts hoisting the flag briskly hand over hand without a pause. Number 1 keeps it from touching the ground until it is floating free. Then he steps back a pace and salutes- which he holds. Note: Number 2 allows the up halyard to slide through his hands as he hauls on the down halyard to raise the flag. If the breeze is too strong for him to control the flag, number 1 holds the up halyard until the flag is at the peak.

As soon as the flag is raised to the peak, number 2 secures the halyard to the pole, steps back a pace and joins number 1 in the salute. Then both drop their salutes in unison and march off. The flag should always be hoisted unfurled, not rolled up.

Lowering the Flag

The flag should always be lowered slowly and ceremoniously. Hauling down the colors at sundown (retreat), on land or afloat, has its own time-honored procedures.

A two person flag detail marches to the flag staff, unfastens the halyard, and while one stands at salute, the other hauls the colors down slowly.

When the flag is down within reaching distance, the saluting person drops the salute and gathers the flag in to prevent its touching the ground. The halyard's ends are clipped or tied together and secured to the flag staff cleat.

United States Flag Etiquette (cont')

Lowering the Flag (cont')

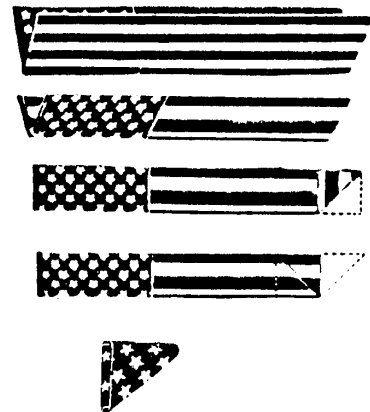
It is important to fasten the halyard ends together after removing the flag—or you may find one end of it at the top of the pole the next time the flag is to be raised.

If it is not a formal retreat ceremony, the flag detail shouts “colors” just before hauling the flag down. All those within 50 yards come to attention and salute until the flag is gathered in.

On being detached from the halyard the flag must be folded immediately. A person lowering the flag alone need not try to fold it. Gathering it into his arms so that it does not touch the ground is sufficient.

To Fold the Flag

1. Bring the striped half up over the blue field.
2. Then fold it in half again.
3. Bring the lower striped corner to the upper edge forming a triangle.
4. Then fold the upper point in to form another triangle. Continue until the entire length of the flag is folded.
5. When you get near the end—nothing but the blue field showing—tuck the last bit into the other folds to secure it.
6. The final folded flag resembles a cocked hat with the white stars on a blue field showing.



Saluting the Flag

When in uniform, with your head covered or uncovered, either indoors or outdoors, stand at attention and salute with your right hand when:

- The national anthem is played. Stand at attention facing the flag and salute at the first note and hold the salute until the last note is played. If there is no flag or you cannot see it from where you are, face the music. When the national anthem is sung without accompaniment or is a recording, stand at attention—do not salute.
- The colors are raised or lowered. When the colors are being raised, stand at attention facing the flag pole. Salute as soon as the flag is started on its way up and hold the salute until it is at its peak.

If the flag is to be flown at half-mast, hold the salute until it is lowered to half-mast after being hoisted to its peak.

At retreat, lowering the colors, start your salute the moment the flag is on its way down and hold the salute until the flag is gathered at the base of the flagstaff.

If the flag is at half-mast, salute as it is first hoisted to the peak; hold the salute until it is gathered at the base.

- During the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. Face the flag, salute, and hold the salute during the pledge.

United States Flag Etiquette

Saluting the Flag (cont')

- The flag passes in a parade of review. Start the salute when the approaching flag is six paces away from you. Drop the salute when the flag is about the same distance passed you. This procedure is also followed when the national ensign is carried past you by mounted standard bearers, or when it passes on a vehicle, provide it is flown from a staff, not lying flat, draped, or used only as a decoration.
- A flag draped coffin is passing. A flag-draped coffin is the exception to the above rule. It rates the same honor as the flag passing in parade.
- "Taps" is played at a funeral. It is customary to salute when "Taps" is played at a military funeral.

When not in uniform, stand at attention, place your hand over your heart. Men should remove their hat and hold it over their heart. In athletic dress, stand at attention, hold hat or helmet in right hand.

Displaying the Flag

TO THE RIGHT IS THE PLACE OF HONOR: This is the fundamental rule governing the location of the national flag in all situations when it flies from a staff.

When displayed on a stage, platform, or chancel of a church, the national flag should be to the speaker's right. Any other flag, on his left.

This is correct even if there are one or more national flags with the audience, provided that flags are all on staffs.

This is correct also if the audience or congregation is on the same level as the speaker.

If there is a national flag held by a member of the audience, it should be on their right (facing the speaker) any other flags should be on the audience's left. National colors brought in with the audience but placed in front of the audience would be with the audience but placed in front of the audience would be positioned according to custom of placing it on the speaker's right. Color guards with the national flag and an organizational flag may keep both flags together at the right of the audience with the national flag on the right of any other.

A flag hanging over an audience should face toward the main entrance to the auditorium-the point of honor on the flag's own right (the blue field to the left as seen by the people entering).

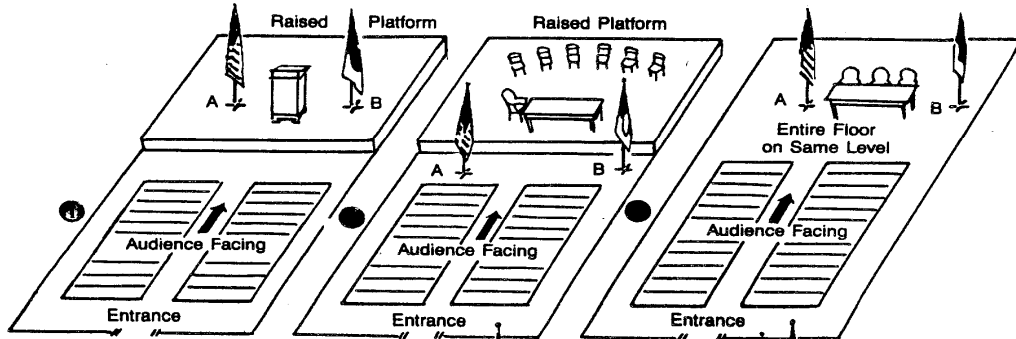
When the national flag is not displayed on a staff, it is displayed flat, either horizontally or vertically, on a wall or in a window, the union (or the blue field) should be at the top and the flag's own right (to the observer's left when facing the flag).

A flag hanging from a balcony or stairway should never be draped but allowed to fall free. The point of honor on its own right.

Destroying Worn out Flags

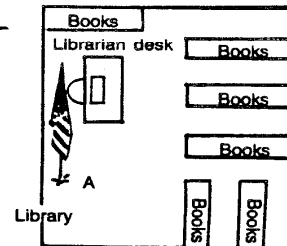
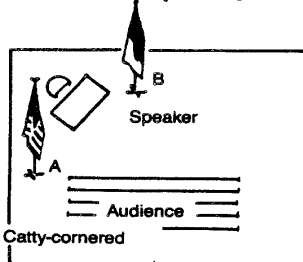
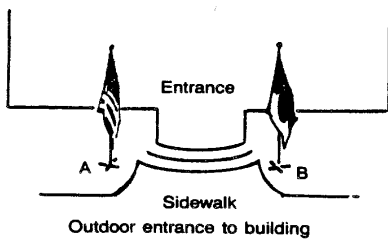
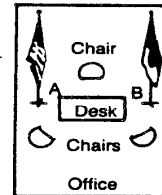
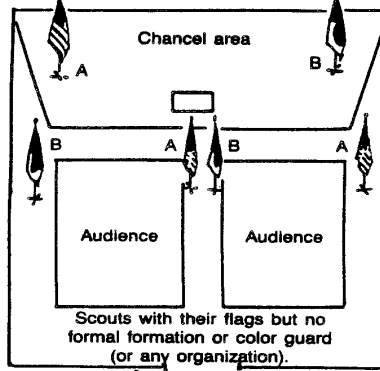
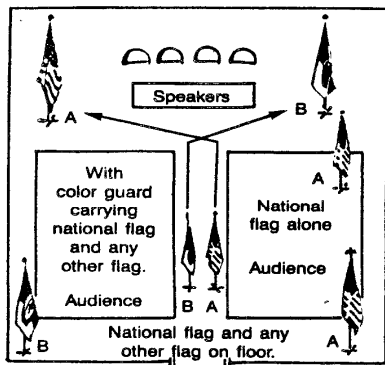
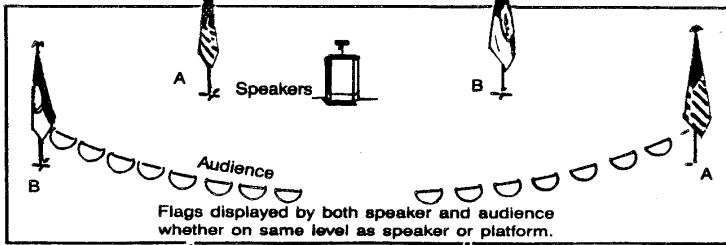
The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning. (Flag Code: Title 36, U. S. C. Chapter 10 Sec. 176.k.).

DIAGRAMS OF FLAG POSITIONS



Note: A stands for the national flag, B stands for any other flag.

Diagrams 1-2-3-4 apply to lecture halls, classrooms, club rooms, churches, auditoriums, etc.



*this U. S. Flag Etiquette information was given out at the 1992 Nevada Area Council Pow Wow. Their resources were: Your Flag, Everything You Wanted to Know About the Flag of the United States of America, Boy Scouts of America, 1986. The Flag Code, Stock No. 72601, National Emblem Sales, The American Legion, PO Box 1050, Indianapolis, IN 46204

