

# FLAG CEREMONIES



A flag ceremony honors the American flag as the symbol of our country and all the hopes, dreams, and people it represents. If your group includes girls from other countries, they can honor their flags, too, and conduct an international flag ceremony.

## 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, outdoor settings, large auditoriums, onstage, or even on horseback. During a flag ceremony, the American flag is carried by a color guard for protection. **All flag ceremonies share one thing—respect for the flag.**

Guidelines: Keep it simple. Emphasis needs to be on respect for the flag rather than on the commands or techniques.

## Adults can ask girls these questions when planning:

- Who will carry the flag?
- Who will the color guards be?
- Who will give the directions for the ceremony?
- What song will you sing? Who will sound the pitch and start the song?
- Will a poem or quotation be included? Who will say or read it?
- After the Pledge of Allegiance, will the Girl Scout Promise and Law be said?
- What order will the ceremony follow?
- When will the group practice?
- 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."** Signals the color guard to advance with the flags, or advance to pick up the flags.

**"Color guard, post the colors."** 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."** or **"Color guard, salute your colors."** Signals the color guard to salute the American flag.

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

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

**"Color guard, dismissed."** Prompts the color guard to leave in formation, with or without the flag.

**"Girl Scouts, dismissed."** Indicates girls may leave in formation or be at ease where they have been standing.

# Handling the Flag of the United States of America

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 **United States Flag Code**.

## Some of the rules most useful for Girl Scouts are:

- **The flag of the United States of America should be at the center and at the highest point of the group** when a number of flags of States or localities or pennants of societies are grouped and displayed from staffs.
- When the flags are posted in stands or raised on a pole, **the American flag is always kept higher than other flags**, so it is placed in its stand after other flags are lowered into their standards, or it is raised up a pole first. When it's time to retire the colors, the American flag is taken out of its stand first so it remains the highest flag at all times.
- **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 can 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**.
- The flag is to 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.

## Retiring a 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 council program staff.**

For more information about flag ceremonies, see *The Girl's Guide to Girl Scouting*.

Source:

<http://www.girlscouts.org/en/about-girl-scouts/traditions/ceremonies.html#flag>

# Flag Raising Script

**Caller:** “Girl Scouts, attention.”

**Caller:** “Color guard, attention.”

**Caller:** “Color guard, advance.”

Color guard starts forward at a uniform pace with their left foot walking in a straight line to the pole. Pace should be moderate, but dignified. At the pole the leader of the guard (if there is no leader, the person to the left) will say quietly so only the guard can hear: “Color guard, halt”. This is on a right foot. They should step with their left foot, then stop.

**Caller:** “Color guard, post the colors.”

The color guard raises the flag, again. Pace should be moderate, but dignified.

**When the flag reaches the top and the rope is secured:**

**Caller:** “Color guard, salute.”

The guard salutes for three seconds.

**Caller:** “Please join us in saying the Pledge of Allegiance and the Girl Scout Promise.”

Troop and audience repeat pledge and promise. Color guard stands at attention, but does not say the pledge or promise.

**Caller:** “Color guard, retreat. “

They walk slower than before back to base (where they started from).

**Once there:**

**Caller:** “Color guard, dismissed.”

**Caller:** “Girl Scouts, dismissed.”

This signals to the attendees that the ceremony is over and they may now exit.



## Equipment/Preparation

1 flag pole and 1 American flag

4 Color guards should practice and be able to walk in step

1 Caller

# Flag Lowering Script

**Caller:** “Girl Scouts, attention!”  
Everyone comes to an attention stance.

**Caller:** “Color guard, attention!”

**Caller:** “Color guard, advance!”  
Color guard marches forward at a uniform pace with uniform steps starting with the left foot in a straight line to the pole. Do not halt until given the command.

**Caller:** “Color guard, salute the colors!”  
The guard salutes for three seconds.

**Caller:** “Color guard, retire the colors.”  
The color guard lowers the flag. If flag is at half-staff, the pole runner should quickly raise the flag to full-staff before lowering. Pole runner then slowly lowers the flag. When the flag is in reach, one person in the color guard steps out of line to grab the stripes end of the flag to ensure that it does not touch the ground. When flag is completely lowered, third person unclips the flag from the bottom up and they move to the side to fold the flag properly while pole runner secures the flag pole. When pole runner is finished securing the flag pole, they move over to support the middle of the flag to ensure that it does not touch the ground and to that the flag is folded as tightly as possible. After the flag is folded the color guard return to line, facing the flag pole, with the flag bearer in the center.

**Caller:** “Please join us in singing Taps.”  
Troop and audience sing Taps. Color guard stands at attention but does not sing.

**Caller:** “Color guard, dismissed!”  
Color guard turns in a clockwise rotation to face the caller in one swift movement color guard once again marches forward at a uniform pace with uniform steps starting with the left foot until they are given the next command.

**Caller:** “Girl Scouts, dismissed.”  
Everyone is dismissed.



## Equipment/Preparation

1 American Flag raised to appropriate height

1 Caller, 1 Pole Runner, 3 additional Color guard members including a color bearer

Highest Ranking Adult Present (stands behind Color guard but does not move)

Learn to fold the flag:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOogtUb7FnE>

Learn Taps tune and lyrics :  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?>

# Flag Retirement Service And Ceremony

## Ceremony of Final Tribute

- Only **one flag should be used in the ceremony**, which is representative of all the flags to be burned in the service. The remainder of the flags collected should be incinerated. A corporate, government, or military incinerator or furnace can usually be found for this purpose.
- The ceremony should be **conducted out-of-doors**, preferably in conjunction with a campfire program, and it should be very special.
- The ceremony involves **two color guards**, one for the flag currently in use and a special color guard for the flag to be retired from service. Of course, this may be adapted if conditions necessitate.
- Just **before sunset the flag** which has been flying all day **is retired** in the normal ceremonial procedure for that location or group.
- The color guard responsible for the flag receiving the final tribute moves to front and center. The leader should **present this color guard with the flag that has been selected for its final tribute and subsequent destruction**. The leader should instruct the color guard to "raise the colors."
- When the flag has been secured at the top of the pole, the **leader says**: "This flag has served its nation well and long. It has worn to a condition in which it should no longer be used to represent the nation. This flag represents all of the flags collected and being retired from service today. The honor we show here, this evening, for this one flag, we are showing for all of the flags, even those not physically here."
- **The leader should:**
  - **Call the group to attention and order a salute.**
  - **Lead the entire group in the Pledge of Allegiance;** and **order the flag retired** by the color guard.
  - Slowly and ceremoniously **lower and then respectfully fold the flag in the customary triangle.**
  - **Deliver the flag** to the leader, and then dismiss the group.



# Flag Retirement Service And Ceremony

## Ceremonial Burning

Flag Preparation: The color guard assigned to the flag opens up its tri-corner fold and then refolds the flag in a coffin-shaped rectangle.

- Assemble around the fire. The leader calls the group to attention and the color guard comes forward and places the flag on the fire.
- All briskly salute. After the salute, but while still at attention, the leader should conduct a respectful memorial service as the flag burns. The National Flag Foundation recommends singing "God Bless America," followed by an inspiring message of the flag's meaning, followed by the "Pledge of Allegiance," and then silence.
- When the flag is basically consumed, those assembled, with the exception of the leader and the color guard, should be dismissed single file and depart in silence. The leader and the color guard remain until the flag is completely consumed.
- The fire should then be safely extinguished and the ashes buried.



### Fire Preparation

It is important that the fire be sizable—preferably having burnt down to a bed of red hot coals to avoid bits of the flag being carried off by a roaring fire—yet be of sufficient intensity to ensure complete burning of the flag.

Source: <http://www.ushistory.org/betsy/more/flagretirement.htm>