

A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling



Enhancing our youths' competitive edge through merit badges



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA®

Welcome to Merit Badge Counseling

A merit badge counselor serves as both a teacher and mentor as Scouts work on a merit badge. In one way, he or she is an examiner. In a larger sense, the counselor uses this opportunity for coaching—helping young men overcome the hurdles of the different requirements and making Scouts aware of the deeper aspects of the subject from their knowledge and experience. Because of these unique opportunities to serve Scouts, volunteering as a merit badge counselor is one of the most gratifying experiences for adults in Scouting today.

New counselors are strongly urged to check with their local councils and should plan on attending Merit Badge Counselor Orientation. This opportunity allows volunteers to get their questions answered by experienced Scouters. If a training opportunity is unavailable in time to begin teaching merit badges, volunteers can access online "The Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling" by visiting www.scouting.org/home/boyscouts/resources/advancement/presentations.aspx

Most local councils list counselors by district so that Scouts may call them to make an appointment. The number of youths requesting help is usually no burden to the volunteer because the popularity of a specific recognition helps determine the number of counselors needed. Thus, scheduling appointments at their convenience can be a real benefit.



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Advancement and the Merit Badge Plan

As part of the advancement program of the Boy Scouts of America, the merit badge plan is one of the most unique educational tools ever devised. Advancement is the process by which a young man progresses from rank to rank in Scouting. Everything done to advance and earn higher ranks in Boy Scouting, including earning merit badges, is designed to help youths have an exciting and meaningful experience.

The advancement method encourages young men to accomplish a progression of fun and motivational tasks. Earning these recognitions allows Scouts to explore many fields, helps them round out their skills, and perhaps introduces them to subjects that will become lifelong interests or rewarding careers.

What Is a Merit Badge?

The merit badge itself is a simple embroidered patch. The intangible end result of earning it, though, is that youths have fun while they gain self-confidence and achieve a goal, sometimes overcoming obstacles and solving problems.

There are more than 130 merit badges a Scout can earn. Subjects range from careers and life skills to hobbies, sports, and citizenship. You may ask yourself, "That's all great, but what do I do, and how do I do it?"

What Is My Responsibility?

The counselor's responsibility is to:

1. Assist Scouts as they plan the assigned projects and activities to meet all the requirements.
2. Coach them through interviews and demonstrations on how to complete the various requirements.
3. Sign off with your approval once you are satisfied the work has been completed.

What Do I Agree to Do?

Before work with youths can begin, individuals currently serving as a merit badge counselor or those seeking to serve in this role must take BSA Youth Protection training and be registered as a merit badge counselor with the Boy Scouts of America. Two possible scenarios for the required Youth Protection training are discussed here.

Current Merit Badge Counselors

In order to reregister as a merit badge counselor, an adult volunteer's Youth Protection training must be current within the past 24 months. If this training is not current, the volunteer must go to

All merit badge counselors must register annually with their local council to continue counseling Scouts.

www.myscouting.org, create a user account using the BSA membership ID number, and complete the training. The local council service center can provide a membership ID number for volunteers who don't have access to their membership card.

New Merit Badge Counselors

Registering as a merit badge counselor for the first time requires certification in BSA Youth Protection training prior to registration. Similar to the above procedure, new volunteers must go to www.myscouting.org and create a user account, which allows them to take the training. For those who prefer or are required to attend in-person, instructor-led Youth Protection training, please contact your local council for training dates and locations.

After completion, print a copy of the Youth Protection training certificate and attach it to the Adult Application, No. 524-501A. Submit these to the local council along with Merit Badge Counselor Information, No. 34405, found at <http://www.scouting.org/Home/BoyScouts/AdvancementandAwards/Resources.aspx>

Other qualifications for serving in this role are:

- Must be an individual of good character
- Must be age 18 or older
- Must have the skills and education in the subjects they want to teach
- Must have good rapport with Scout-age youths and their unit leaders
- Must be approved by the local council

Special qualifications and certifications may be required by the local council prior to teaching certain merit badges.

These qualifications provide counselors with credibility, because Scouts perceive them as role models. A well-qualified merit badge counselor can enhance a youth's attention span through effective communication, which leads to better understanding of the subject, productive discussions, and true interest. A bond of mutual respect often develops when a Scout feels confident to offer his thoughts and opinions through meaningful conversations with his counselor. Thus, a Scout grows in his social skills and self-reliance as a result of interacting with an adult who is a qualified counselor.

The merit badge counselor agrees to follow the requirements of the recognition, making no deletions or additions, ensuring the advancement standards are fair and uniform for all Scouts.

Counselors are encouraged to become familiar with all of the topics in "The Merit Badge Program," section 7 of the *Guide to Advancement*. Information from this resource can be found online at www.scouting.org/GuideToAdvancement.aspx. Books are also available for purchase at your Scout shop or online at www.ScoutStuff.org.

The counselor must be sure the Scout has a buddy present at all instructional sessions.

Step By Step

Through your association with youth members, keep in mind you are assisting unit leaders in the advancement program. Leaders coach Scouts on the recognitions they will earn for a particular rank and provide them with the name and phone number of a counselor to contact.

Whether a Scout earns the award or not, a volunteer is always interested in the youth's progress. The merit badge counselor should feel free to discuss the Scout's work with his unit leader at any time.

Let's now review the process of how a volunteer helps Scouts earn merit badges, beginning with the initial contact.

- 1 The Scout contacts you, probably by phone. You may tell him what is expected of him over the phone, or you may want to make an appointment to discuss this with him and his buddy in person. Personal contact will make earning the badge a better experience for all concerned.
- 2 When you work with a Scout, he must always have someone—a buddy—with him. This buddy may be a friend, group of other Scouts working on the same recognition, or a parent or other adult. This point is emphasized in the BSA Youth Protection training.
- 3 On his first visit, the Scout should bring a merit badge application, known as the "blue card," No. 34124, signed by his unit leader. This lets you know the Scout and his unit leader have discussed earning this badge and authorizes him to meet with you.
- 4 In your discussion of what is expected, you may want to start by finding out what the Scout already knows. He may already have worked on some of the requirements before meeting with you, but before signing off, it is up to you whether or not he has completed each requirement as written. Spend some time helping him learn the remaining requirements, or give guidance in completing projects. You can set up additional meetings with the Scout—not only for the purpose of passing him on the requirements, but rather to help him understand the subject.
- 5 The Scout, along with his buddy, should make another appointment with you when he thinks he is prepared to prove his ability.
- 6 This review session might be approached by the Scout with some apprehension. He is familiar with final exams in school and may see this meeting with you as another such experience. You can help by putting him at ease. Talk with him rather than grill or examine him; there is a big difference, yet you can still find out what he knows. Express honest enthusiasm for the things he has done, particularly if projects are involved. Your approval will give the Scout confidence.
- 7 When he meets you, he should bring with him the projects required for completion. If these cannot be transported, he should present satisfactory evidence, such as a photograph of the project or adult verification. His unit leader might, for example, verify that a satisfactory bridge or tower has been built for Pioneering, or that the required meals were prepared for the Cooking merit badge. Your responsibility, 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.
- 8 When you are satisfied the Scout has met the requirements, you list and initial each completed requirement. The blue card is not signed until all requirements are met.

You may work with many Scouts each year as they earn merit badges. However, you might only work with a few. Your contact with these Scouts is tremendously important. Your influence is measured not by the number of Scouts with whom you work, but by the effect upon the lives of those with whom you have an opportunity to work.

The Scout does not have to show his knowledge of those things beyond the scope of the requirements. The requirements for each award appear in the current BSA merit badge pamphlet series and in the current-year *Boy Scout Requirements* book, which is available at Scout shops and local council service centers. Requirements also are posted online at www.scouting.org.

Requirements—No More, No Less

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 it isn't 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 stated. You must 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 collect 50 to get my signature." You can suggest, encourage, and help the Scout to get 50 things, but you must not require it.

Can You Sell Your Subject?

Scouting units constantly seek program materials for meetings. If you would like to promote your subject and to attract more participants, contact unit leaders in your area and offer to attend a unit meeting to “sell your subject.” Not all youth will be interested in the subject, so plan an exciting 10- or 15-minute presentation designed to tickle the fancy of your audience. Then, offer to meet after the meeting with those who are really interested to plan for your next get-together.

You might wonder, “If the requirements as stated are the limits, what else is there for me to do other than help the Scout with the specifics of these requirements?” Actually, you can go far beyond the requirements in your discussions with him. He probably will welcome your willingness to share your knowledge and experience.

His activity also can expose him to the educational requirements of a subject area. You can provide the Scout with valuable information on career possibilities, show him what is most interesting to you and what is difficult. The final choice—the selection of what he will do with himself in life—is up to him. However, he will appreciate your help in relating his merit badge work with his life as he goes to school, into business, or pursues a military career.

From the *Guide to Advancement*

The *Guide to Advancement* specifies: Worksheets and other materials that may be of assistance in earning merit badges are available from a variety of places including unofficial sources on the Internet and even troop libraries. Use of these aids is permissible as long as the materials can be correlated with the current requirements that Scouts must fulfill. Completing “worksheets” may suffice where a requirement calls for something in writing, but this would not work for a requirement where the Scout must discuss, tell, show, or demonstrate, etc. Note that Scouts shall not be required to use these learning aids in order to complete a merit badge.

Where Do You Meet?

If the merit badge subject relates to your position or profession, then your place of work might be the best place to meet with Scouts. Hobby-related subjects usually are handled in your home. Here you will have the proper materials for use in coaching Scouts. 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. Remember, when meeting with your counselor, always have your buddy with you.

How Many at a Time?

Frequently the skills of a subject can be taught to several Scouts at one time, a real advantage for you. However, completing the requirements must always be done on an individual basis. A youth may not

qualify just by being a member of a group that is instructed in skills.

Scouts must qualify by personally satisfying their merit badge counselor that they can meet all the requirements. This may be hard to do in a group. When one Scout answers a question, that can't possibly prove that all the others know the answer. Then, too, each youth learns at his own pace. No Scout should be held back or pushed ahead by his association with a group.

So remember—you can coach more than one at a time, but each participant must demonstrate he has met the requirements.

Some of the merit badge pamphlets are available in both print and digital editions, available from scoutstuff.org. The digital versions include special features such as videos, extra photos, and other supplemental information.

Do You Need a Merit Badge Pamphlet?

The information in the pamphlet may be familiar to you, but it will help you to know what the youth has read. The pamphlets are written for Scout-age youths with suggestions for projects that interest them.

It's a good idea to obtain the latest printing of the pamphlet on your subject. It will contain the latest requirements and information. The printing date can be found on page 2 of each pamphlet.

A complete list of merit badge pamphlets is printed on the inside back cover of each one with the latest revision date. By checking this list in any current year's printing, you can find out whether your pamphlet has been updated.

If you have suggestions for improvements of the requirements or pamphlet content, please email your comments to merit.badge@scouting.org.

Why Volunteer

The BSA recognizes that the merit badge counselor is the cornerstone to the merit badge program. By offering their time, experience, and knowledge to guide youths in one or more subjects, these volunteers help shape the future of our communities. The Boy Scouts of America is proud of its tradition of volunteer service. It does not endorse merit badge opportunities where fees are paid directly to individuals or groups of individuals.

Merit Badges

American Business
 American Cultures
 American Heritage
 American Labor
 Animal Science
 Animation
 Archaeology
 Archery
 Architecture
 Art
 Astronomy
 Athletics
 Automotive
 Maintenance
 Aviation
 Backpacking
 Basketry
 Bird Study
 Bugling
 Camping
 Canoeing
 Chemistry
 Chess
 Citizenship in the
 Community
 Citizenship in
 the Nation
 Citizenship in
 the World
 Climbing
 Coin Collecting
 Collections
 Communication
 Composite Materials
 Cooking
 Crime Prevention
 Cycling
 Dentistry
 Digital Technology
 Disabilities Awareness
 Dog Care
 Drafting
 Electricity
 Electronics
 Emergency
 Preparedness
 Energy
 Engineering
 Entrepreneurship
 Environmental
 Science

Exploration
 Family Life
 Farm Mechanics
 Fingerprinting
 Fire Safety
 First Aid
 Fish and Wildlife
 Management
 Fishing
 Fly-Fishing
 Forestry
 Game Design
 Gardening
 Genealogy
 Geocaching
 Geology
 Golf
 Graphic Arts
 Hiking
 Home Repairs
 Horsemanship
 Indian Lore
 Insect Study
 Inventing
 Journalism
 Kayaking
 Landscape Architecture
 Law
 Leatherwork
 Lifesaving
 Mammal Study
 Medicine
 Metalwork
 Mining in Society
 Model Design and
 Building
 Motorboating
 Moviemaking
 Music
 Nature
 Nuclear Science
 Oceanography
 Orienteering
 Painting
 Personal Fitness
 Personal Management
 Pets
 Photography
 Pioneering
 Plant Science

Plumbing
 Pottery
 Programming
 Public Health
 Public Speaking
 Pulp and Paper
 Radio
 Railroad
 Reading
 Reptile and
 Amphibian Study
 Rifle Shooting
 Robotics
 Rowing
 Safety
 Salesmanship
 Scholarship
 Scouting Heritage
 Scuba Diving
 Sculpture
 Search and Rescue
 Shotgun Shooting
 Signs, Signals, and
 Codes
 Skating
 Small-Boat Sailing
 Snow Sports
 Soil and Water
 Conservation
 Space Exploration
 Sports
 Stamp Collecting
 Surveying
 Sustainability
 Swimming
 Textile
 Theater
 Traffic Safety
 Truck Transportation
 Veterinary Medicine
 Water Sports
 Weather
 Welding
 Whitewater
 Wilderness Survival
 Wood Carving
 Woodwork

