

**EIGHT  
STARS  
OF  
GOLD  
ACTIVITY**

# FLAG ETIQUETTE

*Why is etiquette  
important?*

Level: Intermediate ( 3-5)



## Background

In the United States, flag etiquette helps Americans show respect for all that the flag represents and symbolizes. We respect flags to show that we value being citizens of America and Alaska.

*Fifty-five delegates met in Fairbanks to write Alaska's constitution. Photo courtesy of Bob Bartlett collection, UAF and Polar Regions Dept.*

## Summary

Students discuss flag etiquette and research laws and organizations that promote flag etiquette. They demonstrate the proper ways to handle, display and fold flags.

## Estimated Time

45 minutes – Discussion and reading

90 minutes – Research and presentations

## In this activity students will focus on the following:

Alaska Performance Standards at Benchmark 2

Reading

- 10 Identify themes in texts and connect them to personal experiences, experiences of others and other texts

Alaska Content Standards

English/ Language Arts

- D.3 Give credit for others' ideas, images, and information by citing information about sources, including title and author

History:

- B3 Recognize that historical understanding is relevant and valuable in the students' life and for participating in local, state, national and global communities

## Activities

### Step One: Discuss and organize

- Discuss with the students the words, "respect," "honor," "flag," and "manners." (SEE Vocabulary.) What do the words mean to the students? What things do they do regularly to show respect to others? (Answers may include: respecting their elders, listening to their parents, etc.) What does being a citizen of Alaska and a citizen of the United States mean to them? (Answers may include: voting, following rules, having freedom, and taking care of the land.) Record their answers about respect and citizenship on a chart or overhead.
- Discuss the definition of etiquette. What manners and ways of behaving do students already have in their lives? (Answers may include: saying "thank you" and "please," knocking on closed doors, telephone greetings, etc.)
- Ask them what etiquette or rules they already know about flags. Record their ideas on a chart or overhead called "Rules We Know." Ask them if there might be other rules. (See "Frequently Asked Questions About the Flag," to select the most age-appropriate questions for your class.) Make another list on a chart or overhead called "Is it a Rule?"
- Tell the students that they will need to find out if the rules they listed are accurate and to locate the answers to the rules they don't know.
- Brainstorm ways the students can locate information. (Answers may include Internet search, going to the library, asking someone who knows, etc.)

### Step Two: Research

- Divide the task of finding the etiquette rules for flags among the students. For instance, each student could find one answer and bring it to share with the whole class, written neatly on one piece of paper or an index card.

- Show the students the format that you want them to use to record the source of their information. This may include title (underlined), author, date, page number(s), information written in a complete sentence, etc. Practice writing the correct format on the board. Have pairs of students make up sample sources and try to write them correctly.
- Possible sources of information include:
  - Websites: The American Legion [www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org); Elks Club [www.elks.org](http://www.elks.org); Flags of the World [www.fotw.org](http://www.fotw.org)
  - Pamphlet: Flag Etiquette, distributed by The American Legion, Indianapolis, Indiana 46206
  - Encyclopedias in school library
- Give the students time to gather the information. (Overnight or 30 minutes should be sufficient.)

### Step Three: Report and Demonstrate

- Have each student present the information he/she learned to the class.
- Print the directions for folding the flag. Have the students pair up and practice folding the flag. Use a full size flag or a large piece of fabric if a flag is not available to your class for handling.
- Have the students discuss ways that they can show respect to the flag, things that they have learned from their research and practice.

### Vocabulary

**respect** v. To feel or show honor or esteem

**honor** n. High regard or respect

**flag** n. Piece of cloth with colors and patterns that represent a country, a state, etc.

**manners** n. Polite way of doing something

**etiquette** n. Acceptable way of behaving in society

### Assessments

- Give each student an incomplete/incorrect citation from a research source. Each student should be able to rewrite it correctly, following class format.
- Check for student understanding, either in writing or orally, about the reasons for showing respect for a flag. Students should be able to articulate the importance of being a responsible citizen and behaving respectfully toward symbols like flags.
- EXTENSION ACTIVITY: Use a song such as "That Ragged Old Flag" to help the students understand that flags allow people to show how they feel about abstract ideas like patriotism. The music and lyrics for "That Ragged Old Flag" by Johnny Cash, 1974 (Need RealPlayer) are located at: [www.geocities.com/EnchantedForest/Tower/2093/RaggedOldFlag.rm](http://www.geocities.com/EnchantedForest/Tower/2093/RaggedOldFlag.rm)

### Materials

- Frequently Asked Questions About the Flag
- Chart paper or overheads and markers
- Writing paper, pens or pencils
- Flag (or large piece of cloth if a flag is not available)

### Resources

Exhibit catalog: Spartz, India. *Eight Stars of Gold: The Story of Alaska's Flag*. Juneau: Alaska State Museum, 2001.

The American Legion [www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org)

Elks Club (19 listed Elks clubs in Alaska, 2001) [www.elks.org](http://www.elks.org)

"That Ragged Old Flag" Music and lyrics by Johnny Cash, 1974 [www.geocities.com/EnchantedForest/Tower/2093/RaggedOldFlag.rm](http://www.geocities.com/EnchantedForest/Tower/2093/RaggedOldFlag.rm)

# PROCEDURES FOR FOLDING THE FLAG



A)



B)



There are no Flag Code provisions which require any method, however, the following is traditional:

- Straighten out the flag to full length and fold lengthwise once.
- Fold it lengthwise a second time to meet the open edge, making sure that the union of stars on the blue field remains outward in full view. (A large flag may have to be folded lengthwise a third time.)
- A triangular fold is then started by bringing the striped corner of the folded edge to the open edge.
- The outer point is then turned inward parallel with the open edge to form a second triangle.
- The diagonal or triangular folding is continued toward the blue union until the end is reached, with only the blue showing and the form being that of a cocked (three corner) hat.



D)



E)



# Frequently Asked Questions About the Flag

Source: American Legion website [www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org)

**Q:** Can a flag that has been used to cover a casket be displayed after its original use?

**A:** There are no provisions in the Flag Code to suggest otherwise. It would be a fitting tribute to the memory of the deceased veteran and their service to a grateful nation if their casket flag were displayed.

**Q:** Can the United States flag be displayed on days when the weather is inclement?

**A:** The flag should not be displayed on days when the weather is inclement, except when an all-weather (nylon or other non-absorbent material) flag is displayed. However, most all flags are made of all-weather materials. (ref: Flag Code 6(c))

**Q:** What is the significance of displaying the flag at half-staff?

**A:** This gesture is a sign to indicate the nation mourns the death of an individual(s), such as death of the President or former President, Vice President, Supreme Court Justice, member of Congress, Secretary of an executive or military department, etc. Only the President of the United States or the Governor of the State may order the flag to be half-staffed. The honor and reverence accorded this solemn act is quickly becoming eroded by those individuals and agencies that display the flag at half-staff on inappropriate occasions without proper authority to do so. (ref: Flag Code 7(m))

**Q:** When the flag is not flown from a staff, how should it be displayed?

**A:** It should be displayed vertically, whether indoors or out, and suspended so that its folds fall free as though the flag were staffed. The stripes may be displayed either horizontally or vertically against a wall, the union should be uppermost and to the flag's own right; that is, to the observer's left. When displayed in a window of a home or a place of business, the flag should be displayed in the same way; that is, with the union or blue field to the left of the observer in the street. (ref: Flag Code 7(i))

**Q:** How are unserviceable flags destroyed?

**A:** The Flag Code suggests that, "when a flag has served its useful purpose, it should be destroyed, preferably by burning." For individual citizens, this should be done discreetly so the act of destruction is not perceived as a protest or desecration. Many American Legion Posts conduct Disposal of Unserviceable Flag Ceremonies on

June 14, Flag Day. This ceremony creates a particularly dignified and solemn occasion for the retirement of unserviceable flags. (ref: Flag Code 8(k))

**Q:** Can the flag be washed or dry-cleaned?

**A:** Yes. There are no provisions of the Flag Code which prohibit such care. The decision to wash or dry-clean would be dependent on the material.

**Q:** Are you required to destroy the flag if it touches the ground?

**A:** Flag Code section 176b states that the flag should not touch anything beneath it such as the ground. This is stated to indicate that care should be exercised in the handling of the flag to protect it from becoming soiled or damaged. You ARE NOT required to destroy the flag when this happens. As long as the flag remains suitable for display, even if washing or dry-cleaning (which is acceptable practice) is required, you may continue to display the flag as a symbol of our great country. (ref: Flag Code 8(b))

**Q:** What is the proper method for folding the flag?

**A:** The Flag Code does not require any specific method, however, there is a tradition that has developed over time. This method produces a triangular shaped form like that of a three corner hat with only the blue union showing. There is a diagram available on Folding the Flag that lists the steps involved.

**Q:** May a person, other than a veteran, have their casket draped with the flag of the United States?

**A:** Yes, although this honor is usually reserved for veterans or highly regarded state and national figures, the Flag Code does not prohibit this use.

**Q:** What is the significance of the gold fringe which we see on some American flags?

**A:** Records indicate that fringe was first used on the flag as early as 1835. It was not until 1895 that it was officially added to the National flag for all regiments of the Army. For civilian use, fringe is not required as an integral part of the flag, nor can its use be said to constitute an unauthorized addition to the design prescribed by statute. It is considered that fringe is used as an honorable enrichment only.

**Q:** What is meant by "the flag's own right?"

**A:** The "right" as the position of honor developed from the time when the

"right hand" was the "weapon hand" or "point of danger." The right hand, raised without a weapon, was a sign of peace. The right hand, to any observer, is the observer's left. Therefore, as used in the Flag Code, the flag and/or blue field is displayed to the left of the observer, which is the flag's "own right." (ref: Flag Code 7(d),(i))

**Q:** Is it proper to fly the flag of the United States at night?

**A:** The Flag Code states it is the universal custom to display the flag only from sunrise to sunset on buildings and on stationary flag staffs in the open. However, when a patriotic effect is desired, the flag may be displayed twenty-four hours a day if properly illuminated during the hours of darkness. (ref: Flag Code 6(a)) The American Legion interprets "proper illumination" as a light specifically placed to illuminate the flag (preferred) or having a light source sufficient to illuminate the flag so it is recognizable as such by the casual observer.

**Q:** What does it mean when the flag is not flying above the White House?

**A:** The flag is flown over the White House when the President is in Washington, D.C. It is not displayed when the President is not in Washington, D.C.

**Q:** What should be the position of the flag when displayed from a staff in a church, public auditorium or other public meeting place, whether indoors or outdoors, on platform, or on the floor at ground level?

**A:** When used on a speaker's platform, the flag, if displayed flat, should be displayed above and behind the speaker. When displayed from a staff in a church, public auditorium or meeting place, the flag should hold the position of superior prominence, in advance of the audience, and in the position of honor at the clergyman's or speaker's right as he faces the audience. Prior to the Flag Code changes in 1976, the display procedure was somewhat different. Now the staffed flag should always be placed to the right of the speaker (observer's left) without regard to a platform or floor level. (ref: Flag Code 7 (k))

**Q:** What are the penalties for the physical desecration of the flag?

**A:** There are currently no penalties for the physical desecration of the flag. The American Legion and other members of the Citizens' Flag Alliance continue working toward securing a Constitutional amendment to protect the flag from physical desecration.