



Visit our in-depth article at <https://catamaranguru.com/education/seamanship/flag-etiquette>.

Nautical flags, or signal flags, are an internationally understood method for vessel communication. Depending on the context, each flag has a specific meaning. With language and cultural differences, this form of communication is unambiguous and effective. Most often the flag meaning rather than its letter is the key message as spelled-out words are less clear.




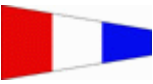







International Code Flags

| Flag | Letter Represented, Name & Pronunciation | Meaning |
|--|--|---|
|  | A lpha AL-fah | I have a diver in the water; remain well clear at slow speed. |
|  | B ravo BRAH-voh | I am taking on, discharging, or carrying dangerous cargo. |
|  | C harlie CHAR-lee | "Yes" or "affirmative". Regatta-specific: Change of course |
|  | D elta DELL-tah | I am experiencing difficulty with maneuvering; keep clear. |
|  | E cho ECK-oh | I am directing my course to starboard. |
|  | F oxtrot FOKS-trot | I am disabled; communicate with me. Aircraft carrier-specific: Flight operations underway. |
|  | G olf GOLF | I require a pilot. |
|  | H otel hoh-TELL | I have a pilot on board. |

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|--|--------------------------------|---|
|  | I ndia IN-dee-ah | I am directing my course to port. Navy-specific: Coming alongside. Regatta-specific: Round the ends starting rule |
|  | J uliet JEW-lee-ett | I am on fire and carrying dangerous cargo; keep clear. |
|  | K ilo KEY-loh | I wish to communicate with you. |
|  | L ima LEE-mah | You should stop your vessel immediately. Regatta-specific: Come within hail or follow me |
|  | M ike MIKE | My vessel is stopped; making no way. Regatta-specific: Mark missing |
|  | N ovember no-VEM-bur | No or negative. Regatta-specific: Abandonment and re-sail |
|  | O scar OSS-kur | Man overboard. |
|  | P apa pah-PAH | All personnel return to ship; proceeding to sea (used in port). |
|  | Q uebec kay-BECK | Ship meets health regulations; request clearance into port. Navy-specific: Boat recall; all boats return to ship. |
|  | R omeo ROH-me-oh | <i>No international meaning.</i> Navy-specific: Preparing to replenish (at sea). Ready duty ship (in port). |

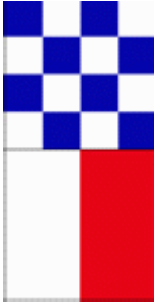


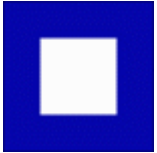

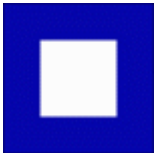
| | | |
|--|---|--|
|  | <p>Sierra</p> <p>see-AIR-ah</p> | <p>Moving astern.</p> <p>Navy-specific: Conducting flag hoist drill.</p> <p>Regatta-specific: Shorten course</p> |
|  | <p>Tango</p> <p>TANG-go</p> | <p>Engaged in trawling; keep clear.</p> <p>Navy-specific: Do not pass ahead of me.</p> |
|  | <p>Uniform</p> <p>YOU-nee-form</p> | <p>You are running into danger.</p> |
|  | <p>Victor</p> <p>VIK-tah</p> | <p>I require assistance.</p> |
|  | <p>Whiskey</p> <p>WISS-kee</p> | <p>I require medical assistance.</p> |
|  | <p>Xray</p> <p>ECKS-ray</p> | <p>Stop carrying out your intentions and watch for my signals.</p> <p>Regatta-specific: Individual recall.</p> |
|  | <p>Yankee</p> <p>YANG-kee</p> | <p>I am dragging anchor.</p> <p>Navy-specific: Ship has visual communications duty.</p> <p>Regatta-specific: Wear life jackets</p> |
|  | <p>Zulu</p> <p>ZOO-loo</p> | <p>I require a tug.</p> <p>Regatta-specific: 20% scoring penalty</p> |
|  | <p>Code/Answer</p> <p>Code or Answer</p> | <p>Message is understood. Also, used as a numeric decimal point.</p> <p>Navy-specific: Flag that follows is from the International Code of Signals.</p> <p>Regatta-specific: Postponement</p> |
|  | <p>First substitute (First Repeater)</p> <p>First sub</p> | <p>Substitute for the first flag in this hoist. Also "repeats" the first flag or series of flags in this hoist.</p> <p>Navy-specific: Absence of flag officer or unit commander (In port).</p> <p>Regatta-specific: General recall</p> |

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|--|---------------------------------|---|
|  | Second substitute Second sub | Substitute for the second flag in this hoist. Navy-specific: Absence of chief of staff (In port). |
|  | Third substitute Third sub | Substitute for the third flag in this hoist. Navy-specific: Absence of commanding officer (In port). |
|  | One WUN | None. Navy-specific: Numeral one. |
|  | Two TOO | None. Navy-specific: Numeral two. |
|  | Three TREE | None. Navy-specific: Numeral three. |
|  | Four FOW-er | None. Navy-specific: Numeral four. |
|  | Five FIFE | None. Navy-specific: Numeral five. |
|  | Six SICKS | None. Navy-specific: Numeral six. |
|  | Seven SEV-en | None. Navy-specific: Numeral seven. |
|  | Eight ATE | None. Navy-specific: Numeral eight. |
|  | Nine NIN-er | None. Navy-specific: Numeral nine. |

| | | |
|--|---------------------------------|---|
|  | Zero ZEE-roh | None. Navy-specific: Numeral zero. |
|  | Pennant one PEN-ant WUN | Numeral one. Navy-specific: Pennant one. |
|  | Pennant two PEN-ant TOO | Numeral two. Navy-specific: Pennant two. |
|  | Pennant three PEN-ant TREE | Numeral three. Navy-specific: Pennant three. |
|  | Pennant four PEN-ant FOW-er | Numeral four. Navy-specific: Pennant four. Regatta-specific: Postponement |
|  | Pennant five PEN-ant FIFE | Numeral five. Navy-specific: Pennant five. |
|  | Pennant six PEN-ant SICKS | Numeral six. Navy-specific: Pennant six. |
|  | Pennant seven PEN-ant SEV-en | Numeral seven. Navy-specific: Pennant seven. |
|  | Pennant eight PEN-ant ATE | Numeral eight Navy-specific: Pennant eight. |
|  | Pennant Nine PEN-ant NIN-er | Numeral nine Navy-specific: Pennant nine. |
|  | Pennant zero PEN-ant ZEE-roh | Numeral zero Navy-specific: Pennant zero. |









Race Committee Flags

| Flag/Shape | Name | Sounds | Regatta Meaning |
|---|------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
|  | X | 1 when raised | Individual Recall |
|  | First Substitute | 2 when raised 1 when lowered | General Recall |
|  | AP | 2 when raised 1 when lowered | Postponement |
|  | I | None when raised 1 when lowered | Round the Ends Starting Rule |
|  | C | Repetitive | Change of Course |
|  | L | 1 when raised | Come Within Hail or Follow Me |
|  | M | Repetitive | Mark Missing |
|  | N | 3 when raised 1 when lowered | Abandonment and Resail |
|  | S | 2 when raised | Shorten Course |
|  | Y | 1 when raised | Wear Life Jacket |

| | | | |
|---|---|----------------|---------------------------------|
|  | N over H | 3 when raised | Abandonment Return to Shore |
|  | Z | 1 when lowered | 20% Scoring Penalty |
|  | Black | 1 when lowered | Hard Start: Disqualification |
| Class Flag Raised | Warning | 1 | 5 minutes to start |
|     | Preparatory (or I or Z or Black Flag) Raised | 1 | 4 minutes to start |
|  | Preparatory (or I or Z or Black Flag) Lowered | 1 | 1 minute to start |
| Class Flag Lowered | Start | 1 | Start |

MEANINGS OF NAUTICAL FLAGS

Miscellaneous Flags & Resources

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
|  <p>Small Craft Warning Up to 38 mph winds</p> |  <p>Gale Warning 39-54 mph winds</p> |  <p>Storm Warning 55-73 mph winds</p> |  <p>Hurricane Warning 74+ mph winds</p> |
|  <p>USCG Auxiliary World Flag Database</p> |  <p>US Power Squadron C.I.A. - Flags of the World</p> |  <p>Race Committee Flags of All Countries</p> |  <p>Semaphore Flag Signalling System Nautical Flag Translator</p> |