



(U) The A-B-Cs of Military Protocol

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(U) For (current or former) military personnel, here's a refresher -- for civilians, a rundown of the basics of military protocol...

(U) In the military and within DoD, protocol is more than simple etiquette: it is recognition of both an individual's rank and their responsibility level.

(U) It is considered proper protocol for military members to verbally greet persons senior in rank to themselves, officer, warrant officer or enlisted, when they pass by each other -- whether indoors or outdoors (and that person should return the greeting).

(U) When outside, military personnel should, of course, also salute when greeting an officer or warrant officer, and the junior ranking member renders the salute first. Enlisted members address an officer preferably by their rank or as "sir" or "ma'am." Warrant officers for all services may be addressed as "Warrant Officer." It's also acceptable to address Army warrant officers as "mister," "ma'am," or use the term "Chief." Marine Corps warrant officers can be addressed as "Gunner."

(U) Terms of address for the enlisted corps can be uniquely different. It's always appropriate to address an enlisted person by their full rank, i.e., "Seaman Apprentice," "Private First Class," "Staff Sergeant," etc. Marine Corps personnel should always be addressed by their full rank; try the "shortened" version and you'll be corrected.

(U) It's important to remember that one should never address a sergeant in any service as "sarge." That term was acceptable in the 1940s and 1950s -- and you see it in cartoons or movies all the time, but it's considered extremely inappropriate -- bordering on rude -- in today's military. It is appropriate to use the term "sergeant" when addressing any Army NCO from sergeant (E-5) through master sergeant (E-8) and any Air Force NCO from staff sergeant (E-5) through senior master sergeant (E-8). Again, Marine Corps NCOs should be addressed by their full rank; only use the term "sergeant" by itself when talking to a sergeant (E-5).

(U) It's also appropriate for military personnel to stand when a senior military officer (O-6 and above) or a Commander enters a room or a work center, unless working a live mission. It shows respect for their rank. They should always stand when a senior officer enters--whether someone calls the room to attention or not. In most services, it is also customary for enlisted personnel to stand when an enlisted member holding the highest enlisted rank (E-9) enters the office or work center, again, indicating respect for their rank. Although not a custom of the Navy, it is never inappropriate to stand to show respect for the individual.

(U) When walking beside senior military personnel and not in formation, custom and protocol dictate that one accord them the "position of honor:" the position of honor is to the right. That means if you're junior in rank to someone, officer or enlisted, walk on his or her left.

(U) When referring to military members by Service, the following terms are used for enlisted or officer personnel: "Soldier," "Marine," "Sailor," "Airman" and "Coast Guardsman;" note that all are capitalized. The term "Airman," is also part of Air Force junior enlisted rank. Marines may refer to themselves as "Devil Dogs;" Coast Guardsmen are occasionally called, "Coasties."

(U) Editor's note: This text is extracted from the publication [Rank Recognition in a Joint-Service Environment](#). You may also want to review the SID *today* article [Military Rank Abbreviations](#).

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