

A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling

Merit Badge Counselor

Merit badge counselors are the key to success in the merit badge plan. They offer their time, experience, and knowledge to help guide Scouts in one or more of the merit badge subjects.

The counselor's responsibility is to:

1. Assist the Scout as he plans the assigned projects and activities to meet the merit badge requirements.
2. Coach Scouts through interviews and demonstrations on how to do the required skills of the craft, business, or hobby.
3. Certify the Scout after determining whether he is qualified for the merit badge.

Most local councils list merit badge counselors by district so that Scouts may call for appointments. The number of Scouts requesting help is usually no burden to the counselor, since the number of counselors is normally determined by the popularity of the badge. Counselors schedule appointments at their convenience.

Merit Badge Plan

A 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.

What Is a Merit Badge?

A merit badge is an award that is presented to a Scout when he completes the requirements for one of the merit badge subjects. The badge is only a small piece of khaki 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.

Millions of Scouts "browse" among the more than 100 subjects, choosing those that seem most interesting to them. Some subjects are in craftwork, some in vocational fields, some in service to others, and many in cultural or self-improvement areas. In addition, certain merit badges are required for the Eagle Scout rank.

It is in the career fields that adults can make a vital impact on the life of a Scout by helping him with merit badges. Badges such as Entrepreneurship, Graphic Arts, Engineering, Chemistry, and many others provide the finest kind of orientation toward a possible career for the Scout.

Service clubs, unions, and professional societies often support the merit badge program through their vocational guidance committees. Members offer their services as counselors, and the group as a whole may help recruit and train counselors for districts or councils.

Merit badge counselors provide the means for Scouts to explore many subjects that may not be available to them otherwise. The Scout who has earned a number of merit badges gains confidence, finds greater purpose in life, and becomes a better person from his experience. This cannot happen without the service of thousands of merit badge counselors, expert in particular subjects and interested in helping Scouts grow into men of character who are 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?"

What's My Responsibility?

Your task is to satisfy yourself that each Scout who comes to you meets all the requirements for the merit badge. In this sense you are an examiner, though your larger opportunity lies in coaching-helping the Scout meet the challenge of the requirements and making him aware of the deeper aspects of the subject through your knowledge and experience.

What Do I Agree to Do?

As a merit badge counselor, I agree to:

- ✓ Follow the requirements of the merit badge, making no deletions or additions, ensuring that the advancement standards are fair and uniform for all Scouts.
- ✓ Have a buddy present with each Scout at all instructional sessions.
- ✓ Renew my registration as a merit badge counselor annually if I plan to continue serving as a merit badge counselor.

Earning a Merit Badge

Working on merit badges is especially enjoyable when Scouts work together. The BSA encourages this by making the buddy system a part of the merit badge program. Together the two meet with merit badge counselors, plan projects, and keep their enthusiasm high.

The requirements for each merit badge appear in the current BSA merit badge pamphlet for that award and in the book *Boy Scout Requirements*, available at Scout shops and council service centers. When a Scout has decided on a merit badge he would like to earn, he must follow these steps:

- Obtain from his Scoutmaster a signed merit badge application and the name of a qualified counselor for that merit badge. (A counselor must know the subject well, be able to work effectively with Scouts, and be currently registered as a merit badge counselor with the Boy Scouts of America.)
- Along with another Scout, a relative, or a friend, set up and attend the first appointment with his merit badge counselor. The counselor will explain the requirements for the badge and help the Scout plan ways to fulfill them so that he can get the most out of the experience.
- Complete the requirements, meeting with his counselor whenever necessary until he has finished working on the badge.

The advancement program allows the Scout to move ahead in his own way and at his own speed. Rather than competing against others, he challenges himself to go as far as his ambition will carry him. The rate of advancement depends upon his interest, effort, and ability.

How the Merit Badge Counselor Helps

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 face-to-face. Personal contact will make earning the badge a better experience for you both.
2. The Scout should bring a merit badge application signed by his Scoutmaster or Varsity Scout Coach on his first visit. He must always be accompanied by a buddy.
3. In your discussion of what is expected, you may want to start by finding out what the Scout already knows. 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.
4. The Scout, along with his buddy, should make another appointment with you when he thinks he is prepared to prove his ability. You set the date, time, and place.

5. 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 a great deal 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.
6. 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 certification. His Scoutmaster or Varsity Scout 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.
7. When you are satisfied that the Scout has met the requirements, you sign his merit badge application.

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.

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

More or 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 have 50 to get my signature." You can suggest, encourage, and help the Scout to get 50 things, but you must not require it.

You might 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 the requirements in your discussions with the Scout. He probably will welcome your willingness to share your knowledge well beyond the requirements, and you will make a sincere 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 merit badge work serves as an exploration in an adult work experience, showing him whether or not he has the interest or ability along such lines.

His activity also can expose him to the educational requirements of a subject area. 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 will do with himself in life-is up to one person. That person is the Scout himself. However, he will appreciate your help in relating his merit badge work with his life as he goes to school, into business or a trade, and on into adult life.

Where Do You Meet?

If the merit badge subject relates to your job 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.

How Many at a Time?

Frequently the skills of a subject can be taught to several Scouts at one time. This has a time advantage for you. However, completing the requirements must always be done on an individual basis. A Scout may not qualify for merit badges by just 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 in a group answers a question, that can't possibly prove all the other group members know the answer. Then, too, each Scout 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 only one Scout at a time can satisfy you that he has met the requirements.

Can You Sell Your Subject?

Boy Scout troops and Varsity Scout teams constantly seek program materials 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 Scout Coaches in your area and offer to attend a troop or team meeting to "sell your subject." Not all Scouts 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.

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 has read. The pamphlets are written for Scout-age boys. They also contain suggestions for projects.

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

If you have suggestions for improvements in the requirements or pamphlet, please send your comments to: Boy Scout Division, Boy Scouts of America, 1325 West Walnut Hill Lane, P.O. Box 152079, Irving, TX 75015-2079.

Please take note of the following information:

The requirements in the merit badge pamphlet may NOT be the current ones, even if the pamphlet is current. Please check the requirements listed in the current Boy Scout Requirements Book (No. 33215), which is issued annually, to verify that you are using the current requirements. Unless a new pamphlet is issued AFTER the Requirements Book, the requirements listed in the Requirements Book are the controlling requirements.

Once you start working with a Scout, if the requirements change, you should continue to use the requirements in effect when the Scout began, unless the SCOUT desires to use the new requirements. However, if he wishes to use the new requirements, he must use ALL of the new requirements. He may not pick and choose a selection from the old and new requirements.

The information above is based on the 2000 printing of "A Guide to Merit Badge Counseling" (BSA Publication No. 34532A)