

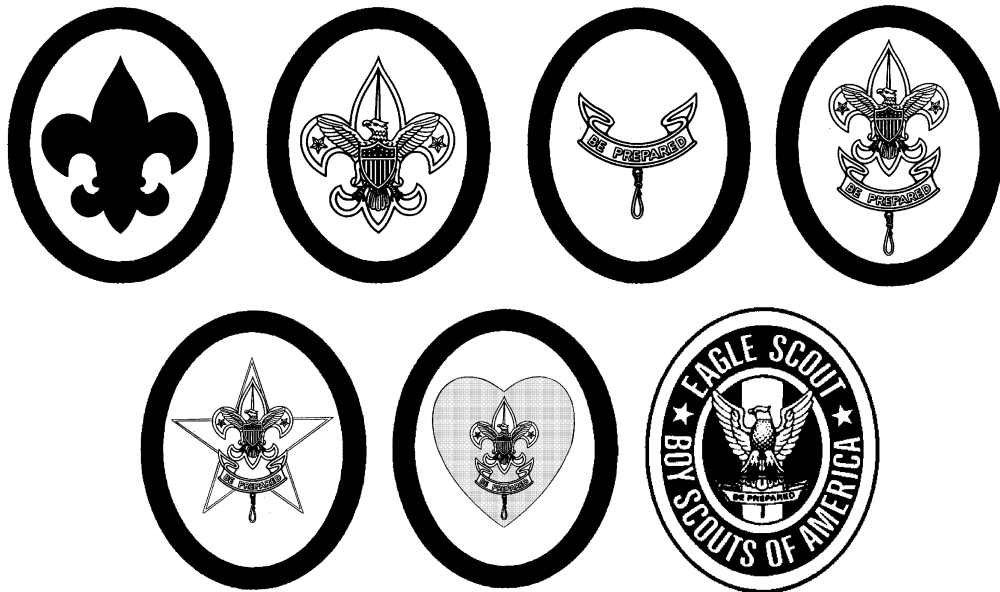
TROOP/CREW 179
MICHIGAN
CROSSROADS COUNCIL
LEADER'S ADVANCEMENT GUIDE



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BOY SCOUT RANKS





AIMS AND METHODS

Every Scouting activity moves boys toward three basic aims: character development, citizenship training, and mental and physical fitness. Advancement is one of the eight methods used by Scout leaders to help boys fulfill the aims of the BSA.

Ideals: The ideals of Scouting are spelled out in the Scout Oath, the Scout Law, the Scout motto, and the Scout slogan. The Scout measures himself against these ideals and continually tries to improve. The goals are high, and as they reach them, they have some control over what and who they become.

Patrols: The patrol method gives Scouts an experience in group living and participating citizenship. It places responsibility on young shoulders and teaches Scouts how to accept it. The patrol method allows Scouts to interact in small groups where members can easily relate to each other. These small groups determine troop activities through elected representatives.

Outdoor Program: Scouts is designed to take place outdoors. It is in the outdoor setting that Scouts share responsibilities and learn to live with one another. In the outdoors the skills and activities practiced at troop meetings come alive with purpose. Being close to nature helps Scouts gain an appreciation for the beauty of the world around us. The outdoors is the laboratory in which Scouts learn ecology and practice conservation of nature's resources.

Advancement: Scouts provide a series of surmountable obstacles and steps in overcoming them through the advancement method. The Scout plans their advancement and progresses at their own pace as they meet each challenge. The Scout is rewarded for each achievement, which helps them gain self-confidence. The steps in the advancement system help a Scout grow in self-reliance and in the ability to help others.

Associations with Adults: Youth learn a great deal by watching how adults conduct themselves. Scout leaders can be positive role models for the members of the troop. In many cases a Scoutmaster who is willing to listen to youth, encourage them, and take a sincere interest in them can make a profound difference in their lives.

Personal Growth: As Scouts plan their activities and progress toward their goals, they experience personal growth. The Good Turn concept is a major part of the personal growth method of Scouts BSA. Scouts grow as they participate in community service projects and do Good Turns for others. Probably no device is as successful in developing a basis for personal growth as the daily Good Turn. The religious emblems program also is a large part of the personal growth method. Frequent personal conferences with the Scout's Scoutmaster help each Scout to determine their growth toward Scouting's aims.

Leadership Development: The Scout BSA program encourages Scouts to learn and practice leadership skills. Every Scout can participate in both shared and total leadership situations. Understanding the concepts of leadership helps a Scout accept the leadership role of others and guides them toward the citizenship aim of Scouting.

Uniform: The uniform makes our Scout troop visible as a force for good and creates a positive youth image in the community. Scouts is an action program, and wearing the uniform is an action that shows each Scout's commitment to the aims and purposes of Scouting. The uniform gives the Scout identity in a world brotherhood of youth who believe in the same ideals. The uniform is practical attire for Scout activities and provides a way for Scouts to wear the badges that show what they have accomplished.

As Adult Leaders It is our job to incorporate all these methods in delivering the Scouting program to our members in Troop and Crew
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FOUR STEPS IN ADVANCEMENT

A Scout advances from Scout to Eagle by doing things with his patrol and troop, with his leaders, and on his own. A well-rounded and active unit program that generates advancement as a natural outcome should take boys to First Class in their first 12 to 18 months of membership. Boy Scout advancement is a straightforward matter when the four steps or stages outlined below are observed and integrated into troop programming. The same steps apply to Venturing.

The Scout Learns

He learns by doing, and as he learns, he grows in his ability to do his part as a member of the patrol and troop. As he develops knowledge and skill, he is asked to teach others; and in this way he learns and develops leadership.

The Scout Is Tested

The unit leader authorizes those who may test and pass the Scout on rank requirements. They might include his patrol leader, senior patrol leader, an assistant unit leader, another Scout, or the unit leader himself. Merit badge counselors teach and test him on requirements for merit badges.

The Scout Is Reviewed

After he has completed all requirements for a rank, the Scout meets with a board of review. For Tenderfoot, Second Class, First Class, Star, and Life ranks, and Eagle Palms, members of the unit committee conduct it. See “Particulars for Tenderfoot Through Life Ranks (or Palms),” 8.0.2.0. The Eagle Scout board of review is held in accordance with National Council and local council procedures.

The Scout Is Recognized

When the board of review has approved his advancement, the Scout deserves recognition as soon as possible. This should be done at a ceremony at the next unit meeting. His achievement may be recognized again later, during a formal court of honor.

After the Scout Is Tested and Recognized

After the Scout is tested and recognized, a well-organized unit program will help him practice his skills in different settings and methods: at unit meetings, through various activities and outings, by teaching other Scouts, while enjoying games and leading projects, and so forth. These activities reinforce the learning, show how Scout skills and knowledge are applied, and build confidence. Repetition is the key; this is how retention is achieved. The Scout fulfills a requirement and then is placed in a situation where he has to put it to work. If he has forgotten what he learned, he may have to seek out a friend, leader, or other resource to help refresh his memory. As he does so, we are able to watch him grow.

RANK REQUIREMENTS OVERVIEW

When people are asked what they did in Scouting, or what it is they think Scouts do or learn, they most often mention the outdoor activities, such as camping and hiking. A First Class Scout would surely add first aid or fire building or swimming or cooking or knot tying. And those who made at least Star or Life would doubtless talk about the merit badges they had earned to achieve those ranks—especially those required for Eagle. But these hands-on experiences, as memorable as they are, make up only a portion of what must be done to advance. And the remaining requirements—those beyond the merit badges and skills activities—are generally the most difficult to administer and judge. This section concentrates on those. Consult the *Troop Leader Guidebook*, No. 33009 (volume 1), for guidance on implementing the others.



ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

The purpose of Star, Life, and Eagle Scout requirements calling for Scouts to be active for a period of months involves impact. Since we prepare young people to go forth, and essentially, make a positive difference in our American society, we judge that a member is “active” when his level of activity in Scouting, whether high or minimal, has had a sufficiently positive influence toward this end.

Use the following three sequential tests to determine whether the requirement has been met.

1. The Scout is registered. The youth is registered in his unit for at least the time period indicated in the requirement, and he has indicated in some way, through his actions, that he considers himself a member.
2. The Scout is in good standing. A Scout is considered in “good standing” with his unit as long as he has not been dismissed for disciplinary reasons. He must also be in good standing with the local council and the Boy Scouts of America. (In the rare case he is not, communications will have been delivered.)
3. The Scout meets the Troop's reasonable expectations; or, if not, a lesser level of activity is explained. If, for the time period required, a Scout or qualifying Venturer meets those aspects of his unit's pre-established expectations that refer to a level of activity, then he is considered active and the requirement is met. Time counted as “active” need not be consecutive. A boy may piece together *any* times he *has* been active and still qualify. In Troop & Crew 179 the following reasonable expectation is found in the troop's Rules and Regulations.
4. Attendance
 - a. Like any other organization we depend and plan on the attendance of all Scouts. If a Scout misses a meeting or activity his patrol (like a team) is short a person. If too many Scouts miss a meeting or activity, the patrol cannot function and our program breaks down. Because Scouting is a year round activity we understand that other activities can come in conflict with the troop program. Regarding sports and other school activities our policy is:
 - i. If an infrequent event, such as a music concert or game, conflicts with our weekly meeting, the Scout should miss the troop meeting for this special event.
 - ii. However, if a weekly after school activity conflicts with a once-a-month troop activity, we feel the Scout should attend the campout. We feel this is important as the Troop attends only one campout each month.
 - b. If a Scout cannot attend a meeting, he should call his Patrol Leader. If a Scout cannot attend a Campout after registration close date, he must notify his Patrol Leader, and the Transportation Chairperson.
 - c. Only active members will be considered eligible for awards, ranks and membership in a patrol. An active member will be defined as someone who consistently attends two-thirds of the troop's activities.
 - d. A Scout may be asked to report to the Patrol Leader's Council if he misses three consecutive meetings or three consecutive activities. If the Scout fails to report to the Patrol Leader's Council they may suspend his membership for review by the Troop Committee.
 - e. The Scout will be expected to be in Full Scout Field Uniform at all Scout meetings and activities.
 - f. As a member of a patrol and troop a Scout will be asked to do tasks by his fellow elected Scouts. If a Scout is insubordinate to the others he will be asked to go home.
 - g. Scouts who participate in High Adventure events, such as the Philmont Scout Ranch, Sea Base, or National Jamborees, are required to participate in Summer Camp. Summer Camp is considered a vital and important part of the Scouting experience that should not be missed for even one year. High Adventure activities are extra-curricular.



DEMONSTRATE SCOUT SPIRIT

As a First Class or Star Scout, demonstrate Scout spirit by living the Scout Oath and Scout Law. Tell how you have done your duty to God and how you have lived the Scout Oath and Scout Law in your everyday

The ideals of the Boy Scouts of America are spelled out in the Scout Oath, Scout Law, Scout motto, and Scout slogan. Members incorporating these ideals into their daily lives at home, at school, in their religious life, and in their neighborhoods, for example, are said to have *Scout spirit*. In evaluating whether a member has fulfilled this requirement, it may be best to begin by asking him to explain what Scout spirit and living the Scout Oath and Scout Law mean to him. Young people know when they are being kind or helpful, or a good friend to others. They know when they are cheerful, or trustworthy, or reverent. All of us, young and old, know how we act when no one else is around.

“SCOUT SPIRIT” REFERS TO IDEALS AND VALUES; IT IS NOT THE SAME AS

A leader typically asks for examples of how a Scout has lived the Oath and Law. It might also be useful to invite examples of when he did not. This is not something to push, but it can help with the realization that sometimes we fail to live by our ideals, and that we all can do better. This also sends a message that a Scout can admit he has done wrong, yet still advance. Or in a serious situation—such as alcohol or illegal drug use—understand why advancement might not be appropriate just now. This is a sensitive issue, and must be treated carefully. Most Scout leaders do their best to live by the Oath and Law, but any one of them may look back on years past and wish that, at times, they had acted differently. We learn from these experiences and improve and grow. We can look for the same in our youth.

Evaluating Scout spirit will always be a judgment call, but through getting to know a young man and by asking probing questions, we can get a feel for it. We can say, however, that we do not measure Scout spirit by counting meetings and outings attended. It is indicated, instead, by the way he lives his life.

SERVICE PROJECTS

While a First Class or Star Scout, participate in six hours of service through one or more service projects approved by your Scoutmaster. At least three hours of this service must be conservation-related.

Basic to the lessons in Scouting, especially regarding citizenship, service projects are a key element in the Journey to Excellence recognition program for councils, districts, and units. They should be a regular and critical part of the program in every pack, troop, team, crew, and ship. Service projects required for ranks other than Eagle must be approved according to what is written in the requirements and may be conducted individually or through participation in patrol or troop efforts. They also may be approved for those assisting on Eagle Scout service projects. Service project work for ranks other than Eagle clearly calls for participation only. Planning, development, or leadership must not be required.

Time that Scouts spend assisting on Eagle service projects should be allowed in meeting these requirements. Note that Eagle projects do not have a minimum time requirement, but call for planning and development, and leadership of others, and must be preapproved by the council or district.

Troop 179 requires that the Scout gets the project he will work on approved by the Assistant Scoutmaster assigned to keeping Advancement Records (Dawn Andrew). After the project has been concluded it is the Scout's responsibility to obtain a letter from the benefiting group (the Eagle candidate if the project was part of an Eagle Scout service project). The letter should include the date of service with number of hours and a brief description of work done. The letter is turned into the Assistant Scoutmaster of Advancement Records who will enter the project into our advancement record, in our Journey to Excellence Service Project national account, and will sign the Scout's handbook.



POSITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY

(For the Ranks of Star, Life, & Eagle Scout must be approved and signed by the Scoutmaster,
Chuck Williams, Greg Hooker or Jim Weinfurther)

“Serve actively in your unit for a period of ... months in one or more ... positions of responsibility” is an accomplishment every candidate for Star, Life, or Eagle must achieve. The following will help to determine whether a Scout has fulfilled the requirement.

Positions Must Be Chosen From Among

Those Listed. The position must be listed in the position of responsibility requirement shown in the most current edition of Boy Scout Requirements. Since more than one member may hold some positions—“instructor,” for example—it is expected that even very large units are able to provide sufficient opportunities within the list. Units do not have authority to require specific positions of responsibility for a rank. For example, they must not require a Scout to be senior patrol leader to obtain the Eagle rank. Service in positions of responsibility in provisional units, such as a jamboree troop or Philmont trek crew, do not count toward this requirement.

For Star and Life ranks only, a unit leader may assign, as a substitute for the position of responsibility, a leadership project that helps the unit. The experience should provide lessons similar to those of the listed positions, but it must not be confused with, or compared to, the scope of an Eagle Scout service project. It may be productive in many cases for the Scout to propose a leadership project that is discussed with the unit leader and then “assigned.” In Troop 179 First Class Scouts who serve as an Assistant Patrol Leader, Patrol Quartermaster or Patrol Scribe may consider those positions as a Scoutmaster approved project for Star only. A Star Scout looking for a position for Life must either work one of the listed positions or discuss with the Scoutmaster a special project.

Meeting the Time Test May Involve Any Number of Positions. The requirement calls for a period of months. Any number of positions may be held as long as total service time equals at least the number of months required. Holding simultaneous positions does not shorten the required number of months. Positions need not flow from one to the other; there may be gaps between them. Evaluating Scout spirit will always be a judgment call, but through getting to know a young man *and* by asking probing questions, we can get a feel for it. We can say, however, that we do not measure Scout spirit by counting meetings and outings attended. It is indicated, instead, by the way he lives his life.

When a Scout assumes a position of responsibility, something related to the desired results

Meeting Unit Expectations.

Troop 179 has established expectations for every positions of responsibility (see the troop publication, Troop Youth Leader Guide), and if, within reason based on his personal skill set, the Scout meets them, he fulfills the requirement. When a Scout assumes a position, something related to the desired results must happen. It is a disservice to the Scout and to the unit to reward work that has not been done. Holding a position and doing nothing, producing no results, is unacceptable. Some degree of responsibility must be practiced, taken, or accepted. Assistant Scoutmasters assigned to work with Scouts have the responsibility to help the Scout meet the troop's expectations.

Meeting the Requirement in the Absence of Unit Expectations.

It is best when a Scout's leaders provide him position descriptions, and then direction, coaching, and support. Where this occurs, and is done well, the young man will likely succeed. Under the above scenario, if it is left to the Scout to determine what should be done, and he makes a reasonable effort to perform accordingly for the time specified, then he fulfills this requirement. Even if his results are not necessarily what the Scoutmaster,



members of a board of review, or others involved may want to see, he must not be held to unestablished expectations.



When Responsibilities Are Not Met.

If a unit has *clearly* established expectations for position(s) held, then—*within reason*—a Scout must meet them through the prescribed time. If he is not meeting expectations, then this must be communicated early. Unit leadership may work toward a constructive result by asking him what he thinks he should be accomplishing. What is *his* concept of the position? What does he think his troop leaders—youth and adult—expect? What has he done well? What needs improvement? Often this questioning approach can lead a young man to the decision to measure up. *He* will tell the leaders how much of the service time should be recorded. If it becomes clear nothing will improve his performance, then it is acceptable to remove the Scout from his position. It is the assigned Assistant Scoutmaster and Scoutmaster's responsibility to address these situations promptly. Every effort should have been made while he was in the position to ensure he understood expectations and was regularly supported toward reasonably acceptable performance. It is unfair and inappropriate—after six months, for example—to surprise a boy who thinks he has been doing fine, with news that his performance is now considered unsatisfactory. In this case, he must be given credit for the time.

Only in rare cases—if ever—should an Assistant Scoutmaster inform a Scout that time, once served, will not count.

If a Scout believes he has performed his duties satisfactorily, but his leaders disagree, then the possibility that expectations are unreasonable or were not clearly conveyed to the youth should be considered. If after discussions between the Scout and his leaders—and perhaps including his parents—he believes he is being held to unreasonable expectations, then upon completing the remaining requirements, he must be granted a board of review.

“Responsibility” and “Leadership.”

Many suggest this requirement should call for a position of “leadership” rather than simply of “responsibility.” Taking and accepting responsibility, however, is a key foundation for leadership. One cannot lead effectively without it. The requirement as written recognizes the different personalities, talents, and skill sets in all of us. Some seem destined to be “the leader of the group.” Others provide quality support and strong examples behind the scenes. Without the latter, the leaders in charge have little chance for success. Thus, the work of the supporters becomes part of the overall leadership effort.

SCOUTMASTER'S CONFERENCE

(For the Ranks of Star, Life, & Eagle Scout must be approved and signed by the Scoutmaster,
Chuck Williams, Greg Hooker or Jim Weinfurther)

The Scoutmaster's conference, regardless of the rank or program, is conducted according to the guidelines in the *Troop Leader Guidebook*, No. 33009 (volume 1). Note that a Scout must participate or take part in one; it is not a “test.” Requirements do *not* say he must “pass” a conference. While it makes sense to hold one after other requirements for a rank are met, it is not required that it be the last step before the board of review. This is an important consideration for Scouts on a tight schedule to meet requirements before age 18. Last-minute work can sometimes make it impossible to fit the conference in before then, so scheduling it earlier can avoid unnecessary extension requests.

The conference is not a retest of the requirements upon which a Scout has been signed off. It is a forum for discussing topics such as ambitions, life purpose, and goals for future achievement, for counseling, and also for obtaining feedback on the troop or crew's program. In some cases, work left to be completed—and perhaps why it has not been completed—may be discussed just as easily as that which is finished. Ultimately, conference timing is up to the troop. Some leaders hold more than one along the way, and the Scout must be allowed to count any of them toward the requirement. Scoutmaster conferences are meant to be face-to-face, personal experiences. They relate not only to the Scouting method of advancement, but also to that of “association with adults”. Scoutmaster conferences should be held with a level of privacy acceptable under the



BSA's rules regarding Youth Protection. Parents and other Scouts within hearing range of the conversation may influence the Scout's participation. For this reason, the conferences should not be held in an online setting. Scoutmasters do not have the authority to deny a Scout a conference that is necessary for him to meet the requirements for his rank. If a Scoutmaster's conference is denied, a Scout—if he believes he has fulfilled all the remaining requirements—may still request a board of review. If an Eagle Scout candidate is denied a conference, it may become grounds for a board of review under disputed circumstances.

MECHANICS OF ADVANCEMENT: IN VENTURING

Venturing offers young people adventure with a purpose that serves to build character, promote citizenship, and develop physical and mental fitness. The experience helps participants mature into responsible, caring, and dependable leaders for tomorrow. Each Venturing crew is responsible for achieving these aims by designing a program that appeals to its members. Thus, Venturing is a catalyst: It brings together adults and young people, and incredible things happen. It is all about asking themselves and one another what is possible, and then setting out to plan and execute toward fulfillment.



Venturing Areas of Emphasis

The four areas of emphasis in Venturing are described as the ALPS model:

Adventure. Mentoring, leading, and participating in crew-led adventures.

Leadership. Ongoing leadership development through training, mentoring, and hands-on leadership.

Personal Growth. Goal setting in support of personal growth.

Service. Leading and participating in community service.

Each of the requirements for the Venturing advancement awards falls under one of these areas of emphasis.

Advancement in Venturing

The purpose of the Venturing awards program is to provide a pathway for accomplishment in the ALPS model. Advancement is accomplished when an active program emphasizes it and pays attention to the four steps in the process: preparation, learning, qualification, and recognition. Four awards make up the Venturing advancement track: Venturing, Discovery, Pathfinder, and Summit, but others also are described below. Venturers have until their 21st birthday to complete their awards. For detailed requirements and more information on Venturing advancement or recognition, see the *Handbook for Venturers*, No. 33494; *Venturing Awards and Requirements*, No. 34784; and the *Venturing Advisor Guidebook*, No. 34655. Each award is progressively more challenging, designed to help Venturers learn and practice new skills and to track their success. Each challenge met puts Venturers closer to the next award, providing a well-rounded program and a path forward as they progress.

Unless otherwise stated, requirements for the Venturing, Discovery, Pathfinder, and Summit awards and other Venturing recognitions may be completed at any time after joining a crew. Note that boards of review are involved with only the Discovery, Pathfinder, and Summit awards.



The Venturing Awards

Venturing Award. This is the beginning of the Venturing experience. The new member learns about the program, what a crew does, what to expect from the experience and the adventures, and makes a commitment to the principles of Venturing. No board of review is involved.

Discovery Award. Participation and preparing for leadership are the key elements here. The Discovery Award encourages members to design and lead an active program of continuous adventure and service. Venturers who achieve the Discovery Award will have taken part in two crew activities, and as they become more active, they discover talents and learn skills that will help them lead and serve others. In doing so, personal growth will result, and they will gradually recognize the wide variety of opportunities awaiting them.

Pathfinder Award. In earning the Pathfinder Award, a Venturer should begin to establish a reputation as a skilled leader. The award seeks to engage Venturers more deeply in the program by delivering further on the ALPS model. One of the key requirements involves leading a crew adventure. The type of adventure—whether an extended bicycle or canoe trip, or even 10 days visiting the museums of Washington, D.C.—is up to the award candidate and the crew. The value in the adventure comes from learning how to lead and demonstrate skills through action. Pathfinder candidates will also continue to deliver service to others, including in the crew to ensure it remains a strong and viable team. Goals set and achieved will continue to help the Venturer grow as an individual.

Summit Award. While the Pathfinder Award requires a member to lead an adventure, the Summit Award—Venturing’s highest—moves a young person into the role of servant leader. The Venturer will serve the crew as a leader—both formally and informally—and become a mentor to others. Additionally, Summit candidates are challenged to carry out a significant and valuable service project, where they will apply many of the lessons they have learned along the way. A crew’s program should be built upon a program of continuous, youth-led adventure, leadership, service, and personal growth. Each award level challenges Venturers to dig deeper into the question of who they are in order to truly develop and enhance their skills and confidence to complete the requirements. To the Summit Award recipient, servant leadership and community service are the cornerstones.

Ranger Award. High adventure and the outdoors have always been emphasized in the Boy Scouts of America, and Venturing is no different. The Ranger Award encourages a high level of achievement and proficiency in outdoor skills. It exemplifies challenge. Eight core requirements and at least four of the 18 electives must be completed.

Quest Award. The Quest Award is about fitness and sports. Candidates learn about nutrition, exercise plans, and what is required for a healthy life. They may be introduced to an enjoyable sport helpful toward that end. As with other Venturing awards, members share with others what they have learned. This can be done through presentations or even sports clinics. Five core requirements and at least one of the five electives must be completed.

TRUST Award. The TRUST (Tending, Respecting, Understanding, Serving, Transforming) Award helps Venturers learn about themselves, their communities, and religion and culture. It recognizes that trust is an essential part of relationships; that learning to trust is the challenge; and that learning to understand one another—especially those from different backgrounds and nationalities—represents a good start. The five core requirements are Tending Your Faith, Respecting the Beliefs of Others, Understanding Other Cultures, Serving Your Community, and Transforming Our Society. There are also 11 essential requirements of which nine must be completed.

4.3.1.2 Past Credit for Venturers

The requirements for all Venturing awards require the work to be done as Venturers. For example, even though a young man earned the Backpacking merit badge as a Boy Scout, before he became a Venturer, he must pass the Ranger backpacking elective once registered as a Venturer. Some requirements may call for certification such as Scuba Open-Water Diver, American Red Cross Standard First Aid, or BSA Lifeguard. Current certifications such as these may be used regardless where they were earned.



4.3.1.3 Multiple Credit for Venturers

Venturers may receive multiple credit for requirements. In the above example, if the Backpacking merit badge was earned while the member was also a Venturer, the effort could also count toward the Ranger elective. Further, experiences such as the Red Cross Emergency Response course could be used for the Ranger first aid requirement and the first aid and lifesaving electives. Venturers may not receive multiple credit for something like a tabletop display or a presentation. These must be done separately and relate directly to each situation requiring them.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Extended Absence From Scouting

Members who leave the Boy Scouting or Venturing program are welcome to return if they are eligible and in good standing. They take up where they left off, assuming the last verifiable rank. It may be necessary for them to produce advancement documentation, or to have records updated or transferred from another council. The time away shall not be held against them, time spent in positions of responsibility or active participation need not be continuous, any periods of activity before leaving count toward the next rank. Provided the Scout can show evidence of time served. Evidence can be in the form of a letter from previous leaders or a record of active participation in troop activities.

Religious Principles

From time to time, issues related to advancement call for an understanding of the position of the Boy Scouts of America on religious principles. The Boy Scouts of America does not define what constitutes belief in God or practice of religion. Neither does the BSA require membership in a religious organization or association for membership in the movement. If a Scout does not belong to a religious organization or association, then his parent(s) or guardian(s) will be considered responsible for his religious training. All that is required is the acknowledgment of belief in God as stated in the Declaration of Religious Principle and the Scout Oath, and the ability to be reverent as stated in the Scout Law.

THE MERIT BADGE PROGRAM

The Benefits of Merit Badges

There is more to merit badges than simply providing opportunities to learn skills. There is more to them than an introduction to lifetime hobbies, or the inspiration to pursue a career—though these invaluable results occur regularly. It all begins with a Scout's initial interest and effort in a merit badge subject, followed by a discussion with the Scoutmaster or designated assistant, continues through meetings with a counselor, and culminates in advancement and recognition. It is an uncomplicated process that gives a Scout the confidence achieved through overcoming obstacles. Social skills improve. Self-reliance develops. Examples are set and followed. And fields of study and interest are explored beyond the limits of the school classroom.

About the Application for Merit Badge (“Blue Card”)

It is important to note the “blue card” is the nationally recognized merit badge record. It has been updated from time to time and carries the information needed for proper posting and for evidence and reference as needed later. The card has three parts: the actual “Application for Merit Badge” portion, the “Applicant's Record,” and the “Counselor's Record.” It requires a total of four signatures—two each from the unit leader and a merit badge counselor. The unit leader signs first on the front of the Application for Merit Badge portion and gives the entire blue card to the Scout. Typically after the unit leader signs the blue card, the Scout contacts the merit badge counselor and sets an appointment. Even though Scouts may benefit from reviewing requirements with a counselor before pursuing them, a boy may begin working on a merit badge at any time after he is registered. It is the counselor's decision whether to accept work or activities completed prior to the issuing of



the signed blue card. Common sense should prevail, however. For example, nights already camped as a Boy Scout, or coins or stamps already collected, would count toward their respective badges. A merit badge counselor—once he or she is satisfied a Scout has met all the requirements—signs in two places: on the reverse of the Application for Merit Badge (to the left) and on the Applicant’s Record (in the middle). These two parts are returned to the Scout. The approving counselor should retain the part of the card called the Counselor’s Record for at least one year—in case questions are raised later. If the Scout did not complete all the requirements, the counselor initials those that *were* fulfilled in the spaces provided on the back of the Applicant’s Record part. This is called a “partial”. Once a registered counselor signs that all requirements have been met, the Scout should meet with his unit leader to discuss his experience. The unit leader then signs the Applicant’s Record portion and returns it to the young man, who should retain it in his personal permanent records. For very large events—such as the national Scout jamboree—the National Council may approve an alternative format and sizing for the blue card. This is done through the National Advancement Team.

All merit badge requirements must be met while a registered Boy Scout or a qualified Venturer. Accomplishments before joining, or while a Cub Scout, do not apply.

The Scout, the Blue Card, and the Unit Leader

A few merit badges have certain restrictions, but otherwise any registered Boy Scout or qualified Venturer may work on any of them at any time. Before he begins working with a merit badge counselor, however, he is to have a discussion with the Scoutmaster or his designated Assistant Scoutmaster (Tom Brown). That a discussion has been held is indicated by the Scoutmaster’s signature on the Application for Merit Badge, No. 34124, commonly called the “blue card.” Although it is the Scoutmaster’s responsibility to see that at least one merit badge counselor is identified from those approved and made available, the Scout may have one in mind with whom he would like to work. The unit leader and Scout should come to agreement as to who the counselor will be. Lacking agreement, the Scout must be allowed to work with the counselor of his choice, so long as the counselor is registered and has been approved by the council advancement committee. The Scout may also want to take advantage of opportunities at merit badge fairs or midways, or at rock-climbing gyms or whitewater rafting trips that provide merit badge instruction. This is also acceptable, but the Scout must still discuss the merit badge with the unit leader and get a signed blue card. Should a Scout want to change counselors, he should once again speak with the Scoutmaster to verify that the counselor is properly registered and approved. Whatever the source, all merit badge counselors must be registered and approved for the merit badges they counsel.

A Scoutmaster should consider making more of the process than just providing a signature. The opportunity exists to provide inspiration and direction in a young man’s life. Preliminary merit badge discussions can lead to conversations about talents and interests, goal setting, and the concept of “challenge by choice.” The benefits can be much like those of a well-done Scoutmaster conference. The discussion a Scout is to have with the Scoutmaster is meant to be a growth-oriented and positive conversation. The Scoutmaster should discuss any concerns related to working on the merit badge and provide appropriate counseling. It is then the Scout’s decision whether or not to proceed with the merit badge. The process is intended to inform the Scout about what he may encounter along the way, and perhaps to give him suggestions on how the work might be approached. It also has the purpose of keeping the unit leader up to date with what the members of the unit are doing.

The Process of Counseling

Earning merit badges should be Scout initiated, Scout researched, and Scout learned. It should be hands-on and interactive, and should not be modeled after a typical school classroom setting. Instead, it is meant to be an active program so enticing to young men that they will want to take responsibility for their own full participation.



Group Instruction

It is acceptable—and sometimes desirable—for merit badges to be taught in group settings. This often occurs at camp and merit badge midways, fairs, clinics, or similar events, and even online through webinars. These can be efficient methods, and interactive group discussions can support learning. Group instruction can also be attractive to “guest experts” assisting registered and approved counselors. Slide shows, skits, demonstrations, panels, and various other techniques can also be employed, but as any teacher can attest, not everyone will learn all the material. Because of the importance of individual attention and personal learning in the merit badge program, group instruction should be focused on those scenarios where the benefits are compelling.

There must be attention to each individual's projects and his fulfillment of *all* requirements. We must know that every Scout—actually and *personally*—completed them. If, for example, a requirement uses words like “show,” “demonstrate,” or “discuss,” then every Scout must do that. It is unacceptable to award badges on the basis of sitting in classrooms *watching* demonstrations, or remaining silent during discussions. It is sometimes reported that Scouts who have received merit badges through group instructional settings have not fulfilled all the requirements. To offer a quality merit badge program, the counselor should ensure the following are in place for all group instructional events.

- A culture is established for merit badge group instructional events that partial completions are acceptable expected results.
- A guide or information sheet is distributed in advance of events that promotes the acceptability of partials, explains how merit badges can be finished after events, and lists merit badge prerequisites.
- Any guest experts or guest speakers, or others assisting who are not registered and approved as merit badge counselors, do not accept the responsibilities of, or behave as, merit badge counselors, either at a group instructional event or at any other time. Their service is temporary, not ongoing.
- Counselors agree to sign off only requirements that Scouts have actually and personally completed.
- Counselors agree not to assume that stated prerequisites for an event have been completed without some level of evidence that the work has been done. Pictures and letters from other merit badge counselors or Scoutmasters are the best form of prerequisite documentation when the actual work done cannot be brought to the camp or site of the merit badge event.

Partial Completions

A Scout need not pass all the requirements of one merit badge with the same counselor. It may be that due to timing or location issues, etc., he must meet with a different counselor to finish a badge. The Application for Merit Badge has a place to record what has been finished—a “partial.” In the center section on the reverse of the blue card, the counselor initials for each requirement passed. In the case of a partial completion, the counselor does not retain his or her portion of the card. A subsequent counselor may choose not to accept partial work, but this should be rare. A Scout, if he believes he is being treated unfairly, may work with the Scoutmaster to find another counselor. An example for the use of a signed partial would be to take it to camp as proof that the camp's prerequisites have been met. Partial completions have no expiration except the Scout's 18th birthday.

Limited Recourse for Unearned Merit Badges

From time to time, it may be discovered that merit badges could not actually have been *earned*. For example, a Scout who returns from summer camp or a merit badge fair with signed blue cards for an extraordinary number of badges could raise concerns. If, after consulting with those involved in the merit badge program—such as an event coordinator, the camp director, or a merit badge counselor—it becomes plainly evident that a youth could not have actually and personally fulfilled requirements as written, then the *limited* recourse outlined below is available. It may result in a decision that some or all of the requirements for a badge could not have been fulfilled, and thus, that the badge was not actually earned.



After such a consultation, the Scoutmaster, in a positive environment similar to that of a Scoutmaster conference, discusses with the Scout the circumstances under which a merit badge in question was approved. A parent or an Assistant Scoutmaster should attend as an observer. The young man *shall not be retested* on the requirements, but a conversation with him can reveal if he was present at the class and actually and personally fulfilled all the requirements. Such a discussion could cover who taught a class, what sort of activities took place, where and when they occurred, how testing was done, what the Scout might have brought home from the class, and other similar process-oriented details. In most cases, with a fair and friendly approach, a young man who did not complete the requirements will admit it. Short of this, however, if it remains clear under the circumstances that some or all of the requirements *could not* have been met, then the merit badge is not reported or awarded, and does not count toward advancement. The unit leader then offers the name of at least one other merit badge counselor through whom any incomplete requirements may be finished. Note that in this case a merit badge is not “taken away” because, although signed off, it was never actually earned. Just as we avoid penalizing Scouts for the mistakes of adults, it should be a rare occurrence that a Scoutmaster finds the need to question whether merit badges have been earned. This procedure for recourse is limited and reserved only for clear and evident cases of noncompletion or nonparticipation. For example, the recourse could be allowed when it would *not have been possible* to complete a specific requirement at the location of the class, event, or camp; if time available was not sufficient—perhaps due to class size or other factors—for the counselor to observe that each Scout personally and actually completed all the requirements; if time available was insufficient for a “calendar” requirement such as for Personal Fitness or Personal Management; or if multiple merit badges in question were scheduled at the same time. This procedure is not to be viewed as an opportunity for retesting on requirements, for interjecting another set of standards over those of a merit badge counselor, or for debating issues such as whether a Scout was strong enough, mature enough, or old enough to have completed requirements.

If the Scoutmaster finds it necessary to make use of this recourse must act quickly—if possible, within 30 days of discovery. It is inappropriate to delay a Scout’s advancement with anything less than a prompt decision. If a Scout or his parent or guardian believes a Scoutmaster has incorrectly determined a Scout has not earned a merit badge, or more than 30 days have passed without a reasonable explanation for the lack of a decision, they should address their concerns with the unit committee. They should first, however, develop a thorough understanding of the merit badge requirements and that each one must be passed exactly as it is set forth.

Unofficial Worksheets and Learning Aids

Worksheets and other materials that may be of assistance in earning merit badges are available from a variety of places including unofficial sources on the Internet and even troop libraries. 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 shall not be required to use these learning aids in order to complete a merit badge.