

U.S. Flag, Pledge of Allegiance & National Anthem Etiquette

By Maralee McKee Etiquette School 9-29-2024

* When our National Anthem, ***The Star-Spangled Banner***, is performed, we **stand** at attention in respect for those who fought and can no longer stand.

* National Anthem Etiquette (Star-Spangled Banner Protocol)

When the National Anthem is announced, there are several things to keep in mind: stand, remove your cap, face the flag, place your right hand over your heart, and sing along if appropriate. Don't talk, eat, or distract from the performance of the National Anthem. Event participants and military have slightly different procedures, so let's look at those and the remainder of our National Anthem etiquette here.

1. Athletes and featured participants in an event should follow procedures to **stand and respect the Anthem**.
2. As citizens, our [US Federal Statute \(36 U.S. Code § 301 – National Anthem\)](#) says we should face the flag (or face toward the music if there is no flag) and **stand at attention** with the right hand over the heart. If the music is prerecorded, look straight ahead. Those who are performing their assigned tasks as workers/volunteers at the event need not follow these protocols if their attention *must* be on those tasks during the Anthem. A few examples of these are choirs, bands, flagbearers, and security staff.
3. As soon as you hear an announcement that the National Anthem is about to be played or sung, **stand up in anticipation** if you are able. If you have a hat on, remove it. This etiquette applies to both men and women if they are wearing a unisex or sports hat (ball cap). Ladies-only decorative hats (like you see worn at the Kentucky Derby) can be left on, as of course can any uniform hats of performers or flag-bearers.
4. As soon as you hear an announcement that the National Anthem is about to be played or sung, **stand up in anticipation** if you are able. If you have a hat on, remove it. This etiquette applies to both men and women if they are wearing a unisex or sports hat (ball cap). Ladies-only decorative hats (like you see worn at the Kentucky Derby) can be left on, as of course can any uniform hats of performers or flag-bearers.
5. Veterans and current military members should give and hold a military salute during the Anthem. [The change in protocol for former members of the military using a military salute occurred in 2008](#). Prior to that, veterans held their hands over their hearts just as civilians did.
6. Remove your sunglasses. Yes, it's uncomfortable in the bright sun. That's OK. People on the battlefield have been much more uncomfortable.

7. Don't talk during the Anthem. If you're talking, you're not paying attention to the song and thus not showing respect for its meaning. And **you're interrupting those around you** who are trying to show their respect.
8. Don't eat or drink during the song. If you're chewing gum, stop until the Anthem has ended. Have nothing in your hands (except a hat); **put your smartphone away**.
9. You may sing along if you wish. In fact, since it's our nation's song, we *should* sing along. Just don't belt it out like you're the one who was invited to perform it!
- 10 After the song is completed, it's *not* proper to applaud. The song represents our National Anthem as a hymn, and we usually don't applaud after hymns. I know this sounds odd, and I know that most everyone else at a sporting or large event claps, but that does go against the official Code. The performers are leading the audience in the singing of the hymn, not performing it for their own recognition or for applause. (I know it's hard sometimes not to clap. Remember when Whitney Houston sang the National Anthem in 1991 at Super Bowl XXV? It was practically impossible not to clap for her!) On the other hand, at sporting events the game usually begins immediately after the playing of the Anthem, so it could be said that people are clapping for the start of the event and not the end of the Anthem. And at the **Super Bowl**, the fly-over immediately follows the Anthem; this proud, awe-inspiring display is certainly applause-worthy.
- 11 In cases where the anthem of another nation is playing on U.S. soil, or you're visiting another country: stand up, remove your hat, and remain quiet in respect for their anthem. Do not place your hand over your heart or salute a foreign anthem, allegiance, or flag.

Note:

Did you know that our National Anthem, *The Star-Spangled Banner*, **is spelled with a hyphen**, though most of us don't include it? We're in great company, though. The composer, Francis Scott Key, left the hyphen off **his first version back in 1814!**

Pledge of Allegiance Etiquette

1. When pledging allegiance to the flag, follow the manners of participating in the National Anthem listed above.
2. Say the Pledge out loud with the rest of those gathered.
3. Look at the flag as the Pledge is said, and don't forget to put your right hand over your heart.

U.S. Flag Etiquette

1. Any time you're at an event (a parade, football game half-time show, Boy or Girl Scout ceremony, church or school event, or such) and the flag passes you, stand up as you see it come into your line of vision. Follow all the protocols of listening to the National Anthem listed above. And remain standing until the flag has passed you and your family or group.
2. The flag does not belong to any one American. It's a shared symbol of our nation. It should only be at half-mast by presidential or gubernatorial order, even when mourning a soldier killed in the line of duty.

A person may not correctly decide to fly our national symbol at half-mast for personal reasons.

I know this is hard from my experience. I wanted to honor my brother, a 25-plus-year member of the Armed Forces when he passed away. He didn't die in the line of duty; however, the beauty and dignity of his military funeral, including the three volley, often called a "21-Gun Salute," along with the presenting of the flag that covered his coffin to his widow, were a beautiful reflection of his service to our nation.

3. Any time you see the flag being raised or lowered, stop to watch, remain silent, remove your hat, and place your right hand over your heart.
4. Light must always shine on our flag. It must never fly in darkness. If you have one flying outside your home, either lower it and bring it inside before sunset each evening or have a light installed to shine on it throughout the night.
5. The flag isn't dipped (lowered) to any person or thing.
6. On United States soil, our flag always should be given the place of honor among other flags. It should be put on a stage in a room to its right-hand side. No other flag may be larger in size, be on a taller flag pole, or raised higher. The U.S. flag will be the first one raised and the last one lowered. (It is to be raised briskly and lowered slowly.)
7. When displayed on a wall, the flag may be hung either vertically or horizontally. In either case, the stars should be at the top and to the observer's left.
8. All flags displayed for general public use (those not of historical significance) should be clean and tatter-free. When it's time to retire a flag, there are precise protocols. American Legion posts and Boy Scout troops hold occasional ceremonies in which the flag is correctly burned (retired). Contact your local chapter for details on when their next service will be held. One will often occur on Flag Day, June 14.

This list of flag etiquette is by no means an exhaustive one. To learn more, visit [USFlag.org](https://www.usflag.org).