

MERIT BADGE COUNSELING

The merit badge program is part of the advancement plan of the Boy Scouts of America. It has guided the interests and energies of Boy Scouts for over 85 years and is one of the most unusual educational programs ever devised. A merit badge is an award that is presented to a Boy Scout or Varsity Scout when he has completed the requirements for one of more than 100 subjects in a wide range of art, craft, hobby, sport, trade, profession, agribusiness, service or self-improvement areas. The badge is only a small piece of cloth with a design embroidered in color – but its significance is as large as the interest of the merit badge counselor who helps a Scout earn it.

The merit badge program is one of Boy Scouting's basic measurement tools. Earning merit badges gives a boy the kind of self-confidence that comes from overcoming obstacles to achieve a goal. Through the merit badge program, a boy also learns career skills, develops socially, and may develop physical skills and hobbies that give a lifetime of healthful recreation.

This could not have happened without the service of thousands of merit badge counselors – like yourself – expert in a particular subject and interested in helping Scouts grow into men of character, ready to take their place in the world of work as participating citizens. You're probably saying, "That's all great, but what do I do, and how do I do it?"

The steps to follow in the merit badge program are outlined in the current *Boy Scout Requirements*. This book lists the requirements a Scout meets to earn each of the more than 100 merit badges that are available. Scouts must be tested individually, and they must meet all of the requirements.

WHAT'S MY JOB?

Your job is to satisfy yourself that each Scout who comes to you meets all the requirements for the merit badge. In a sense you are an examiner. But, your larger opportunity lies in coaching – helping the Scout over the different hurdles of the requirements and making him aware of the deeper aspects of the subject from your knowledge and experience.

Article X. Program (Advancement) - Rules and Regulations

Clause 14. The responsibility for merit badges shall rest with the merit badge counselor approved by the local council and district advancement committee. *Merit badge counselors shall be registered adult members of the Boy Scouts of America.* The merit badge counselor shall prepare and qualify youth members. There shall be no board of review procedure for merit badges, but public recognition may be given at a unit court of honor or other suitable occasion

No council, district, unit or individual has the authority to add to or subtract from advancement requirements.

EARNING A MERIT BADGE

These are the steps that a Scout takes to earn a merit badge, as outlined in The Official Boy Scout Handbook:

1. The Scout gets a merit badge application from his Scoutmaster or Varsity Scout Coach. This “blue card” must be signed by the unit leader on the front of the form indicating that the Scout has approval to work on the merit badge. The unit leader will sign the card again *after* the Scout has completed the requirements and you have signed the card. The unit leader will give the Scout the name of one or more qualified counselors for the merit badge the Scout wants to earn.

2. The Scout contacts the merit badge counselor and tells that person he wants to earn the badge. The merit badge counselor may counsel the Scout by telephone or in person about what is expected of him. Personal contact will make earning a badge a better experience for both you and the Scout

Anytime you meet with a Scout, you must follow the Scout Buddy System

A Scout must have a buddy with him at each meeting with a merit badge counselor. A Scout’s buddy can be another Scout, a parent or guardian, a brother or sister, or a relative or friend. From his Scoutmaster, the Scout obtains a signed merit badge application and the name of the appropriate merit badge counselor. The Scout sets up an appointment with the counselor. The counselor should explain the requirements to the Scout. The Scout and his buddy then meet as appropriate with the counselor until the Scout completes the badge’s requirements.

If the merit badge subject relates with your job or profession, then your place of work is probably the best place to meet with the Scout. Subjects related to your hobbies usually will be handled in your home. For a few subjects, coaching will happen in the field or where special equipment is at hand. Rowing, Rifle Shooting, Swimming and Astronomy are good examples.

The Scout should bring a signed merit badge application the first time he meets with you. There is space on the application to track the Scout’s completion of requirements. A Scout has from the time he begins working on a merit badge until he reaches his 18th birthday to complete the merit badge. Any requirements you sign off on can be used by the Scout with you or another counselor towards completion of the badge.

In your discussion of what is expected, you may want to start by finding out from the boy what he already knows, so you can spend the your time on helping him learn the remaining items, or give guidance in completing projects. You can set up additional meetings with the Scout – not only for the purpose of

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passing him on the requirements, but rather to help him in his understanding of the subject.

3. The Scout gets the merit badge pamphlet on his subject. His Troop or Team may have one he can borrow. So may the library. Or he may buy one at the Scout Shop or Scouting outlet.

4. The Scout learns and does the things that the pamphlet describes as being required for the badge.

5. When he is ready, the Scout calls the counselor again to make an appointment. He brings along the things he has made to meet the requirements or proof of what he has done such as a photograph of the project or adult certification. His Scoutmaster or Coach might, for example, certify that a satisfactory bridge or tower has been built for Pioneering, or that the required meals were prepared for the Cooking merit badge. Your job, in addition to coaching, is to satisfy yourself that the requirements have been met. Question the Scout and, if you have any doubts, contact the adult who signed the statement.

6. You will spend time with him to make sure that he knows his stuff. When you are satisfied that the Scout has done what is required, you sign the boy's merit badge card.

Each counselor must maintain the exact standard as outlined in the merit badge requirements — **nothing deleted, nothing added.**

The Scout is expected to meet the requirements as stated – no more and no less. Furthermore, he is to do exactly what is stated. If it says “show or demonstrate,” that is what he must do. Just telling about is not enough. The same thing holds true for such words as “make,” “list,” “in the field,” and “collect, identify and label.”

On the other hand, you cannot require more of a Scout than is stated. You may not, for example, say, “I want to be sure you really know your stuff, so instead of the 20 items in your collection, you must have 50 to get my signature.” You can suggest, encourage, and help the Scout to get to 50 things, but you may not require that he do so.

You may wonder, then, if the requirements as stated are the limits, what there is for you to do other than help the Scout with the specifics of these requirements. Actually, you can go far beyond them in your discussions with the Scout. He probably will welcome your willingness to share with him your knowledge well beyond the requirements, and you will be making a real contribution to him by doing so.. But it isn't required. That's the key. The Scout does not have to show his knowledge of those things beyond the requirements.

You might stress the fact that while knowledge is necessary, whether he can put his knowledge to work is the important thing in life. As you work with the Scout you can give him indirect career guidance. Many merit badge subjects can acquaint a Scout with the job opportunities in various fields. In these cases the

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merit badge work is a real exploration in an adult work experience, showing him whether or not he has the interest or ability along such lines. His activity can also show him what educational requirements a subject area has. You can provide the Scout with valuable information on job possibilities, show him what is most interesting to you and what is difficult. The final choice – the selection of what he is going to do with himself in life – is up to one person; the Scout himself. However, he will appreciate your help in showing him the relationship of his merit badge work to his life as he goes to school, into business or a trade, and on into adult life.

7. The Scout gives the signed form to his Scoutmaster or Coach who will get the badge for him and will present it to him at an appropriate time such as a court of honor.

You may work with many Scouts each year as they earn merit badges. Or, you may only work with two or three. Your contact with each Scout is tremendously important. Your influence is measured not by how many Scouts you work with, but the effect upon the lives of those you have an opportunity to work with.

Throughout your association with the Scout, keep in mind that you are assisting the Scoutmaster, the Varsity Team Coach, and other troop and team leaders in the program of advancement which the unit leader helps each of his Scouts plan. Often, the unit leader will help the Scout select the merit badges he will earn for a particular award. Whether he does or not, he is always interested in the Scout's progress. You should feel free to discuss his work with the Scoutmaster or Coach at any time.

Group Instruction of Merit Badges. The question arises as to whether it is permissible to have boys earn merit badges in groups. Many subjects may be presented to groups of Scouts without defeating one of the purposes of the merit badge plan — working closely with a qualified adult.

Frequently the skills of a subject can be taught to several Scouts at one time. This has a time advantage for you. However, the completing of the requirements always must be done on an individual basis. Scouts may not qualify for merit badges by just being members of group that is instructed in skills. They must qualify by personally satisfying you that they can meet all the requirements. It's pretty hard to do this in a group. When one Scout in a group answers a question it does not prove that all the others in the group also know the answer. Then too, each Scout learns at his own pace. He should not be held back or pushed ahead by his association with a group.

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The National Executive Board has approved this policy statement on group merit badge counseling:

To the fullest extent possible, the merit badge counseling relationship is a counselor–Scout arrangement in which the boy is not only judged on his performance of the requirements, but receives maximum benefit from the knowledge, skill, character and personal interest of his counselor. Group instruction and orientation are encouraged where special facilities and expert personnel make this most practical, or when Scouts are dependent on only a few counselors for assistance. However, this group experience should be followed by attention to each individual candidate's projects and his ability to fulfill all requirements.

So remember – you can coach more than one Scout at a time, but only one Scout at a time can satisfy you that he can meet the requirements.

CAN YOU SELL YOUR SUBJECT?

Scout troops and Varsity Scout teams are constantly seeking program material for meetings. If you would like to expand interest in your subject and to attract more Scouts to earn the merit badge, contact Scoutmasters and Varsity Team Coaches in your area and offer to come to a troop or team meeting to “sell your subject.” All Scouts won't be interested in the subject so plan to present an exciting 10 to 15 minutes designed to tickle the fancy of your audience. Then offer to meet with those who are really interested after the meeting to plan for your next get-together.

DO YOU NEED A MERIT BADGE PAMPHLET?

The information in the pamphlet is probably familiar to you, but it will help you to know what the Scout is told. The pamphlets are written for Scout-age boys. They also contain suggestions for projects that might give you helpful ideas.

Try to be sure that the version you have is the most recent printing of the pamphlet on your subject. It will contain the latest requirements and information on your subject. The printing date is on each pamphlet.

A complete list of merit badge pamphlets is printed on the inside back cover of all pamphlets with the latest revision date by each. By checking this list in any current year's pamphlet, you can find out whether your pamphlet is updated. Most pamphlets are reprinted each year, but the contents are not always revised.

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If you have suggestions for improvements in the requirements or pamphlet, please send your comments to the Boy Scout Division, Boy Scouts of America, 1325 Walnut Lane, Irving, TX 75038-3096

MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

The council advancement committee is responsible for approving merit badge counselors. In many Councils, the responsibility of appointing merit badge counselors has been delegated to the district advancement committees.

The council advancement committee reviews the district merit badge list and has it published at least once a year by the council service center. The list should include the current counselors' names, addresses and telephone numbers. It should be mailed to every unit leader and commissioner, as well as printed in the council bulletin.

Recruiting and Training Merit Badge Counselors and Publishing Lists (Districts)

The essence of quality Scouting is having sufficient qualified adult leaders. Nowhere does this become more apparent than in the recruitment of adults to serve as merit badge counselors. Because counselors must be knowledgeable in specialized area as well as able to have a good rapport with Scout-age boys, the district advancement committee has a challenging task in seeking, recruiting, and training merit badge counselors, and in helping units do the same.

In order to be certified as a Counselor for a badge, one **MUST** be qualified by job, profession, business, hobby **or** special training in that subject. Having earned a Merit Badge as a Scout or previously serving as a Counselor for a badge does **not** automatically qualify someone as a Counselor. The Dean of Merit Badges, with the approval of the Chair of the District Advancement Committee and the Chair of the Scout Advancement Committee may certify individuals without specific qualifications in the Merit Badge area as Counselors for non-technical Merit Badges such as Scholarship, Reading, Cooking, etc.

All counselors must have an understanding of their role in Scout advancement. The district advancement committee is responsible for making the appropriate training available to Merit Badge counselors.

Advancement in Summer Camp

Camp merit badge counselors must be fully qualified in the subject they are counseling. Merely having earned a merit badge *does not* qualify a person to counsel that badge. Camp staff members who are qualified in the subject and are younger than age 18 may assist the merit badge counselor with instruction. The merit badge counselor or instructor in a particular subject should be available to both individuals and groups. Because of the need for continued practice in some subjects, it will be necessary to meet candidates at a certain time each day. For other subjects, it may be necessary to meet as a group one or twice during the week.

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Each counselor or camp staff member must maintain the exact standard as outlined in the merit badge requirements — **nothing deleted, nothing added** — and make himself available at the time most convenient to the Scouts. Partial completion of merit badges should be credited to a Scout on the Application for Merit Badge and given to the Scoutmaster at the end of the week.

All adults involved with the earning of merit badges at summer camp have the responsibility of checking on the quality of the badges being offered. This includes camp directors, camp staff and Scout leaders. A “merit badge factory” atmosphere may be exciting for Scouts, but it does not serve the goals of the program. Merit badges are supposed to represent the acquisition of real knowledge, not mom’s sewing ability.

There is no time limit for completion of merit badges other than age 18. This does not mean that a counselor should not check on how well a Scout has retained the knowledge he demonstrated a year or more in the past. A spot check is appropriate in such cases; re-testing is not.