

Flag Ceremonies & Etiquette

Civic duty is an important part of Scouting. The American flag is a symbol of our country. The flag represents us as a people and as a nation. Working with Scouts and showing respect to a flag, whether it's saying the pledge, presenting a flag at a ceremony or parade, or learning to properly retire an old, tattered flag, is how we help Scouts develop pride in their country..

Flag ceremonies should be respectful and tailored to the Scouts participating.

All Scout flag ceremonies should be solemn events, but they shouldn't all be the same. For younger Cub Scouts, plan a flag ceremony that's short and simple. For older Cub Scouts, add a few more lines. For Boy Scouts, suggest the Scouts plan something more elaborate and deeper in meaning, perhaps with additional comments by an adult or a more senior Scout.

As a sign of respect, don't ever let the flag touch anything beneath it.

This includes the ground, the floor, or water. However, contrary to legend, the U.S. Flag Code does not state that a flag that touches the ground should be burned or retired.

Never add anything to an American flag.

The American flag is great enough as it is. That's why the flag "should never have placed upon it, nor on any part of it, nor attached to it any mark, insignia, letter, word, figure, design, picture, or drawing of any nature" (U.S. Code, Title 36, Chapter 10, paragraph 176g).

The flag isn't to be worn as a costume.

No part of the flag should ever be used as a costume or athletic uniform. However, a flag patch may be affixed to the uniform of military personnel, firefighters, police officers, and members of patriotic organizations like the BSA.

The flag occupies a position of honor.

- In a procession, the American flag is carried to the marching right of other flags, or in front of other flags.
- When displayed, the American flag should be to the flag's own right (also described as "the speaker's right" or "the audience's left").
- When grouped with other flags (e.g., state, Scout, council), the American flag should be at the center, in front of or higher than the other flags.
- When with another flag on crossed staffs, it should be on the flag's own right, and its staff should be in front of the staff of the other flag(s).
- When the flags of two or more nations are flown, the American flag should be flown from a separate staff of the same height. International use forbids the display of the flag of one nation above that of another nation in times of peace.

When it's time to retire a flag, do so in a dignified way.

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. Be sure to take into account such things as local fire codes, and the fabric from which the flag is made. Some fabrics such as nylon should not be burned.

The flag may be burned as a whole or separated into pieces.

Separation is appropriate when the flag is large, or when you have only a few flags and a large number of Scouts who wish to take a substantive part in the ceremony.

The flag should be lowered daily.

Unless the flag pole is lighted, it should be lowered at dusk. Again, special care should be taken that no part of the flag touches the ground.

Fold the American flag properly.

In this country, we have a special way we fold our flag. Only the American flag is folded into a triangle.

A folded flag is carried against the chest.

A properly folded flag should show only a triangular blue field of stars. The flag, when folded, may then be held against the chest with the arms crossed and folded, with the triangle point up, or other ways that demonstrate respect and honor for the flag.

Roundtable Planning Guide

Sample Ceremonies

Pledge Definition

Word strips inside balloons

- **BLUE** is the color of faith. Believing in yourself, your country, and your religion. This is like the first part of the Scout Oath—doing our best—and our duty to God and our country.
- The color **RED** in our flag means sacrifice and courage, the qualities of the founders of our country. Red symbolizes the second part of the Oath: “to help other people at all times,” which often requires acts of courage to help anyone in trouble and self-sacrifice as we put others first.
- The last color of the flag is **WHITE**. It is the symbol of purity and perfection. It represents keeping ourselves strong and having strong morals.