

Merit Badge Counseling

The merit badge program is part of the advancement plan of the Boy Scouts of America. It has guided the interests and energies of Boy Scouts for 85 years and is one of the most unusual educational programs ever devised. A merit badge is an award that is presented to a Boy Scout or Varsity Scout when he has completed the requirements for one of more than 100 subjects in a wide variety of art, craft, hobby, sport, trade, profession, agribusiness, service, or self-improvement areas. The badge is only a small piece of 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.

This could not have happened without the service of thousands of merit badge counselors -- like yourself -- expert in a particular subject and interested in helping Scouts grow into men of character, 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 JOB?

Your job 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. But, your larger opportunity ties in coaching -- helping the Scout over the different hurdles of the requirements and making him aware of the deeper aspects of the subject from your knowledge and experience.

WHAT DO I AGREE TO?

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

These are the steps that a Scout takes to earn a merit badge, as outlined in the Boy Scout Handbook.

Gets a signed merit badge application from his Scoutmaster or Varsity Scout Coach and finds a buddy who can attend the merit badge counselor meetings with him. (His buddy can be another Scout, a parent or guardian, a brother or sister, or a relative or friend.)

Gets the merit badge pamphlet on his subject. His patrol or troop may have one he can borrow. So may the library. Or he may purchase one from the local council service center.

Contacts the merit badge counselor and explains that he would like to earn the badge. Along with his buddy, meets the counselor and discusses how he can get the most out of the time he spends working on the badge.

Learns and does the things that the pamphlet explains. Goes as far as he can to fulfill the requirements on his own.

When he is ready, he and his buddy make another appointment with the counselor. The counselor will spend time with him going over the important parts of the subject. A good counselor will also help him see beyond the requirements and discover ways to continue learning about the subject. If the counselor is satisfied that the Scout has completed the requirements, he will sign the merit badge form. If not, the counselor will explain what he still must do.

Gives the signed form to his Varsity Scout Coach or Scoutmaster. The Varsity Scout Coach or Scoutmaster will get the badge for him and present it to him during a troop ceremony.

HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO YOU?

The Scout should bring a merit badge application signed by his Scoutmaster or Varsity Scout Coach on his first visit to you. He must be accompanied by a buddy.

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 both you and the Scout.

In your discussion of what is expected, you may want to start by finding out from the boy what he already knows, so you can spend your time on helping him learn the remaining items, 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 in his understanding of the subject. 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. This review session will be approached by the Scout with some apprehension. He is familiar with final exams in school and may look on this meeting with you as another such experience. You can help a great deal by putting the boy at ease. Talk with him rather than examine him. There is a big difference, yet you can find out what the boy knows. Express honest enthusiasm for the things he has done, particularly if projects are involved. Your approval will give confidence to the Scout.

When he meets you, he should bring with him the projects required for completion. If the things he has done cannot be transported, he should present you with 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 my doubts, contact the adult who signed the statement. 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 may only work with a few. Your contact with these Scouts is tremendously important. Your influence is measured not by how many Scouts you work with, but the effect upon the lives of those you have the opportunity to work with.

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 program of advancement which the Scoutmaster or Varsity Scout Coach helps each of his Scouts plan. Often, the Scoutmaster or Varsity Scout Coach will help the Scout select the merit badges he will earn for a particular award. Whether he does or not, he 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 them in your discussions with the Scout. He probably will welcome your willingness to share with him your knowledge well beyond the requirements, and you will be making a real 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 is a real exploration in an adult work experience, showing him whether or not he has the interest or ability along such lines. His activity also can show him what educational requirements a subject area has. 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 is going to do with himself in life -- is up to one person. That person is the Scout himself. However, he will appreciate your help in showing him the relationship of his merit badge work to 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 is probably the place to meet with Scouts.

Subjects that are related to your hobbies usually will be handled in your home. Here you will have hobby-related materials to use in your coaching of 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, the completing of the requirements always must be done on an individual basis. Scouts may not qualify for merit badges by just being members of a group that is instructed in skills. They must qualify by personally satisfying you that they can meet all the requirements. It's pretty hard to do this in a group. When one Scout in a group answers a question it can't possibly prove that all the others in the group also know the answer. Then, too, each Scout learns at his own pace. He should not 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 can meet the requirements.

CAN YOU SELL YOUR SUBJECT?

Scout troops and Varsity Scout teams are constantly seeking program material 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 come to a troop or team meeting to "sell your subject." All Scouts won't 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 with those who are really interested after the meeting 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 is told. They are written for Scout-age boys. They also contain suggestions for projects that might give you ideas for being helpful.

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