

## FRAC OBSERVING GUIDELINES

(The following statements define FRAC's preferences regarding various aspects of participation by members and guests at our club observings. Awareness of, and adherence to, these guidelines will help to ensure that everyone present will have the opportunity to enjoy our observings to the fullest extent possible. This position paper is based to a large extent on an article written by Tom Clark that appeared in his *Amateur Astronomy Magazine* [No. 18, p. 34], and is used with his permission. Tom's direct quotes are indicated as such.)

"Etiquette is not something that we are born with; it must be learned," Clark wrote. If you've never attended a group observing before, "There are a few things that you need to understand about the nature of such events that will (help you) make new friends and avoid the appearance of being completely unenlightened to the more experienced observers present." They are:

1. If you're a newcomer to astronomy and FRAC, try to arrive at the observing site before dark so we can see what you look like and vice versa. More importantly, if you bring a telescope and need help in setting it up or collimating it, such things are more easily done while there is still daylight left.

If you arrive after dark, use your parking lights on the observing field. Drive slowly, and drive straight toward whomever is shining a red flashlight in your direction. Park where the person holding the flashlight tells you to, leaving no more than 8 to 10 feet between your vehicle and the one next to it.

2. "**Come prepared.**" Bring along extra clothing that will keep you comfortably warm in weather that is at least 20 degrees cooler than the temperature is when you leave home, since the night air is always cooler. Make a checklist of what you plan to bring (e.g., bug spray, observing equipment and accessories, star atlases, red flashlight, extra batteries, etc.), and check the list before you leave home to ensure that you haven't forgotten anything. Later, when preparing to leave the observing site, check the list again to see that you've packed everything you brought with you.

Our club observing site has no electricity, water or restroom facilities, so plan accordingly.

3. "**Bring your telescope.**" (Please Note: this suggestion does not apply to beginning astronomers who are first-timers at our observing site.) First, there's the fact that you need to learn how to operate your telescope. Beyond that, after your first visit or two to our club observings, it's unreasonable to expect experienced observers who likely have their own observing agendas to let you use their telescopes more often than occasionally. **Never** touch, use, move or borrow anyone's telescope, accessories or property without first obtaining their permission to do so.

If you're an experienced observer and first-time visitor, by all means bring your telescope and have a great time!

If you're a newcomer to astronomy, however, please don't go out and buy anything that you don't already have prior to your first visit; just come on out, take a look at the kinds of telescopes we have, and let us (a) take you on a tour of the night sky through our telescopes and (b) talk with you about what kind of observing equipment you might need. Amateur astronomy can be quite expensive, and we don't want you to rush out and buy either a cheap little \$79 telescope that you'll never be able to enjoy or a 15" Dobsonian that may be more 'scope than you're prepared to handle. Most of our experienced observers started out with small 'scopes or binoculars and gradually moved up to larger telescopes as our skills increased and our need for more light-gathering power became more acute.

4. **"Lights."** Darkness and clear skies are the night sky observer's best allies. Dark-adaptation takes about 15 minutes to achieve, yet it takes only a second or less of exposure to white light to lose it. In order to avoid tripping over telescopes, tables, chairs, etc., in the dark, we carry red flashlights with us when moving around the observing field. (They can be purchased at any Army-Navy store.) Soft red light doesn't affect dark-adaptation. If you have such a light, use it but don't point it directly in people's faces.

"If you have to open your car door or trunk in the dark, be kind enough to remove the fuse beforehand. It only takes a second. If you want to become unpopular quickly, just be the one who is always ruining his companions' dark adaptation by opening car doors or your trunk every few minutes and splashing bright lights all over everyone. If you have to leave early, move the shift lever to Neutral before starting your engine and the backup lights won't come on. If a bright light can't be avoided, just yell 'LIGHTS IN THREE SECONDS!' first, to give everyone time to turn the other way. If your car has daytime running lights that come on as soon as you turn the key on, there IS a way to turn them off temporarily: simply lift the parking brake one click, and now you can turn the key without the lights coming on. After you drive one or two hundred yards away from the observing group, remember to turn off the emergency brake so you don't cause undue damage to the brake system."

If you have to leave a star party early – and we're not talking about our regular club observings here – "park where your lights will not bother those who are still observing, and so that you will not have to use your headlights or backup lights when you leave.

5. **"Smokers.** Smokers need to be especially considerate of non-smokers. Since you are outside on the observing field, the smoke itself is not usually a problem. The problem is lighting up. The normally insignificant glow of a lighter or match is a killer to the dark-adapted eyes of your friends (or to astrophotographers whose long-exposure photos may be ruined by the match's intrusive glow). Be careful to turn away and cup your hands around the flash, so the flare of your match won't ruin anyone's eyes but your own. Also keep in mind that eventually someone will have to pick up every cigarette and cigar butt you throw on the ground, so please use an ashtray or collect your butts before you leave."

6. **"Music.** Music is a great relaxation to many. To some, it just isn't possible

to observe without the proper mood-setting musical accompaniment. Many love to scope out the heavens while listening to heavy metal rock at 110 decibels. Others may enjoy an eight-hour Elvis session. Great! Enjoy yourself! Turn it up! Play it as loud as you like...just wear earphones. The battle of the bands does not belong on the observing field. Many appreciate the new “space music” at a low volume, to set the mood. But if anyone complains...back to the earphones.”

**7. Children.** Children are always welcome at our observings; they are our hope, and our future. Since many of our members have spent thousands of dollars on their observing instruments, accessories, equipment and other necessities, however, it is imperative that children be under the supervision of their parents at all times, especially after dark when vision is reduced. Playing, running and chasing are forbidden within the confines of the observing areas. This Guideline, and Guideline #8 as well, will be strictly enforced in all cases, and by whatever means necessary to protect members’ property.

Children with communicable eye infections such as pinkeye should not observe through our telescopes or binoculars, since the infection can be spread through contact between their eyelashes and the eyepieces.

**8. Alcohol and Drugs.** Alcohol and illegal drugs have no place at FRAC meetings or observings, and neither their presence nor the effects of their usage will be tolerated.

### **Special Star Party Guidelines**

These guidelines apply primarily to star parties – weekend, or even week-long, gatherings at which amateur astronomers camp out and, like vampires, sleep during the day and come out at night.

1. **“Dobsonian” Telescopes.** Whether you own one or not, you need to “Learn how to operate a Dobsonian before you have to embarrass yourself by yelling down from the top of a ladder, ‘It’s moving out of the field!’ It’s not polite to lose the object being viewed with 25 people standing in line behind you. These large telescopes are so easy to use that you can learn how with just a couple of minutes’ preparation ahead of time, so don’t waste everyone’s time by waiting until you are at the eyepiece and then ask what to do. Take the time to learn earlier in the day, as a courtesy to everyone else.”

2. **“Big ‘Scopes.** The largest telescopes on the field are not necessarily public property. It is probable that their owners have their own observing programs to carry out. If you would like to look through one (and everyone does), ask first. If possible, ask ahead of time if the ‘scope will be open for public observing during the star party. Find out when, and go during the proper time.”

3. **“Piggy.** Don’t be an eyepiece hog on someone else’s telescope. Of course you should never simply take a two-second look at an interesting object, and when you are at your own telescope you should learn to study each object, to train your eye to see all that it can see. But when you are at someone else’s telescope, don’t get carried away and spend hours hogging their observing time. Keep your visit short, and then move on to the next ‘scope on the field.”

4. **“Be Helpful. Share Your Knowledge.** A star party is a place for learning, and a place for teaching. If you see a novice struggling to locate an object in his telescope, ask if you can be of assistance. Chances are he will appreciate it. Every once in a while take a break and walk around the observing field. You will see some amazing and comical sights. Enjoy yourself, and help others to enjoy themselves!”

5. **“Quiet Mornings.** Loud talking or other noise before noon is out of place, and rude to those observers who don’t retire till dawn. On the other hand, loud talking on the observing field at 4 a.m. is rude to early risers who may be leaving on a day trip at dawn. Perhaps families with small children, and other early risers, could place their camp in an area where they won’t be disturbed by astronomers talking all night, or disturb astronomers who are trying to sleep late the next morning.”

6. **“Trash.** Trash belongs in the trash can, not around your site. You would be amazed at how many people think nothing of leaving it to lie until “tomorrow,” but by morning it has blown over to someone else’s space. If you finish a drink while visiting someone else’s area, don’t leave your trash for them to clean up after you.”

7. **“Be Nice.** As the end of a week-long star party nears, you will notice that most of the die-hard observers are becoming a little brain-dead. Observing till dawn night after night, followed by too few hours of sleep, has the tendency of sharpening one’s tongue a little. Be careful what you say while in this condition. Nothing worse than looking into someone’s 48” MegaMonster telescope and declaring the view to be much worse than it was in your Super Duper 6” last night. That’s not how to win friends. Be considerate. Just because you paid a few dollars in registration fees does not entitle you to boss everyone around. The people who run star parties are volunteers, not paid servants! Volunteer your services if they need help. Running a star party is a lot of work. When you see a crew setting up chairs to convert the mess hall into the lecture hall, jump in and lend a hand...It will be appreciated. Never touch or move someone’s telescope without first asking permission. A telescope that looks unattended may be in the middle of a difficult star hop to some elusive target, and you may have one angry person on your hands if you act before thinking. Star parties are for fun. Go in a good mood, and stay in one. Things will go wrong, especially with the complicated equipment amateurs use. You will forget something, or you may not be able to set up exactly how you would like to, or park where you would like. Make the best of it; don’t get in a sour mood and spoil it for everyone. As always, the age-old advice “Do Unto Others...” is the best advice, and hard to beat.”