



Flag Ceremonies

A flag ceremony is a tribute to the flag we honor and is a way to show love and respect for one's country. Practice the ceremony with your troop so the ceremony can be conducted with pride and confidence.

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

All flag ceremonies share one thing in common—respect for the flag. Many service units have American flags and other flags that troops can borrow. Troops can make their own troop flag or purchase one through the GSME shop.

Whether performed indoors or outdoors, follow the same general guidelines for the care and presentation of the flag. When possible, Girl Scouts participating in the flag ceremony should wear their Girl Scout uniform (at least their membership pin) and coordinate clothing (such as white tops and dark pants, etc.).

Flag ceremonies can be as simple or elaborate as you want to make them. Keep them simple at first as the girls are learning. More elaborate elements can be added as the troop becomes more comfortable and more skilled with the ceremony. Emphasis should be on respect for the flag rather than on the commands or techniques.

Discuss these questions with your troop when planning a flag ceremony:

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?

SALUTE WHEN:

- The moment the flag passes in front of you in a parade
- When a flag is retreated in a parade
- From the moment the flag starts to be lowered from a flagpole until the moment it is completely unattached
- When saying the Pledge of Allegiance and/or during the National Anthem
- Do not salute when other flags are presented
- Color guard does not salute except when directed to

Terms Used in a Flag Ceremony

- **“Flag’s own right”:** The American flag is carried to the RIGHT of the troop flag from the perspective of the person carrying the flag, so it would appear on the left to an observer.
- **Color bearer (or flag bearer):** The person who carries the flag. There is one color bearer for each flag used in the ceremony. Hold the staff at a slight angle in front of the body, or hold the folded flag in front of the body at waist level. If not in uniform, the flag bearer may wear a red sash over the right shoulder tied on the left side at the waist in a square knot. The flag bearer stands silent and at attention throughout the ceremony and does not speak or sing with the group.
- **Color guard:** The team that guards the flags and makes sure the flag does not touch the ground. Any even number of guards may be used, but two per flag is a traditional number. The color guard stands behind the flag bearer. If not in uniform, the color guards may wear a red sash around the waist, tied on the left side in a square knot. The color guards stand silent and at attention throughout the ceremony and does not speak or sing with the group.
- **Girl Scout in-charge (or caller)** is a designated Girl Scout who announces each part of the ceremony. She stands in front and to one side of the circle or at the front and to one side of the assembly.

Flag Etiquette

Display of the American flag is governed by law to ensure that it will be treated with respect. This is known as the United States Flag Code. Some of the rules most useful for Girl Scouts are:

- The American flag must be placed in the center, and higher, when displayed with a group of state, local, or organizational flags flown from staffs.
- The flag must also be positioned to the “flag’s own right” of other flags, which is the observer’s left. A girl holding the flag while facing the audience would need to hold the flag on the farthest right side, which the audience would see as being on the far left of all of the other flags.
- When displayed from a staff in a house of worship or public auditorium, the flag of the United States must hold the position of superior prominence, in advance of the audience, and in the position of honor at the clergy’s or speaker’s right as he or she faces the audience. Any other flag so displayed should be placed on the left of the clergy or speaker or to the right of the audience.
- 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.
- The flag, when carried in a procession with other flags, should be either on the marching right (see description above for “flag’s own 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.

Flag Ceremony Diagrams

Here are a few basic principles for honoring the American flag in the presence of Girl Scout flags.

The United States flag should be in one of the following positions: first, to the flag's own right, center front, or center and higher.

A few of the most common situations in troop, adult or larger organization meetings have been used in illustrating these principles. Since the presence of color guards does not alter flag positions, they are not shown. Other Girl Scout flags can be added as desired.



United States flag



World Association flag



Troop flag



Direction flag faces



Indicates "flag's own right"



Path of American flag



Path of troop flags



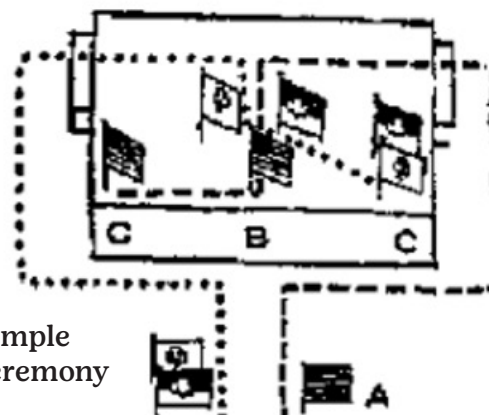
Two flags: right



Three flags: center front



Many flags: in front



Sample Ceremony

Sample ceremonies using these principles:

A. Carried in: U.S. flag leading, World Association flag next, troop flag third. U.S. flag turns right at end of aisle, Girl Scout flags go to left.

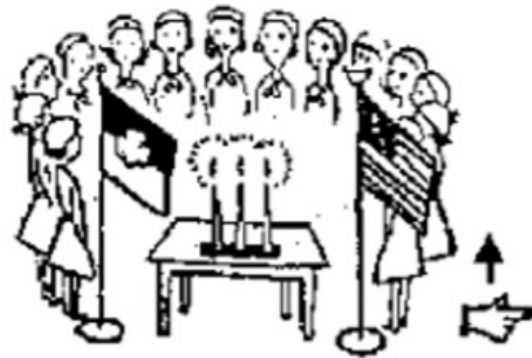
B. Held for ceremony: U.S. flag at front center stage, Girl Scout flags behind it.

C. Grounded: Girl Scout flags grounded before U.S. flag. U.S. flag grounded last and in highest stand.

D. Retiring flags: U.S. flag is picked up first, carried along route which Scout flags are entered. Girl Scout flags go out the other way. This keeps the U.S. flag on the right.



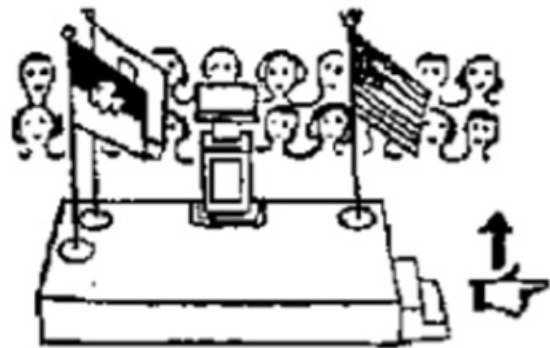
Two flags: right



All same level: right



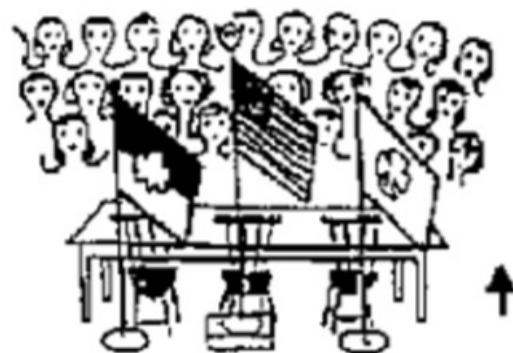
Many flags: right



On platform: Flag's own right



Three flags: center



Higher, if centered



Against wall: flag's own right

Flag Ceremony Commands

This is a simple version of the commands. You may add in other elements such as singing the National Anthem or Taps. You may find variations of flag ceremony commands online through sites such as the VFW or American Legion.

Open:

- **“Girl Scouts, Attention.”**
 - Used to announce that the flag ceremony is to begin. Girl Scouts stand quietly and remove all headwear.
- **“Color guard, Advance.”**
 - This signals the color guard to advance with the flags, or advance to pick up the flags. Color guard carries the flag(s) towards flag pole or stand.
- **“Color guard, post the colors.”**
 - This directs the color guard to place the flag in its stand, or unfold and hoist the flags up the poles in the appropriate order (The American flag always comes first, and the state flag if you have it is usually next, with any flags after that going in order of importance.)
- **“Color guard, honor your flag.”**
 - Color guard salutes the flag and then returns to “attention.”
- **“Please join us in saying the Pledge of Allegiance and Girl Scout Promise and Law.”**
 - If you have a color guard, they should stand at attention and not participate, keeping their full attention on the flag. Everyone else says Pledge of Allegiance, Promise and Law.

Close:

- **“Color guard, retire the colors.”**
 - Color guard removes the flag(s) from the stand(s) or slowly lowers and folds the flag(s); American flag first, and then in reverse order that they went up.
- **“Color guard, dismissed.”**
 - Color guard carries the flag to an appropriate place at the back of the room.
- **“Girl Scouts dismissed.”**
 - Girl Scouts may leave formation or be at ease where they have been standing.



Folding the American Flag



Step 1

To properly fold the flag, begin by holding it waist-high with another person so that its surface is parallel to the ground.



Step 2

Fold the lower half of the stripe section lengthwise over the field of stars, holding the bottom and top edges securely.



Step 3

Fold the flag again lengthwise with the blue field on the outside.



Step 4

Make a triangular fold by bringing the striped corner of the folded edge to meet the open (top) edge of the flag.



Step 5

Turn the outer (end) point inward, parallel to the open edge, to form a second triangle.



Step 6

The triangular folding is continued until the entire length of the flag is folded in this manner.



Step 7

When the flag is completely folded, only a triangular blue field of stars should be visible. The Color Bearer carries the folded flag with the point held forward away from her body.

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. This is generally done formally by reaching out to your local VFW or American Legion. You may also check with your local service unit to see about teaming up with other local troops for a flag retirement ceremony.

Basic Indoor Flag Ceremony

(thanks to https://www.girlscoutsem.org/content/dam/girlscoutsem-redesign/documents/Ceremonies_In_Girl_Scouting.pdf)

Arrangements:

The participants should form a horseshoe formation with the open end for the Color Guard to enter and exit. The Color Bearer(s) and Color Guards enter with the flag and face the horseshoe. Reminder—the United States flag is to its own right. That means that the person holding the U.S. flag is to the right of any other flags (to observers, this will appear to be on the left). Another option is to have the other flags follow the U.S. flag in and out of the formation.

Posting the Colors:

The Caller gives the following commands:

1. Girl Scouts, attention
(The audience stands with empty hands at sides)
2. Color Guard, attention (The Color Guards and Color Bearer(s) stand at attention)
3. Color Guard, advance (The Color Guards and Color Bearer(s) enter with the flags)
4. Girl Scouts, the flag of your country. Please join me in saying The Pledge of Allegiance (The Color Guards and Color Bearer(s) stand silently at attention. Everyone else recites the Pledge)
5. Let us sing (At this point a song may be sung, patriotic or otherwise, and/or a reading may be done).
6. Let us now say the Girl Scout Promise (Can add the Girl Scout Law and anything else appropriate)
7. Color Guard, post the colors (The Color Bearer(s) place the flags in the stands. Post other flags first; American Flag last)
8. Color Guard, honor your colors (The Color Bearer(s) and Color Guards step back and salute the flag by placing their hands over their hearts)
9. Color Guard, dismissed (The Color Bearer(s) and Color Guards return the way they entered)
10. Announcements and the rest of the program or meeting begin after the Color Guard has exited.

Retiring the Colors:

All formal meeting or program activities should be complete before Retiring the Colors, which is the last formal activity.

The Caller gives the following commands:

1. Girl Scouts, attention (The audience stands with empty hands at sides)
2. Color Guard, attention (The Color Guards and Color Bearer(s) stand at attention)
3. Color Guard, advance (The Color Guards and Color Bearer(s) move forward to stand in front of flags)
4. Let us “_____” (At this point a song may be sung or a poem read. The Color Guard remains silent)
5. Color Guard, honor your colors (The Color Bearer(s) and Color Guards step back and salute the flag by placing their hands over their hearts)
6. Color Guard, retire the colors (The Color Bearer(s) pick up the flags from the stand(s) with the U.S. Flag first).
7. Color Guard, dismissed (The Color Bearer(s) and Color Guards return the way they entered with the U.S. flag in front of any other flags)
8. Girl Scouts, dismissed (Everyone departs the formation. The formal program or part of the evening may be followed by an informal part such as refreshments or collecting of paperwork)

Participants:

- **Caller:** The individual in charge of the ceremony. The Caller gives the commands.
- **Color Bearer(s):** The individual(s) that hold the flag(s). One bearer per flag.
- **Color Guards:** The individuals who guard the flag(s). The Color Guards may walk on either side of, or in front of and behind the Color Bearers.
- **Note:** Color Bearer(s) and Color Guard(s) stand at attention and only salute when told to by the Caller. They do not salute or say the pledge with the rest of the group.

Multi-level Flag Ceremony

Daisy Girl Scout enters with the Daisy Flag

Narrator 1: "I am a Daisy Girl Scout flag. I have watched over the Girl Scouts in blue. I have watched them become Girl Scouts and now they seek the wise old owl."

Brownie Girl Scout enters with Brownie flag.

Narrator 2: "I am the Brownie Girl Scout flag. I have watched over the Girl Scouts in brown. I have guided their enthusiasm and now they fly from my arms."

Junior Girl Scout enters with Girl Scout flag.

Narrator 3: "I am the Girl Scout flag. I have watched over the Girl Scouts in green. I have watched them grow and now they step upward to Cadette Girl Scouting."

Cadette Girl Scout enters with World Association flag.

Narrator 4: "I am the World Association flag. I watch over all Girl Scouts and Girl Guiding all over the world. I watch Cadette Girl Scouts grow to be Senior Girl Scouts. Please stand."

Senior Girl Scout enters with the American flag

Narrator 5: "I am the United States flag. I watch over Senior Girl Scouts and all Girl Scouts. I can hold my head high when I am with them. I am proud of my daughters. Girl Scouts and guests, the flag of our country. Please say the Pledge of Allegiance."

