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 Scouts 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/programs/boy-scouts/resources/advancement-presentations.

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 Scout progresses from rank to rank in Scouting. Everything done to advance and earn higher ranks in Scouts BSA, including earning merit badges, is designed to help youth have an exciting and meaningful experience.

The advancement method encourages Scouts 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 youth have fun while they gain self-confidence and achieve a goal, sometimes overcoming obstacles and solving problems.

There are more than 135 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 youth 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 my.scouting.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.

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

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 my.scouting.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. 524-501. Submit these to the local council along with Merit Badge Counselor Information, No. 34405, found at www.scouting.org/programs/boy-scouts/mb-counselor-guide.

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 youth 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 thoughts and opinions through meaningful conversations with a merit badge counselor. Thus, a Scout grows in 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/resources/guide-to-advancement. Books are also available for purchase at your Scout shop or online at www.scoutshop.org.

The counselor must be sure the Scout has either another registered adult or the Scout's parent or legal guardian 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 the 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 explain what is expected over the phone, or you may want to make an appointment with the Scout and another registered adult or the Scout's parent or legal guardian to discuss expectations in person. Personal contact will make earning the badge a better experience for all concerned.
2. When you work with a Scout, there must always be another adult with the Scout. This person can be a registered adult or the Scout's parent or legal guardian.
3. On the first visit, the Scout should bring a merit badge application, known as the "blue card," No. 34124, signed by the unit leader. This lets you know the Scout and the unit leader have discussed earning this badge and that the leader authorizes the meeting with you.
4. In your discussion of what is expected, you may want to start by finding out what the Scout already knows. The Scout may already have worked on some of the requirements before meeting with you, but before signing off, it is up to you whether each requirement has been completed as written. Spend some time helping the Scout learn the remaining requirements, or give guidance in completing projects. You can set up additional meetings—not only for the purpose of passing the Scout on the requirements, but also to help the Scout understand the subject.
5. The Scout, along with a registered adult or the Scout's parent or legal guardian, should make another appointment with you when ready to prove an ability to complete the requirements.
6. This review session might be approached by the Scout with some apprehension. The Scout is familiar with final exams in school and may see this meeting with you as another such experience. You can help by putting the youth at ease. Talking rather than grilling or examining—there is a big difference—you can still find out what the Scout knows. Express honest enthusiasm for the things the Scout has done, particularly if projects are involved. Your approval will give the Scout confidence.
7. When meeting with you, the Scout should bring the projects required for completion. If these cannot be transported, the Scout should present satisfactory evidence, such as a photograph of the project or adult verification. The 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 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 *Scouts BSA Requirements* book, which is available at Scout shops and local council service centers. Requirements also are posted online at www.scouting.org/programs/boy-scouts/advancement-and-awards/merit-badges.

Requirements—No More, No Less

The Scout is expected to meet the requirements as stated—no more and no less. Furthermore, the Scout is to do exactly what is stated. If it says "show or demonstrate," that is what must be done. 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. A Scout probably will welcome your willingness to share your knowledge and experience.

An activity also can expose a Scout to the educational requirements of a subject area. You can provide valuable information on career possibilities and show the Scout what is most interesting to you and what is difficult. The final choice—the selection of what the youth will do in life—is up to them. However, the Scout will appreciate your help in relating merit badge work with daily life as they attend school, go into business, or pursue 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 the Scout, always have another registered adult or the Scout's parent or legal guardian.

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 their own pace. No Scout should be held back or pushed ahead by their association with a group.

So remember—you can coach more than one at a time, but participants must demonstrate individually that they have met the requirements.

Some of the merit badge pamphlets are available in both print and digital editions, available from www.scoutshop.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 youth 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 youth 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
Railroading
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



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