

Troop 19 Weymouth/Braintree



Opening and Closing Ceremonies

Updated February 2007

Part 1: Basic Rules

The Purpose of Opening and Closing Ceremonies

Ceremonies are an important part of Scouting. A good ceremony makes us think. It reminds us about our duty to God, country, others, and self. And it inspires us to follow the ideals of Scouting in our lives.

An opening ceremony sets the tone for the rest of the meeting. It reminds us of where we are and why we're there. An opening ceremony is a good time for an inspiring message that people will remember throughout the meeting. For example, before a big competition, the opening ceremony can provide a message about sportsmanship.

A closing ceremony provides a formal end to the meeting. It can remind us about what we learned or what we achieved during the meeting. It also can include an inspiring message that we can take with us for the rest of the week.

Ceremonies also help to build confidence. When your patrol is running a ceremony, it's your chance to stand up in front of everyone else and lead the group by your words, your actions, and your example. Show everyone that *your patrol* can get the job done right.

The Basic Ingredients

A good opening or closing will include the following ingredients:

- The ceremony should be dignified and inspiring.
- The ceremony should be reasonably simple and brief.
- The ceremony should give every member of the troop an opportunity to participate.
- Flags must be carried and displayed correctly.
- All participants must be in proper uniform (including hat).
- The speaker(s) must be loud enough for the entire audience to hear.
- The speaker must give correct commands.
- **PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!**

Showing Respect for the U.S. Flag

The United States flag code adopted by Congress provides the rules for honoring and displaying the flag. The code states: “The flag represents a living country and is itself considered a living thing.” Give it your full respect.

Here are the basic rules:

- Never let the U.S. flag touch the ground, the floor, or water.
- If flags are flying at different heights, the U.S. flag should be the highest.
- If there’s more than one flag on a pole, the U.S. should be the highest.
- When flying from a staff in an auditorium, the U.S. flag should be to the speaker’s right. This means that to the audience, the U.S. flag should appear on the left. This applies to scout meetings, where the SPL is the “speaker.”
- When marching, the U.S. flag should be in front of others, or to the right if the flags are arranged in a line. The U.S. flag should be the first one carried into a ceremony.
- Make sure to fold the U.S. flag properly.



For more information:

- Scout handbook
- The U.S. Flag Code, <http://www.legion.org/pdf/flagcode.pdf>

Who’s in Command?

Troop formation is supposed to be orderly. One of the ways we keep order is by controlling who has command of the floor.

The Senior Patrol Leader has command of the floor until he transfers that command to someone else. That someone else might be the program patrol leader, or it might be someone with an announcement to make. In all cases, the transfer of command takes place with a salute.

The program Patrol Leader can give command of the floor to someone else—for example, another patrol member who will actually be speaking during the ceremony. This patrol member assumes command when he salutes the Patrol Leader (as part of the color guard, for example). When he’s done, he salutes the Patrol Leader again, which gives command back to the patrol leader. Then the Patrol Leader gives command back to the SPL with a salute.

Who salutes first?

The SPL runs the troop. As a sign of respect, the program Patrol Leader begins the salute, and the SPL responds. The same goes for anyone else who takes command from the SPL (for example, to make an announcement).

When saluting the program Patrol Leader, the color guard and other patrol members should begin the salute. This is a sign of respect to the leader of the patrol.

Commands

The Senior Patrol Leader says “Program Patrol Leader.”

The program Patrol Leader says “Color guard front and center” to call the color guard forward. At a Scout meeting, he says “Post the colors” at the end of the opening and “Dismiss the colors” at the end of the closing. At a flag raising ceremony, he says “Post the colors.” At a flag lowering ceremony, he says “Lower the colors,” and then at the end, “Dismiss the colors.”

When raising or lowering the U.S. flag, or when saying the Pledge of Allegiance, the speaker says “Scout salute” or “Hand salute.” If at least part of the audience is in class A, B, or C uniform, the correct command is “Scout salute.” If no one is in uniform, the command should be “Hand salute.”

When the audience will be reciting the Scout Oath or Scout Law, the speaker gives the command, “Scout sign.”

When it’s time to stop saluting or holding the Scout sign, the speaker says “To.”

The Color Guard

The color guard includes the people who raise, lower, or carry the flags, along with other people who will be participating in the ceremony.

People carrying flags on staffs should start at the back of the formation. They should carry the flags in the correct order (see “Carrying Flags on Staffs,” below). At the end of the closing, they should carry the flags to the back of the formation.

Members of the color guard who are not carrying flags should start at the back of the formation and walk to the front side-by-side (see “Marching Techniques,” below). Another option is to start from the side of the formation, but if you do this, you should make sure everyone turns in an orderly way. When leaving the ceremony, people without flags should return to where they came from in an orderly way.

Marching Techniques

You don't need to do anything fancy, but using a few basic marching techniques can really help make your ceremony stand out. Here are a few ideas:

- When several people are walking side-by-side (this is called a “rank”), stay in a straight line. Use the person on the right end of the rank as a guide (“guide right”). If the person on the left end of the rank looks to his right, he should only be able to see the person directly to his right. The rest of the rank should be hidden from view if they're really in a straight line.
- Kick it up a notch: march in step. Have everyone in the rank start on his left foot. A command like “Forward march” will help everyone step off at the same time. [The command comes first; *then* start marching.]
- Make crisp 90-degree turns. This is especially important for the program Patrol Leader.
- Have everyone turn the same way. When you do an about-face (180-degree turn), turn to your right.



For more information:

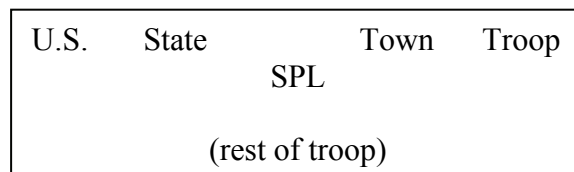
- Have a member of the military or the marching band show you how to do a proper about-face. They can give you other marching tips too.

Carrying Flags on Staffs

Flags should be carried in the correct order. The U.S. flag goes first, followed by other flags in the order of importance. At our regular troop meetings, the flags go in the following order:

- United States
- Commonwealth of Massachusetts
- Town of Weymouth
- Troop 19

This is the order for marching, and it's also the order for placing the flags at the front of the formation, starting with the U.S. flag on the audience's left.



Carry the flag with two hands on the staff. Let the flag fly freely; don't bunch it up in your hands. Color guard members should carry the flags in a similar way—for example, with the staff against the right hip. The U.S. flag should be held up a little bit higher than the others (others should be dipped more).

When a member of the color guard is standing at the flag stand, the flag should be out of the stand and the staff should be resting on the flag holder's right toe.

When it's time to put the staff into the flag stand, don't just jam it straight in. Twist it in a circular manner. The same goes for removing the staff from the stand.

Color guard members do not salute or hold the Scout sign while they're holding a flag. But they should still say whatever the rest of the troop is saying (for example, the Pledge of Allegiance, Scout Oath, or Scout Law).

Raising and Lowering Flags

When raising flags, the U.S. flag goes first. It should be raised quickly. The troop should salute while the U.S. flag is being raised. Once the U.S. flag is up, other flags can be raised. It takes two people to raise the U.S. flag: One to attach the flag to the flag line (halyard) and one to hold the other end and keep it from touching the ground.

When lowering flags, the U.S. flag is lowered last. It should be lowered slowly. The troop should salute while the U.S. flag is being lowered. Once the U.S. flag is down, it should be folded properly. It takes at least two people to fold the flag; a third person can help by keeping it taut in the middle.

There are special rules for flying the flag at half-staff. When raising the flag, you should raise it to full peak first, then lower it to half-staff. When lowering the flag, raise it to full peak first, then lower it all the way.



For more information:

- Scout handbook
- The U.S. Flag Code, <http://www.legion.org/pdf/flagcode.pdf>

Part 2: Ceremony Ideas

This section will give you some general ideas for opening and closing ceremonies, followed by some specific examples.

General Ideas

Get everyone involved. The easiest way to do this is by having the whole troop recite the Pledge of Allegiance, Scout Oath, or Scout Law. For a new twist, try a call-and-response (for example, “Be prepared!”/”We are prepared!”). To make it more memorable, get people physically involved. For example, have everyone hold up the Scout sign, then use their left hand to grab the right arm of the person to their left.

Use a different formation. For example, you can have Patrol Leaders hold onto a flagpole and then have their patrols line up behind them. Or you can have each patrol gather around the patrol flag. This is another way to get people involved.

Use flags. You can talk about one of the flags that the color guard has carried up. You can also bring up a special flag and explain its historical significance. Bonus points if you can relate that historical flag to a lesson that’s meaningful for today.

Use simple props. You might find a way to have several speakers standing in a row, with each one holding up a letter one by one. At the end, the letters will spell something. Another idea is to use colors—for example, talk about the meaning of the U.S. flag by holding up something red, something white, and something blue.

Use candles. Shutting the lights off and using candles can add dramatic effect. Candles can be symbolic—for example, they can stand for the 12 points of the Scout Law. A candle can also represent the spirit of Scouting, which means spreading the flame to others is like spreading the spirit of Scouting.

Use a substitute for candles. If you’re not allowed to use candles, find something else to give you the same effect. Pocket-size flashlights can work. Lights in tin cans might work. You can think of other ideas too.

Tie it all together. Think of something that goes along with the meeting theme. Tie the opening and the closing together. Or tie a series of openings and closings together—for example, a different point of the Scout law every week for 12 weeks.



For more information:

- http://www.whitestag.org/ceremonies/ceremonies_scout_program.html
- Other resources on the Web