



# Nautical Flags

UConn 4-H New London County

## History

Nautical flags played an important role in maritime history. Used by sailors in the 1800s, nautical flags were considered a universal language that enabled communication between ships and vessels on the high seas and at ports. Each letter of the international signal alphabet has its own name and meaning, and these signals could be understood by any savvy sailor, regardless of what language they spoke or what country they were sailing from.

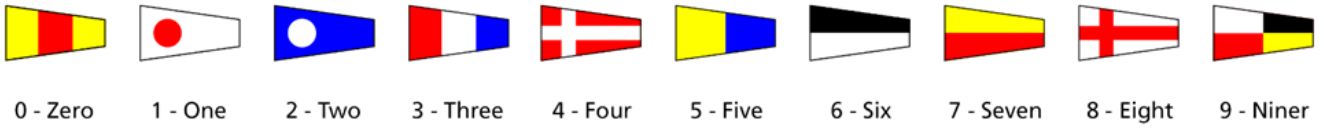
- A** I have a diver down; keep well clear at slow speed.
- B** I am taking in, or discharging, or carrying dangerous goods.
- C** Yes
- D** Keep clear of me; I am maneuvering with difficulty.
- E** I am altering my course to starboard.
- F** I am disabled; communicate with me.
- G** I require a pilot. When made by fishing vessels, this signal means "I am hauling nets".
- H** I have a pilot on board.

- I** I am altering my course to port.
- J** I am on fire and have dangerous cargo on board: keep well clear of me, or I am leaking dangerous cargo.
- K** I wish to communicate with you.
- L** You should stop your vessel instantly.
- M** My vessel is stopped and making no way through the water.
- N** No
- O** Man overboard.
- P** All persons should report on board as the vessel is about to proceed to sea.

- Q** My vessel is "healthy" and I request permission to proceed into port.
- S** I am operating astern propulsion.
- T** Keep clear of me; I am engaged in pair trawling.
- U** You are running into danger.
- V** I require assistance.
- W** I require medical assistance.
- X** Stop carrying out your intentions and watch for my signals.
- Y** I am dragging my anchor.
- Z** I require a tug.

<b>A</b> Alfa		<b>F</b> Foxtrot		<b>K</b> Kilo		<b>P</b> Papa		<b>U</b> Uniform		<b>Z</b> Zulu	
<b>B</b> Bravo		<b>G</b> Golf		<b>L</b> Lima		<b>Q</b> Quebec		<b>V</b> Victor			
<b>C</b> Charlie		<b>H</b> Hotel		<b>M</b> Mike		<b>R</b> Romeo		<b>W</b> Whiskey			
<b>D</b> Delta		<b>I</b> India		<b>N</b> November		<b>S</b> Sierra		<b>X</b> X-ray			
<b>E</b> Echo		<b>J</b> Juliet		<b>O</b> Oscar		<b>T</b> Tango		<b>Y</b> Yankee			

Single Letter Signals. Multi-letter signals were also used to convey more complex messages. Source: [National Ocean Service](#).



Number pennants. Source: [National Parks Service](#).

Create your own maritime message by following the steps below. For more information on international signal flags, visit: [National Ocean Service: Who's Blue Peter?](#)

## Supplies and Tools

Signal Flag Cutout Sheets (available from the [National Park Service website](#))

String

Scissors

Tape



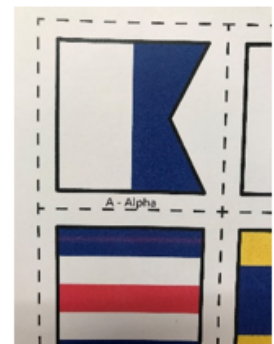
## Activity Steps

### Notes

1. Print out the signal flag sheets from the [National Park Service website](#). Familiarize yourself with the international signal alphabet.

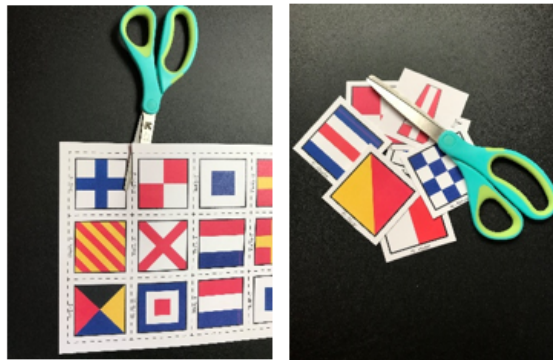
National Park Services website:  
[www.nps.gov/articles/000/signal-flags-activity.htm#act2](http://www.nps.gov/articles/000/signal-flags-activity.htm#act2)

### Visuals



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2. Decide what message or word you would like to convey with your nautical flags. Cut out the appropriate letters and numbers. Make additional copies of the signal flag sheets as needed.



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3. Layout your flags in the correct order. Tape each flag to the string, leaving spaces as appropriate.



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4. Hang your nautical flags on a wall or other location. Ask household members to translate your message using the international signal alphabet.  
**Can you decipher what we wrote with our nautical flags?**



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