

A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling

Merit Badge Counselor

Merit badge counselors are the key to success in the merit badge plan. They offer their time, experience, and knowledge to help guide Scouts in one or more of the merit badge subjects.

The counselor's responsibility is to

1. Assist the Scout as he plans the assigned projects and activities to meet the merit badge requirements.
2. Coach Scouts through interviews and demonstrations on how to do the required skills of the craft, business, or hobby.
3. Certify the Scout after determining whether he is qualified for the merit badge.

What Is a Merit Badge?

A merit badge is an award that is presented to a Scout when he completes the requirements for one of the merit badge subjects. The badge is only a small piece of khaki 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.

Millions of Scouts "browse" among the more than 100 subjects, choosing those that seem most interesting to them. Some subjects are in craftwork, some in vocational fields, some in service to others, and many in cultural or life skills areas. In addition, certain merit badges are required for the Eagle Scout rank.

It is in the career fields that adults can make a vital impact on the life of a Scout by helping him with merit badges. Badges such as Entrepreneurship, Graphic Arts, Engineering, Chemistry, and many others provide the finest kind of orientation toward a possible career for the Scout.

Merit badge counselors provide the means for Scouts to explore many subjects that may not be available to them otherwise. The Scout who has earned a number of merit badges gains confidence, finds greater purpose in life, and becomes a better person from his experience. This cannot happen without the service of thousands of merit badge counselors expert in particular subjects and interested in helping Scouts grow into men of character who are ready to take their place in the world as participating citizens. You are probably saying, "That's all great, but what do I do, and how do I do it?"

What's My Responsibility?

Your task 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, though your larger opportunity lies in coaching "helping the Scout meet the challenge of the requirements and making him aware of the deeper aspects of the subject through your knowledge and experience.

Am I Qualified?

Merit badge counselors must be members of the Boy Scouts of America. A counselor must have approval from the BSA local council, but there is no cost to serve. All volunteers are expected to complete BSA Youth Protection training within 90 days of assuming a leadership position. This training is available online at [Boy Scouts of America - MyScouting.org](http://BoyScouts.org).

What Do I Agree to Do?

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

Working on merit badges is especially enjoyable when Scouts work together. The BSA encourages this by making the buddy system a part of the merit badge program. Together the two buddies meet with merit badge counselors, plan projects, and keep their enthusiasm high.

The requirements for each merit badge appear in the current BSA merit badge pamphlet for that award and in the book Boy Scout Requirements, available at Scout shops, council service centers, and online at <http://www.scouting.org/meritbadges.aspx>. When a Scout has decided on a merit badge he would like to earn, he must follow these steps:

- Obtain from his Scoutmaster the name of a qualified counselor for that merit badge and a signed merit badge application. (A counselor must know the subject well, be approved by the local council, be able to work effectively with Scouts, and be currently registered as a merit badge counselor with the Boy Scouts of America.)
- Along with another Scout, a relative, or a friend, set up and attend the first appointment with his merit badge counselor. The counselor will explain the requirements for the badge and help the Scout plan ways to fulfill them so that he can get the most out of the experience.
- Complete the requirements, meeting with his counselor whenever necessary until he has finished working on the badge.

Where Do You Meet?

We would prefer to meet at the weekly Troop Meetings held at the Wesley Freedom United Methodist Church. 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. This has a time advantage for you. However, completing the requirements must always be done on an individual basis. A Scout may not qualify for merit badges by just being a member of a group that is instructed in skills.

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 has read. The pamphlets are written for Scout-age boys. They also contain suggestions for projects.

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 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 has been updated. Most pamphlets are reprinted each year, and the contents are updated periodically.

Please take note of the following information:

The requirements in the merit badge pamphlet may NOT be the current ones, even if the pamphlet is current. Please check the requirements listed in the current Boy Scout Requirements Book (No. 34765), which is issued annually, to verify that you are using the current requirements, or check the [current requirements posted on this web site](#) which are updated whenever the requirements change. Unless a new pamphlet is issued AFTER the Requirements Book, the requirements listed in the Requirements Book are the controlling requirements.

Once you start working with a Scout, if the requirements change, you should continue to use the requirements in effect when the Scout began, unless the SCOUT desires to use the new requirements. However, if he wishes to use the new requirements, he must use ALL of the new requirements. He may not pick and choose a selection from the old and new requirements.

REQUIREMENTS FOR MERIT BADGE COUNSELORS

To qualify as a Merit Badge Counselor, you must:

- Be at least 18 years old.
- Be proficient in the merit badge subject by vocation, avocation, or special training. (see below)

- Be able to work with Scout-age boys.
- Be registered with the Boy Scouts of America
- Complete and submit the BSA Merit Badge Counselor Information Form (No. 33405), indicating which Merit badges you wish to counsel.

TO REGISTER AS A SCOUTER

For administrative purposes, Boy Scouts of America requires all merit badge counselors to register with their local council, by submitting an Adult Registration Application, No. 524-501. If you are registering solely to serve as a merit badge counselor, there is no fee. You may also become a full member of the Boy Scouts of America by paying the \$15.00 annual registration fee, which includes a subscription to Scouting magazine. This bimonthly publication will keep you updated on developments in the merit badge program and many other aspects of Scouting.

Please note that when registering as an adult member of BSA, you must authorize a criminal background check of yourself, which will be made from public records. In addition, ALL Adults, when registering, including all Merit Badge Counselors, MUST complete BSA Youth Protection Training before they can be registered. The training must be current (within 2 calendar years) whenever counseling Scouts. Youth Protection Training can be taken locally or online at <https://myscouting.scouting.org/Pages/eLearning.aspx>