

American Flag Etiquette

The American flag conjures a vast array of different thoughts, feelings, memories and connotations for Americans. Many people feel a fierce sense of loyalty and pride when they see the star-spangled banner wave. Many see the sacrifice that thousands of men and women have made over the years in times of war, fighting and dying for the American nation and its core values, beliefs and policies. Often times that sacrifice came from that person themselves or their close comrades, friends, or family members.

While the flag can mean different things to different people, a breach of American flag etiquette, even if accidental or well-intentioned, can deeply offend many people. If you want to be sure to avoid offending anyone by negligence, there is an official Flag Code that you can abide by. From the Code, here are some of the basic rules of American flag etiquette. Note that special American flag rules may apply at certain national holidays.

These are some of the core "rules" of American flag etiquette:

1. The flag should usually be displayed from sunrise to sunset.
2. The flag should be raised briskly.
3. The flag should be lowered ceremoniously.
4. The flag should never touch the ground.
5. The flag should not be flown in inclement weather unless it is an all-weather flag. The flag code allows for all-weather flags to be displayed in inclement weather.
6. According to the flag code, when the flag is raised or lowered as part of a ceremony as it passes by in parade or review, everyone, except those in uniform, should face the flag with the right hand over the heart.

7. The U.S. flag should never be dipped toward any person or object, nor should the flag ever touch anything beneath it.

8. The flag can be flown at home 24 hours a day, as long as it is "appropriately illuminated" during hours of darkness.

In particular, these are some rules of the American flag that apply during holidays:

1. On Memorial Day, it is customary to place small American flags at gravesites of fallen soldiers.

2. On Memorial Day, the flag should be displayed at half-staff until noon and then flown at full-staff the rest of the day.

3. Flags should not be used in any kinds of advertisements.

4. Despite widespread use of patriotic apparel especially on holidays such as Independence Day (4th of July), according to the American flag etiquette as detailed in the flag code, the flag is not to be worn as apparel. This includes imprints on shirts, neck ties, bandannas, shorts, etc.

5. The flag should never be carried flat or horizontally.

6. It is in violation of the flag code to use flag napkins or flag paper plates (such as for 4th of July picnics) because according to the Flag Code, the flag should not be "printed or otherwise impressed on paper napkins or boxes or anything that is designed for temporary use and discard."

7. With regards to behavior around the flag at certain times likely to occur especially on holidays, the Flag Code states:

"During the ceremony of hoisting or lowering the flag or when the flag is passing in a parade or in review, all persons present in uniform should render the military salute.

Members of the Armed Forces and veterans who are present but not in uniform may render the military salute. All other persons

present should face the flag and stand at attention with their right hand over the heart, or if applicable, remove their headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart.

Citizens of other countries present should stand at attention. All such conduct toward the flag in a moving column should be rendered at the moment the flag passes."

8. The flag should be displayed especially on these holidays:

- Inauguration Day, Jan. 20
- Lincoln's Birthday, Feb. 12
- Washington's Birthday, 3rd Monday in Feb.
- Armed Forces Day, 3rd Saturday in May
- Memorial Day, last Monday in May, (half-staff until noon)
- Flag Day, June 14
- Independence Day, July 4
- National Korean War Veterans Armistice Day, July 27
- Labor Day, 1st Monday in Sept.
- Constitution Day, Sept. 17
- Columbus Day, 2nd Monday in Oct.
- Navy Day, Oct. 27
- Veterans Day, Nov. 11
- Thanksgiving Day, 4th Thursday in Nov.
- other days as proclaimed by the President of the United States
- the birthdays of States (date of admission)
- State holidays

The flag should be displayed at half-staff on these holidays:

- May 15 — Peace Officers Memorial Day: half-staff from sunrise to sunset
- September 11 — Patriot Day: half-staff from sunrise to sunset
- December 7 — National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day: half-staff from sunrise to sunset
- Last Monday in May (Memorial Day) — the flag should be displayed at half-staff until noon