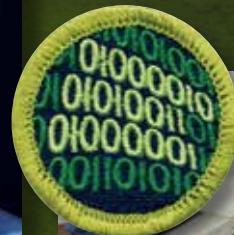


# A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling



Enhancing our youths' competitive edge through merit badges

Scouting  America.

## Welcome to Merit Badge Counseling

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

New counselors are strongly urged to check with their local councils and attend Merit Badge Counselor Orientation, in person if possible, to get their questions answered by experienced Scouters. In addition, volunteers can access "The Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling" by visiting [www.scouting.org/programs/scouts-bsa/resources/advancement-presentations](http://www.scouting.org/programs/scouts-bsa/resources/advancement-presentations).

Most local councils list counselors by district so that Scouts may call nearby counselors to make an appointment. The popularity of a specific recognition helps determine the number of counselors needed.



# A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling

## Advancement and the Merit Badge Plan

As part of the advancement program of Scouting 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 series of difficult, 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 gain self-confidence and achieve a goal, often 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 become a merit badge counselor?”

## 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 their approval once they are satisfied the Scout has individually and personally completed the requirements exactly as written.

## What Do I Agree to Do?

Before work with youth can begin, you must be registered as a merit badge counselor with Scouting America and take Safeguarding Youth training.

**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 requires certification in Safeguarding Youth training prior to registration. Volunteers must go to [my.scouting.org](http://my.scouting.org) and create a user account (or log into their existing account) to take the training. For those who prefer to attend in-person, instructor-led Safeguarding Youth training, please contact your local council for training dates and locations.

After completion, print a copy of the Safeguarding Youth 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/scouts-bsa/mb-counselor-guide/](http://www.scouting.org/programs/scouts-bsa/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 skills and/or 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 for each merit badge they want to counsel

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

These qualifications provide counselors with credibility, necessary because they are serving as experts and role models. A well-qualified merit badge counselor can enhance a youth’s attention span through effective communication and enthusiasm, which lead 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, making no deletions or additions, ensuring advancement standards are fair and uniform for all Scouts. Each Scout must individually and personally complete all requirements.

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 at [www.scouting.org/resources/guide-to-advancement/](http://www.scouting.org/resources/guide-to-advancement/).

**The counselor ensures that the Scout has either their parent or legal guardian, or a second Scout and a second registered adult leader, present at all sessions.**

## Step by Step

Through your association with youth members, keep in mind you are assisting unit leaders in the advancement program. Leaders provide Scouts with a counselor's name and contact information.

Whether a Scout earns the merit badge or not, a volunteer is always interested in the youth's progress. The 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.

- 1 The Scout contacts you, probably by text or email. You may explain what is expected then, or you may want to make an appointment with the Scout 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, for merit badge counselor meetings only, the Scout and counselor may meet as long as a parent or guardian is also present. In a group setting with at least two Scouts, there must be at least two registered leaders present. All merit badge classes and counseling sessions must always be conducted in accordance with the current [Guide to Advancement](#).
- 3 On the first visit, you must confirm with the Scout that they have discussed with their unit leader their interest in working on the badge. This is typically done with the "blue card," No. 34124, signed by the unit leader, or through Scoutbook.
- 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 should make another appointment with you when ready to prove an ability to complete some or all of 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—can still show 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. If using Scoutbook, you can check off each requirement as its completed.

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 your 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 current requirements for each merit badge are posted online at [www.scouting.org/skills/merit-badges/all/](http://www.scouting.org/skills/merit-badges/all/). They are also available in the current *Scouts BSA Requirements* book, and in the merit badge pamphlets.**

### Requirements—No More, No Less

The Scout is expected to meet the requirements as stated—no more and no less—and 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." See [Guide to Advancement](#) section 5.0.8.0 for more

information.

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.

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. 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 unofficial sources. 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 must not be required to use these learning aids in order to complete a merit badge. (GTA section 7.0.4.8)**

### 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 can be 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 follow Safeguarding Youth guidelines.

## Can You Sell Your Subject?

Scouting units constantly seek program materials for meetings. If you would like to promote your subject, 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.

### 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.

### 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 version of the pamphlet on your subject. It will contain the latest requirements and information. Find pamphlets and the latest requirements at [www.scouting.org/skills/merit-badges/all/](http://www.scouting.org/skills/merit-badges/all/). Some also have a digital resource guide, with videos, instructions, and more to assist the Scout in completing the requirements.

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, 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](mailto:merit.badge@scouting.org).

## Why Volunteer

Scouting America recognizes that the merit badge counselor is the cornerstone of 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. Scouting 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. See *Guide to Advancement* section 7.0.4.10 for more information.

## as of June 2025

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  
 Health Care  
     Professions  
 Hiking  
 Home Repairs  
 Horsemanship  
 Indian Lore  
 Insect Study  
 Inventing  
 Journalism  
 Kayaking  
 Landscape Architecture  
 Law  
 Leatherwork  
 Lifesaving  
 Mammal Study  
 Metalwork  
 Mining in Society  
 Model Design  
     and Building  
 Motorboating  
 Moviemaking  
 Multisport  
 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

