

U.S. Flag Protocol

Rules for displaying the United States flag were established by Public Law 829 of the 77th Congress and amended by Public Law 94-344, July 7, 1976. A copy of the law is available online in a pamphlet called "Our Flag" from the U.S. Government Printing Office at bookstore.gpo.gov. It should be part of every campus ceremonies or protocol office reference collection. The Flag Code includes everything from lists of holidays on which the flag should be displayed to specifics on how the flag should be stored. Its rules are considered advisory, and currently there are no penalties for violations. The following provisions do not constitute a complete list of the rules, rather they are a selection of those that are pertinent to situations commonly faced on campus.

The flag should be displayed daily, weather permitting, on or near the main administration building of every public institution. It is interesting to note that Congress saw fit to make special mention of schools in the law by saying, "The flag should be displayed during school days in or near every schoolhouse."

Display the flag in good weather from sunrise to sunset. It is permissible to display the flag round the clock provided it is constructed of weather-resistant fabric and lit during darkness. It is not permissible to display the flag at night simply for convenience; it should be done for patriotic reasons.

When the U.S. flag is displayed with domestic flag on the same halyard (the system of ropes and snaps used to guide flags up a pole) the United States flag flies at the top. The state flag is second. Other flags, such as city or university, fly in the lowest position.

When displaying the U.S. flag on separate staffs on stage with flags of states, cities, universities, or pennants of organizations, the Stars and Stripes should be at the center and highest point of the group.

When flags of two or more nations are displayed with the U.S. flag, they should be flown on separate, identical staffs of the same height. International law forbids flying a flag above that of another nation during peacetime. Flags should be approximately the same size and arranged in alphabetical order according to the English spellings of their names. When only two flags are on display, the U.S. flag as the host is given the place of honor to the right of the other flag.

On U.S. soil, the flag is hoisted first and lowered last. It is posted in the position of honor, on its own right. In other words, no other flag or pennant may be placed to the right of the United States flag.

To display the flag behind a speaker's platform, position it flat on the wall above and behind the speaker.

On the stage of an auditorium or the chancel of a church, post the flag on the speaker's right as if he or she were facing the audience. All other flags are posted on the speaker's left as he or she faces the audience.

When the flag is not posted on the stage, but rather on the floor in an auditorium or chancel, it belongs on the audience's right as they face the stage. Others flags are posted on the floor on the audience's left.

To display the flag with other flags in front of a building, the U.S. flag is given the place of honor on the right side of all others. Therefore, if a person were standing at the front of the building looking out, the U.S. flag would be on his or her right. From the street looking toward the building, the flag would be on the viewer's left.

It is never correct to drape the flag over a podium, platform, statue, or table or to confine it by drawing it up into folds. Instead, use bunting for decorative purposes arranged with the blue above, white in the middle, and red at the bottom.

To cover a casket, the flag should be placed so that the union (the blue field with the stars) is at the deceased's head and over the left shoulder. The flag should not be lowered into the grave or allowed to touch the ground.

It is permissible to use gold fringe on indoor flags and those that are used in ceremonies and parades. Do not use a fringed flag on an outdoor flagpole.

The flag should not be carried horizontally or used as a receptacle.

The American flag is never dipped to salute any person or thing.

When the flag becomes worn, it should be replaced immediately and the old flag destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning.

Color Guards

Academic processions traditionally include a color guard, unless the colors are permanently affixed in the venue or are displayed on stage and will not be moved during the event. The colors should not be presented by a person in academic regalia. Instead, enlist a trained color guard from the campus ROTC, an area military base, or veteran's organization. As a final option, civilians in dark suits may present the flag, but care should be taken to be certain they are trained to perform the function properly and with dignity.

The color guard carries the national flag in the position of honor, on the right. In other words, if a person were facing the color guard watching its approach, the American flag would be on his or her left.

If the American flag is being presented in a line of several other flags, such as state, university, or historic banners, the Stars and Stripes is placed in the center and a few paces in front of the line.

How to Fly the U.S. Flag at Half-Staff

Check The White House web site at www.whitehouse.gov for official proclamations about when to fly the flag at half-staff.

Position the flag at precisely one-half the distance between the top and bottom of the staff. Only flags that are displayed outdoors on flag poles are lowered.

Do not display other flags on the same pole when the U.S. flag is at half-staff.

Do not fly state, city, university flags, or any other flag higher than the United States flag. Many campuses have an arrangement of flags on separate poles in front of buildings or at campus entryways. Instead of lowering them perilously close to the ground, remove them and fly only the Stars and Stripes during periods of mourning.

A foreign flag cannot be flown higher than the United States' flag nor can it be flown at half-staff without permission of that country. It is therefore advisable to refrain from displaying foreign flags when the Stars and Stripes is at half-staff.

Continue to display the flag in this manner throughout the period designated by the President regardless of special occasions that may occur on campus during this time.

Who Determines When the Flag is Lowered?

Traditionally, the president of the United States declares that the flag should be lowered to half-staff. The question often arises on campus as to whether the flag can properly be flown at half-staff in tribute to a prominent member of the university community. Because American custom reserves this high honor for occasions of national mourning, the best option for honoring a special person is to use the school, state, or city flag for this purpose.