

Advancement Education

BSA

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# The Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling



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# This Training Will Cover

- ♣ Scouting overview: mission, aims, and methods
- ♣ Merit badge program role and benefits
- ♣ Merit badge counselor qualifications
- ♣ How to become a counselor
- ♣ The merit badge counseling process
- ♣ Merit badge requirements: fulfill as written
- ♣ Effective counseling
- ♣ Group instruction and camp settings



# Boy Scouts of America Mission Statement

The mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Scout Law.



# Aims of the Scouting Program

- ♣ Character development
- ♣ Citizenship training
- ♣ Mental and physical fitness

Every activity in Scouting should support one or more of these aims.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 2.0.0.3



# Methods of Scouting

- ♣ Scouting ideals
- ♣ Patrol method
- ♣ Advancement
- ♣ Association with adults
- ♣ Outdoors
- ♣ Leadership development
- ♣ Uniform
- ♣ Personal growth

*Guide to Advancement* topic 2.0.0.4



# Four Steps in Boy Scout Advancement

1. The Scout **learns**.
2. The Scout is **tested**.
3. The Scout is **reviewed**.
4. The Scout is **recognized**.



Merit badge counselors  
are directly involved in the first two steps.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 4.2.1.0



# Merit Badges: Their Role in Advancement

- ♣ Merit badges are integral to advancement.
- ♣ Any Scout may earn them at any time, including qualified Venturers and Sea Scouts.
- ♣ Merit badges are required for Star, Life, and Eagle.
- ♣ A total of 21 must be earned for the Eagle rank.
- ♣ Some merit badges are “elective;” some “required.”
- ♣ Thirteen specific badges are required for Eagle.



# Broad Range of Subjects

More than 130 merit badges in 14 subject areas:

Agribusiness

Arts and crafts

Business and industry

Communications

Conservation

Hobbies

Natural science

Personal development

Physical science

Professions

Public service

Sports

Trades

Transportation



*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.0.1



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# Benefits of Merit Badges

- ♣ Contribution to the aims of Scouting: citizenship, character, and fitness
- ♣ Development of confidence, self-reliance, and social skills
- ♣ Physical fitness and healthy lifestyles
- ♣ Career and hobby choices may result
- ♣ Exposure to positive role models: **You!**



# Qualifications to Become a Merit Badge Counselor

- ♣ At least 18 years of age
- ♣ Good character
- ♣ Recognized as having skills and education in the subject area
- ♣ Good rapport with leaders and Scout-age youth



*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.1.1



# Special Certifications and Trainings

Specific training is required for some BSA activities, including merit badges.



A counselor *must* hold the specific certification or work with someone who does.

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.1.1



# Registering as a Merit Badge Counselor

- ✦ Even if already registered, every counselor must submit a BSA adult application for the position of merit badge counselor (code 42). There are no exceptions.
- ✦ Merit badge counselors who are re-registering need not complete a new application.
- ✦ “Merit badge counselor” is a council or district position.
- ✦ Approval of merit badge counselors is the responsibility of the council advancement committee, not the unit.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.1.5



# Forms Needed to Register as a Merit Badge Counselor

## BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA ADULT APPLICATION

The mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Scout Law.

In a Cub Scout pack, Boy Scout troop, Varsity Scout team, Venturing crew, or Sea Scout ship—or in any position in a district or council—your participation is a service to your community and helps youth become better citizens.

As members of the Boy Scouts of America, high-quality adult leaders are important role models for youth. This application helps the chartered organization to select qualified leaders to serve as volunteers. Thank you for completing this application in full. See instructions on the inside cover.

BY SUBMITTING THIS APPLICATION YOU ARE AUTHORIZING A CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK OF YOURSELF. THIS CHECK WILL BE MADE FROM PUBLIC RECORD SOURCES. YOU WILL HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO REVIEW AND CHALLENGE ANY ADVERSE INFORMATION DISCLOSED BY THE CHECK.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE A COPY OF YOUR CRIMINAL BACKGROUND REPORT, PLEASE CONTACT YOUR LOCAL COUNCIL OFFICE.

Youth Protection Training

All applicants for membership are required to complete Youth Protection training before submitting this application and before volunteer service with youth begins. It is available online at [www.scouting.org](http://www.scouting.org) and each local council provides training to leaders on a regular basis throughout the year.

For more information, refer to the back of this application.

BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

524-901A 510

### Boy Scouts of America MERIT BADGE COUNSELOR INFORMATION

(Please type or print legibly.)

Name\* \_\_\_\_\_ Primary phone\* \_\_\_\_\_  Home  Cell  Work  
 Address\* \_\_\_\_\_ Other phone\* \_\_\_\_\_  Home  Cell  Work  
 City/state/zip \_\_\_\_\_ Other phone\* \_\_\_\_\_  Home  Cell  Work  
 Email address\* \_\_\_\_\_  I do not have email. Age \_\_\_\_\_  
 District \_\_\_\_\_ Unit:  Troop  Team  Crew  Ship No. \_\_\_\_\_ BSA ID \_\_\_\_\_

I am not affiliated with a district.  I am not affiliated with a unit.

**\*Required field. Primary phone and email address indicate how Scouts should contact you.**

**To qualify as a merit badge counselor, you must**

- Be at least 18 years old and of good character.
- Be registered with the Boy Scouts of America (position code 42).
- Complete Youth Protection training.
- Be recognized as having the skills and education in the merit badge subjects covered and hold any required qualifications and training as outlined in the *Guide to Safe Scouting* or the *Guide to Advancement*—or use others so qualified.
- Be able to work with Scout-age boys.

**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 Scout accompanied by his buddy during all instructional sessions.
- Keep my Youth Protection training current.
- Renew my registration annually if I plan to continue as a merit badge counselor.

Merit Badges <i>For more than eight merit badges, attach additional sheets.</i>	Add (A) Drop (D)	For each merit badge, list qualification(s) that support your request. <i>Qualifications could include college degrees, formal training certificates, positions held, and specific life experiences.</i>
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		

A = Adding a new merit badge that you will counsel to the roster. D = Removing your name from the roster for this merit badge.

**Complete the following:**

This is a new application (first time to register as a merit badge counselor). Attach this form to the BSA Adult Application, indicating position code 42.

This is an update to an existing list of merit badge subjects.

I no longer wish to serve as a merit badge counselor.

Youth Protection training date \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Attach copy of the current certificate.)

I agree to work with:

All Scouts

All Scouts in these districts: \_\_\_\_\_

Only with Scouts in these units (indicate whether troop, team, or crew): \_\_\_\_\_

**Counselors are encouraged to be available to work with any Scout in any unit.**

I plan to serve as a merit badge counselor for this event or outside organization: \_\_\_\_\_

**Council Approval:**

Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Use position code 42.

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.1.5



# Complete Youth Protection Training



The screenshot shows the MyScouting website interface. At the top left is the Boy Scouts of America logo and the text "BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA.". Below this is a blue horizontal bar. The main content area is divided into two sections: "Sign in to MyScouting" and "New to MyScouting?". The "Sign in" section has input fields for "User Name:" and "Password:", a "Sign in" button, and links for "Forgot your User Name or password?" and "Frequently asked questions". The "New to MyScouting?" section has a "Create an account to:" heading, a list of benefits (take Youth Protection and other BSA training, access unit, district, and council tools, register for events, keep in touch with members and alumni), a note that some tools require a Member ID, and a "Create an account" button. At the bottom, there is a disclaimer about age restrictions and a footer with copyright information and navigation links.

[www.myscouting.org](http://www.myscouting.org)



Good for



Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.1.1

# Approval by Local Council

- ❖ Local councils establish procedures for registration, re-registration, and approval, and for reviewing:
  - Background checks
  - Youth Protection training
  - Any council-required certifications
- ❖ Approval is for specific merit badges.
- ❖ Counselors may work with just one unit, but registration and council advancement committee approval are still required.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.1.4



# The Process of Counseling

- ♣ A Scout indicates his interest and discusses the badge with his unit leader.
- ♣ The unit leader signs a blue card and provides at least one counselor.
- ♣ The Scout contacts a counselor.
- ♣ The Scout and counselor meet—often several times.
- ♣ The requirements are fulfilled.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.3.0



# The Process of Counseling

- ♣ The counselor approves completion and signs the blue card.
- ♣ The Scout returns the signed blue card to his unit leader for signature.
- ♣ The unit leader gives the Scout the applicant record section.
- ♣ The unit reports the merit badge as advancement.
- ♣ The merit badge is presented.

*Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.3.0*



# The Merit Badge Process

Scout indicates interest;  
discusses with unit leader;  
gets MBC name and blue card

Scout contacts counselor

Scout/counselor first meeting

Subsequent  
Scout/counselor meetings

Unit reports advancement and  
obtains badge for presentation

Scout returns completed  
merit badge card to unit leader

Counselor approves completion

Scout completes requirements



# Application for Merit Badge

## *The Blue Card*

### The unit leader signature:

- ❖ Required for Scouts to work with counselors
- ❖ Does not indicate unit leader “approval”
- ❖ Evidence of discussion between unit leader and Scout
- ❖ Indicates registered counselor has been recommended
- ❖ Not required for Scout to get started on requirements

“I have discussed this merit badge with this Scout and recommended at least one merit badge counselor.”

APPLICATION FOR MERIT BADGE

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

is a registered  
 Boy Scout  Varsity Scout  Venturer

of \_\_\_\_\_ No. \_\_\_\_\_  
troop, team, crew, ship

District \_\_\_\_\_

Council \_\_\_\_\_

I have discussed this merit badge with this Scout and recommended at least one merit badge counselor.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of unit leader \_\_\_\_\_

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34124



# Application for Merit Badge

## *The Blue Card – Reverse Side*

Counselor's information →

Counselor signs in *two* places → once all requirements are complete

The applicant has personally appeared before me and demonstrated to my satisfaction that he has met all requirements for the (please print)	APPLICANT'S RECORD	COUNSELOR'S RECORD
Merit badge _____ Name of counselor _____ Address of counselor _____ City _____ Zip code _____ Telephone No. of counselor _____	Name _____ has given me his completed application for the _____ Merit badge _____ Completed on ____/____/____ by _____ Date	Applicant _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Troop <input type="checkbox"/> Team Unit No. _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Crew Merit badge _____
Signature of counselor _____ / _____ Date _____	Signature of counselor _____	Date completed ____/____/____
Checked and recorded: _____ Date _____ Initials _____ Certificate and badge presented _____ Date _____	Signature of unit leader _____	Remarks: _____
Applicant will turn in this portion to his unit leader for record posting.	NOTE TO BOY SCOUT, VARSITY SCOUT, OR VENTURER: Retain this copy for your permanent records.	It is suggested that the counselor keep this record in case any question is raised later in regard to this award.

Unit leader's second signature →

1/3 goes to the unit as application for the badge

1/3 goes to Scout for his records

1/3 goes to the counselor's records

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.0.2

# Role of a Merit Badge Counselor

Interview the Scout (with a buddy present) to determine:

- ♣ His preparedness
- ♣ His current knowledge
- ♣ His interest

In subsequent meetings:

- ♣ Evaluate progress
- ♣ Review completed work



# Role of a Merit Badge Counselor

## *Coaching:*

- ❖ Teach required skills.
- ❖ Provide opportunities to practice.
- ❖ Provide encouragement, and also praise when appropriate.
- ❖ Encourage goal setting and provide help and support in reaching goals.
- ❖ Evaluate progress and respond accordingly.



# Role of a Merit Badge Counselor

## *Mentoring:*

- ❖ Establish a relationship, taking a genuine interest in the Scout's projects.
- ❖ Spark curiosity.
- ❖ Go for the deeper dive.
- ❖ Encourage long term goal-setting.



# Merit Badge Requirements

## Finding current requirements for a merit badge

- ♣ *Boy Scout Requirements* (current edition)
- ♣ Merit badge pamphlet (latest printing)
- ♣ [www.scouting.org](http://www.scouting.org)

## Are the requirements flexible?

- ♣ No; they must be fulfilled as written.
- ♣ Wording matters!
- ♣ “Show,” “demonstrate,” “describe,” “make,” “list,” etc., are to be taken literally.



# Meeting More Than One Requirement At a Time

*A single activity may fulfill more than one requirement if...*

- ♣ Requirements match and have the same intent.
- ♣ It is not specifically disallowed.
- ♣ The Scout remembers safety content.
- ♣ Common sense suggests that meeting the requirement more than once is unnecessary.

**More work will be needed if requirements are only *similar*.**

Guide to Advancement topic 4.2.3.6



## ***Policy on Unauthorized Changes to Advancement Program***

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

There are limited exceptions relating only to youth members with disabilities. For details see section 10, “Advancement for Members With Special Needs.”

–*The Guide to Advancement*, No. 33088



# Scouts with Special Needs

- ❖ Merit badge requirements must not be waived or changed for any Scout.
- ❖ Scouts with disabilities—either permanent, or expected to last at least two years or beyond age 18—still may advance.
- ❖ The “Application for Alternative Eagle Scout Rank Merit Badges” may be found at:  
[www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-730.pdf](http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-730.pdf)



Guide to Advancement section 10



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# Buddy System

A Scout *must* have a buddy with him at every meeting with a merit badge counselor.

A buddy could include:

- ♣ Another Scout
- ♣ A parent or guardian
- ♣ A brother or sister
- ♣ A relative or friend



Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.3.1



# Tips for Counseling

Make Scouts feel  
welcome  
and relaxed.



- ♣ First impressions matter.
- ♣ Ask a few simple questions.
- ♣ Show them something related to the subject.
- ♣ Invite them to demonstrate a simple skill.
- ♣ Remember: This is Scouting. Have fun.



# Tips for Counseling

Use the EDGE method.

- ♣ **E**xplain
- ♣ **D**emonstrate
- ♣ **G**uide
- ♣ **E**nable



# Group Instruction

## Benefits

- ♣ Guest experts
- ♣ Interactive learning
- ♣ Slide shows, skits, demonstrations, and other dynamic approaches



## The Challenge

*Every Scout must actually and personally fulfill every requirement as written.*

*Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.3.2*



# Group Instruction

## Ensuring Quality

- ❖ Limit group instruction to cases where the benefits are compelling.
- ❖ See that all counselors are registered and approved.
- ❖ Establish processes where counselors confirm prerequisites have been completed.
- ❖ Report any issues to the council advancement committee.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.3.2



# Camp Settings

- ❖ No exemption from merit badge counselor qualifications.
- ❖ Staff members under 18 may assist, but must work with qualified counselors.
- ❖ Instruction must be done in accordance with the “group instruction” procedures found in the *Guide to Advancement*.



*Guide to Advancement* topics 5.0.1.3 and 7.0.3.2



# Merit Badge Events

- ❖ Merit badge fairs may provide an overview or introduction to multiple badges.
- ❖ It should be rare that Scouts begin and finish badges at one- or two-day events.
- ❖ Prerequisites should be made known early.
- ❖ Scouts must actually and personally fulfill all requirements.



*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.3.2



# Merit Badge Events

- ♣ Only minimal fees should be charged for events.
- ♣ Events staged as fundraisers are discouraged.
- ♣ Non-Scouting organizations or businesses are not allowed to use protected BSA trade names, images, logos, or artwork without national BSA permission.
- ♣ Non-Scouting organizations must have local council approval to present classes that are for the sole purpose of earning merit badges.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.4.9 and 7.0.4.10



# Worksheets and Learning Aids

- ❖ Merit badge “worksheets” from the Web or other sources are unofficial, but may aid in learning.
- ❖ These tools must relate to current BSA requirements, which still must be fulfilled as written.
- ❖ Worksheets may be used to meet “in writing” requirements.
- ❖ Worksheets are not a substitute for “telling,” “showing,” or “demonstrating,” etc.
- ❖ Scouts must not be required to use them.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.4.8



# Completing the “Partial” Blue Card

- ♣ The merit badge counselor records and initials the front of the card in the middle section as each requirement is completed.
- ♣ The back of the card is not signed in either place until ***all*** requirements are fulfilled.
- ♣ Partials do not expire as long as the Scout is a registered youth member.
- ♣ Accepting a “partial” is at the follow-up counselor’s discretion.

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.3.3



## *Once It's Earned, It's Earned*

A Scout who has earned a merit badge from a registered and approved counselor by actually and personally fulfilling the requirements as written, will have met the purpose of the merit badge program and the contributions to the aims of Scouting. The badge is his to keep and count.



Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.4.6



# A Second Counselor Review May Be Warranted If...

- ❖ A Scout, to whom it has been made clear that only registered and approved counselors are to be used, chooses to ignore this mandated procedure.
- ❖ It becomes plainly evident that it could not have been possible for a Scout to actually and personally fulfill requirements as written. In this case a limited recourse is available, according to the details outlined in topic 7.0.4.7.

*Guide to Advancement topics 7.0.4.6 & 7.0.4.7*



# Addressing Merit Badge Myths

1. At what age or rank may Boy Scouts work on merit badges?
2. What is the maximum number of merit badges a Scout may work on at the same time?
3. Is a Scout allowed to begin work on a merit badge without his unit leader's approval?
4. If a Scout has too many unfinished merit badges, may the Scoutmaster limit how many others he may begin?



# Addressing Merit Badge Myths

5. Is it appropriate to tell a Scout he must earn all or most of his Eagle-required badges before he earns any others?
6. Is the Scoutmaster permitted to serve as a troop merit badge counselor for some merit badges like Camping or Hiking?
7. What is the maximum number of badges a youth may earn from one counselor?
8. How many badges may one counselor be approved to counsel?



# Addressing Merit Badge Myths

9. May you counsel your own son?
10. May you counsel in other units, districts, or councils?
11. Due to tight schedules, is a camp staff member allowed to make minor adjustments so requirements can be finished at camp?
12. Once you are registered and approved as a counselor, at what point must you re-register and become re-approved?
13. When does a “partial” expire?



# Merit Badge Myths – Review

1. At what age or rank may Boy Scouts work on merit badges?

There is no limit if registered as a Scout.

2. What is the maximum number of merit badges a Scout may work on at the same time?

There is no limit.

3. Is a Scout allowed to begin work on a merit badge without his unit leader's approval?

Approval is no longer required; a discussion is now held.



# Merit Badge Myths – Review

4. If a Scout has too many unfinished merit badges, may the Scoutmaster limit how many others he may begin?

During the discussion of a new merit badge, the Scoutmaster should provide counseling on what to do.

5. Is it appropriate to tell a Scout he must earn all or most of his Eagle-required badges before he earns any others?

A Scoutmaster could only suggest this.



# Merit Badge Myths – Review

6. Is the Scoutmaster permitted to serve as a troop merit badge counselor for some merit badges like Camping or Hiking?

This is permitted *only* if the unit leader is registered and approved as a counselor.

7. What is the maximum number of badges a youth may earn from one counselor?

There is no BSA limit. A unit leader may set a limit, but it must apply to all Scouts in the unit.



# Merit Badge Myths – Review

8. How many badges may one counselor be approved to counsel?

National places no limit on this. Councils may do so, within reason.

9. May you counsel your own son?

Yes, but generally it is better for Scouts to learn from a variety of adults.

10. May you counsel in other units, districts, or councils?

Yes.



# Merit Badge Myths – Review

11. Due to tight schedules, is a camp staff member allowed to make minor adjustments so requirements can be finished at camp?

**Absolutely not.**

12. Once you are registered and approved as a counselor, at what point must you re-register and become re-approved?

**Annually.**

13. When does a “partial” expire?

**When the youth is no longer eligible to register as a Boy Scout.**



# Merit Badge Counselors

- ♣ Share passion
- ♣ Teach skills
- ♣ Touch lives



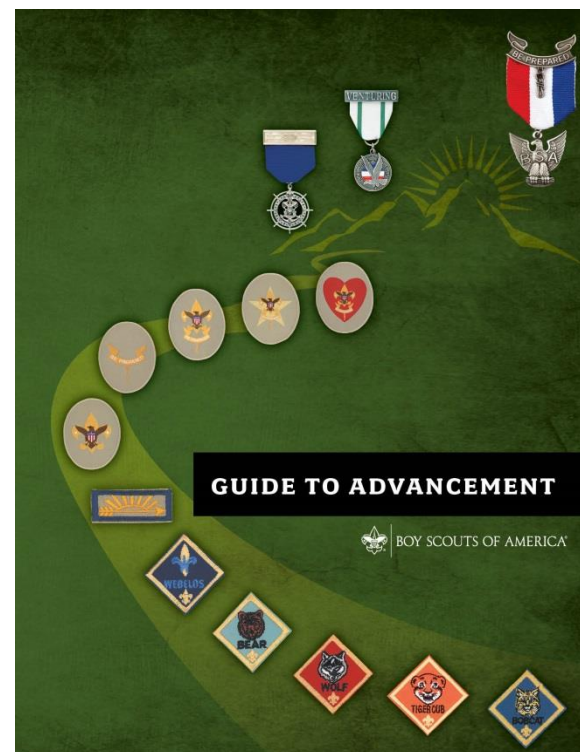
# For More Information

Other advancement presentations available at:

[www.scouting.org/advancement](http://www.scouting.org/advancement)

## Resources

- *Guide to Advancement*, No. 33088
- BSA's *Guide to Safe Scouting*, No. 34416
- Merit badge pamphlets
- *Boy Scout Requirements*, No. 616334
- Application for Merit Badge, No. 34124
- *A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling*, No. 34532
- *Boy Scout Handbook*, No. 34554
- Merit Badge Counselor Information, No. 34405
- BSA Adult Application, No. 524-501



If you are a Merit Badge Counselor in the Crossroads of America Council:

Please report your completion of this education by clicking on the link below and completing the reporting form.

[REPORT COMPLETION](#)

