

Merit Badge Counselor Information and Training

Scoutmasters and Troop Advancement Committee: please make sure each merit badge counselor in your troop reads and understands the information below before they teach a merit badge. Please hold a training session and go over this material and give them a copy. Remember that you have the potential of adding counselors every time you add a boy. This training is not a one-time event. Every boy deserves a trained leader and that includes merit badge counselors. Also, refer them to this site if they need a quick reference. This may be lengthy but needed to keep everyone on the same page. Some guidelines are mentioned more than once.

The first part of this presentation is taken from the Advancement Committee Guide Policies and Procedures for the District from National and A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling.

The essence of quality Scouting is having sufficient qualified adult leaders. Nowhere does this become more apparent than in the recruitment of adults to serve as merit badge counselors.

All counselors must have an understanding of their role in Boy Scout advancement.

The merit badge plan is based on the concept that a boy works with an adult knowledgeable in one or more fields, an experience invaluable to a Boy Scout.

Qualifications of Counselors

Persons serving as merit badge counselors must be registered as a merit badge counselor with the Boy Scouts of America. They must be men and women of good character, age 18 or older, and recognized as having the skills and education in the subjects for which they are to serve as merit badge counselors, as well as having the ability to work with Scout-age boys.

All merit badge counselors must be approved by the **council** advancement committee. Merit badge counselors are not required to pay a fee if they are only registered as merit badge counselors.

There is no restriction or limit on the number of merit badges an individual may be approved to counsel for, but they must be approved by the committee for each specific merit badge.

There is no limit on the number of merit badges a youth may earn from one counselor.

An approved merit badge counselor may counsel any youth member, including his or her own son, ward, or relative.

All merit badge counselors must be trained in the aims of Boy Scouting and in advancement procedures.

Merit badge counselors are registered with the local council. As with all council members, their registration must be renewed annually.

Responsibility for Merit Badges

Merit badge counselors shall prepare and qualify youth members. There shall be no board of review procedure for merit badges, but public recognition may be given at a unit court of honor or other suitable occasion.

Merit Badge Counselors and the Buddy System

A Scout must have a buddy with him at each meeting with a merit badge counselor. A Scout's buddy can be another Scout, a parent or guardian, a brother or sister, or a relative or friend. From his Scoutmaster, the Scout obtains a signed merit badge application and the name of the appropriate merit badge counselor. The scout sets up his first appointment with the counselor. The counselor should explain the requirements to the Scout and his buddy then meet as appropriate with the counselor until the Scout completes the badge's requirements.

Group Instruction of Merit Badges

The question arises as to whether it is permissible to have Scouts earn merit badges in groups. Many subjects may be presented to groups of Scouts without defeating one of the purposes of the merit badge plan – working closely with a qualified adult.

The National Executive Board has approved this policy statement on merit badge counseling:

“To the fullest extent possible, the merit badge counseling relationship is a counselor-Scout arrangement in which the boy is not only judged on his performance of the requirements, but receives maximum benefit from the knowledge, skill, character, and personal interest of his counselor. Group instruction and orientation are encouraged where special facilities and expert personnel make this most practical, or when Scouts are dependent on only a few counselors for assistance. However, this group experience should be followed by attention to each individual candidate's projects and his ability to fulfill all requirements.”

In harmony with this policy, a troop or team may use merit badge counselors in unit meetings. The merit badge counselor can make a presentation covering the highlights of a merit badge subject. Scouts should then be given an opportunity to try some skill

related to the badge. This introduction to a merit badge can spark an interest in the subject.

Scouts must be tested individually, and they must meet all the requirements. A Scout may not qualify for merit badges by just being a member of a group that is instructed in skills. 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.

No additional requirements may be added.

General information

A merit badge cannot be taken away once it has been earned, provide the counselor is a registered counselor for the merit badge.

There is no time limit for completion of merit badges other than age 18.

Merit Badge requirements

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 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.

Merit Badge Pamphlets?

Merit badge pamphlets are available through the scout shop or your own troop library.

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 is a good idea to obtain the latest printing of the pamphlet on your subject. It will contain the latest requirements and information.

How do I register? – National Guidelines

You must fill out a standard leader form (separate from a leader form for another position) and a **Merit Badge Counselor Information** sheet (form # 34405) available on the National site(www.scouting.org) or the Council site(www.westarkbsa.org) under forms. Also, your troop advancement person may have them available for you.

Procedure for following National Guidelines

If you filled out a leader form in 2005 or later, you only have to fill out a Merit Badge Counselor Information sheet. If your troop keeps their merit badge counselor list on troop master, you can simply make a copy of that and sign by your name (if you have filled out a leader form for merit badge counselor in 2005 or later), additional merit badges need a Merit Badge Counselor Information sheet. Submit all documents to your district office.

The following is from Merit Badge Counselor Orientation (form#34542)

Scout Buddy System

A Scout must have a buddy with him at each meeting with a merit badge counselor. A Scout's buddy could be another Scout, or be a parent or guardian, brother or sister, relative or friend. The Scout obtains a signed Application for Merit Badge and the name of the appropriate merit badge counselor from his Scoutmaster. The Scout sets up his first appointment with the counselor. At this first meeting with the Scout and his buddy, the counselor should explain to the Scout what is expected to start meeting the requirements. When the Scout knows what is expected, he can start to learn and do the things required. The counselor will help the Scout learn the things he needs to know or do.

When the Scout is ready, he should call the counselor again and make an appointment for him and his buddy to meet with the counselor and begin to meet the requirements. He should take along with him the things he has made to meet the requirements. The counselor will ask him to do each requirement to make sure he knows his stuff and has done or can do the things required.

When the counselor is satisfied that the requirements have been met, he or she will sign the Application for Merit Badge, keeping the third section and returning the first two sections to the Scout. The Scout turns in both sections of the Application for Merit Badge to his Scoutmaster so the merit badge can be secured.

Statement

A Scout earns a merit badge by working with a council/district – approved and registered adult counselor, an expert in the chosen subject, who is on the list provided in his troop from the district. The Scout, along with a buddy, makes an appointment with the counselor and works on the merit badge with the counselor during one or more visits. When the counselor approves the Scout's application, the Scoutmaster submits it to the council service center and obtains the badge. As with rank awards, the Scout is awarded the merit badge at the next troop meeting, and later at the next court of honor.

Any registered Scout, regardless of rank, may work on any merit badge and receive the award when he earns it.

The merit badge program is one of Scouting's basic character developing tools. Earning merit badges gives boys the kind of self-confidence that comes only from overcoming difficult obstacles to achieve a goal.

Through the merit badge program, boys learn career skills that might help them choose their lifework. Some merit badges help boys develop physical fitness and provide hobbies that give a lifetime of healthful recreation.

Working with a merit badge counselor gives Scouts contact with an adult with whom they might not be acquainted. This is a valuable experience. The Scouts could be shy and fearful in this new situation, so the counselor must see that the counseling session is relaxed, informal, and friendly.

Although at times two Scouts will be working as buddies on the same merit badge, each Scout is judged on his own performance of the requirements and should receive the maximum benefit from the knowledge, skill, character, and personal interest of the counselor. Group instruction and orientation are encouraged where special facilities and expert personnel make this most practical or when Scouts are dependent on a few counselors for assistance. However, this group experience should include individual attention to each candidate's projects and his ability to fulfill all requirements.

Discuss these points with the merit badge counselor

1. Merit badge requirements in merit badge pamphlet
2. Merit badge pamphlets are available in each subject and may be purchased by the Scout, may be available at the public library, or the troop library.
3. The Scout indicates his interest in a merit badge to his Scoutmaster, who gives him an interview to determine interest, enthusiasm, preparedness, a signed Application for Merit Badge, the name and phone number of the council/district approved counselor, and encourages him to wear the official uniform when he visits the counselor with a buddy.

4. The Scout calls the merit badge counselor and makes an appointment.
5. The merit badge counselor sets the date and time for the Scout and his buddy and suggests the Scout bring the following: merit badge pamphlet, merit badge application, projects he may have started, and any other indication of preparedness.
6. At the first interview, the merit badge counselor and the Scout decide upon projects, short-term and long-term goals with dates of completion in mind, and dates and times for future sessions.
7. The number of counseling sessions depends on the difficulty of the subject and the preparation and ability of the Scout.
8. The Scout is counseled with a buddy present.
9. The Scout is always tested individually but with a buddy present, and as each requirement is completed the counselor marks it on the application.
10. The Scout is expected to meet the requirements as stated – not more and not less.
11. The merit badge counselor assists the Scout to meet the requirements and certifies when he has completed them.

Counseling techniques

1. For the Scout to get the most benefit from the counseling session, he must feel welcome and relaxed. One way for the counselor to put him at ease is to ask a simple question. For example, “how long have you been in Scouting?” or “What got you interested in the Astronomy merit badge?”
2. Another way to put a Scout at ease is to show him something related to the merit badge subject. For example, a Coin Collecting merit badge counselor might show the Scout his coin collection. However, don’t overwhelm the Scout. Remember, he is probably a beginner.
3. A third way to put a Scout at ease is to ask him to do a simple skill. For example, a Woodwork merit badge counselor might say, “Would you sand this piece of wood while I get some tools ready?”
4. At the first meeting with the Scout, the merit badge counselor should carefully review each requirement to be sure the Scout understands what he must do.
5. Before the merit badge counselor signs the Scout’s Application for Merit Badge, he must insist that the Scout do exactly what the requirements call for. If it says, “show or demonstrate,” that is what he must do. Just telling isn’t enough. The same things hold true for words such as “make,” “list,” “in the field,” and “collect, identify, and label.”
6. 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 you need for you collection, you must have 30 to get my signature.”
7. It is, of course, acceptable for a Scout on his own initiative to do more than the requirement calls for.
8. When reviewing the requirements with a Scout or testing him, the merit badge counselor may find that the boy needs help in learning a particular skill. One of the jobs of a merit badge counselor is to teach the Scout the skills required.
9. The most effective way to teach a skill is to get the Scout to practice while learning.

As a counselor

1. A Scout is interviewed with a buddy present to determine his preparedness, the amount of knowledge he already has in the subject, and his interest in the subject.
2. Short-term and long-term goals are set by the Scout with encouragement from the counselor.
3. Counselor follows up with the Scout on his goals – projects, collections, written work.
4. Counselor helps the Scout evaluate his progress.
5. Counselor encourages the Scout to ask for any help he needs to gain more knowledge or skill in the subject.

A coach

1. Teaches the Scout the skills required.
2. Gives the Scout an opportunity to practice the skills under his or her guidance.
3. Takes a genuine interest in the projects and encourages completion.

Merit badge library

A listing of all merit badge pamphlets can be found on the inside back cover of the current *Boy Scout Requirements*.

Thank you so much for volunteering as a merit badge counselor. I hope this information helps and gets everyone on the same page. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact me.

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