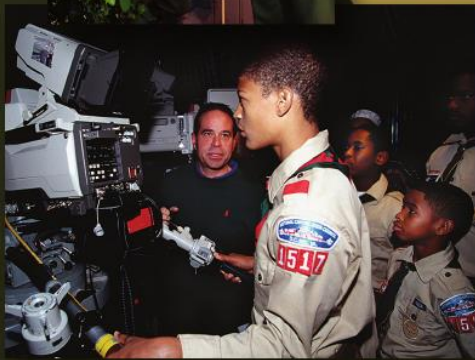


# A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling

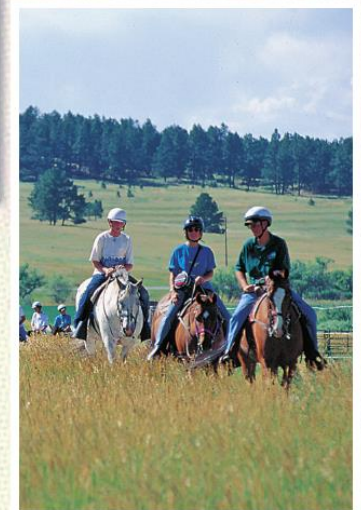
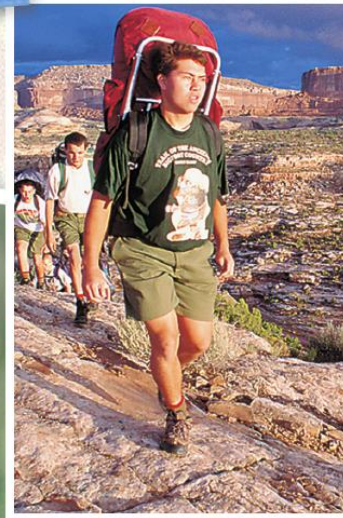
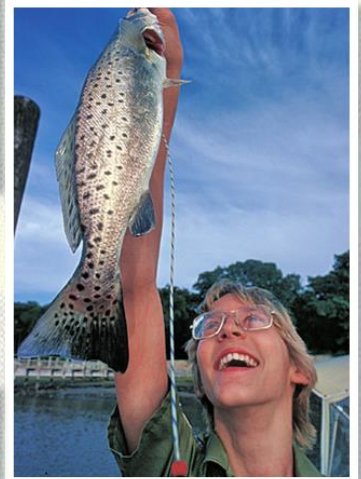
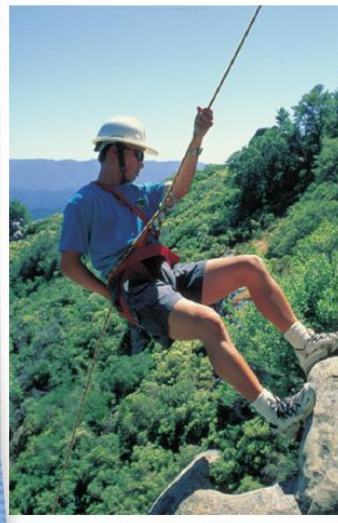


BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA®

## 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.

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.



## A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling

### 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 100 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

All merit badge counselors must register annually with their local council to continue serving as a volunteer.

training is not current, the volunteer must go to <http://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 <http://myscouting.org> and create a user account, which allows them to take the training. 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. Now would also be a good time to complete and turn in the Merit Badge Counselor Information, No. 34405.

Other qualifications for serving in this role are:

- Must be an individual of good character
- Must be age 18 or older
- Must be recognized as possessing the skills and education in the subjects for which they want to serve
- Must have good rapport with Scout-age youths

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.

Lastly, 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.

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

### 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

## Step By Step

Through your association with youth members, keep in mind you are assisting unit leaders in the advancement program. Leaders help select and approve the recognitions Scouts will earn for a particular rank and provide them with the name and phone number of the 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 face-to-face. Personal contact will make earning the badge a better experience for you both.
- 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 signed by his unit leader.
- 4 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.
- 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 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.

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 <http://www.scouting.org>.

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, "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.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

## 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.

If you have suggestions for improvements of the requirements or pamphlet, please send your comments to: Advancement Team, S209, Boy Scouts of America, 1325 West Walnut Hill Lane, P.O. Box 152079, Irving, TX 75015-2079.



## 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.

# Merit Badges

American Business  
 American Cultures  
 American Heritage  
 American Labor  
 Animal Science  
 Archaeology  
 Archery  
 Architecture  
 Art  
 Astronomy  
 Athletics  
 Auto Mechanics  
 Aviation  
 Backpacking  
 Basketry  
 Bird Study  
 Bugling  
 Camping  
 Canoeing  
 Chemistry  
 Cinematography  
 Citizenship in the Community  
 Citizenship in the Nation  
 Citizenship in the World  
 Climbing  
 Coin Collecting  
 Collections  
 Communications  
 Composite Materials  
 Computers  
 Cooking  
 Crime Prevention  
 Cycling  
 Dentistry  
 Disabilities Awareness  
 Dog Care  
 Drafting  
 Electricity  
 Electronics  
 Emergency Preparedness  
 Energy

Engineering  
 Entrepreneurship  
 Environmental Science  
 Family Life  
 Farm Mechanics  
 Fingerprinting  
 Fire Safety  
 First Aid  
 Fish and Wildlife Management  
 Fishing  
 Fly-Fishing  
 Forestry  
 Gardening  
 Genealogy  
 Geocaching  
 Geology  
 Golf  
 Graphic Arts  
 Hiking  
 Home Repairs  
 Horsemanship  
 Indian Lore  
 Insect Study  
 Inventing  
 Journalism  
 Landscape Architecture  
 Law  
 Leatherwork  
 Lifesaving  
 Mammal Study  
 Medicine  
 Metalwork  
 Model Design and Building  
 Motorboating  
 Music  
 Nature  
 Nuclear Science  
 Oceanography  
 Orienteering  
 Painting  
 Personal Fitness  
 Personal Management

Pets  
 Photography  
 Pioneering  
 Plant Science  
 Plumbing  
 Pottery  
 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  
 Shotgun Shooting  
 Skating  
 Small-Boat Sailing  
 Snow Sports  
 Soil and Water Conservation  
 Space Exploration  
 Sports  
 Stamp Collecting  
 Surveying  
 Swimming  
 Textile  
 Theater  
 Traffic Safety  
 Truck Transportation  
 Veterinary Medicine  
 Water Sports  
 Weather  
 Whitewater  
 Wilderness Survival  
 Wood Carving  
 Woodwork



  
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