

**Be a Merit Badge Counselor**

Merit badge counselors are the key to success in the merit badge program. 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.

Patriot’s Path Council lists merit badge counselors by district so that Scouts may call for appointments. This list is in the hands of the Scoutmaster. The number of Scouts requesting help is usually no burden to the counselor, since the number of counselors is normally determined by the popularity of the badge. Counselors schedule appointments at their convenience.

**Merit Badge Program**

A part of the advancement program of the Boy Scouts of America, the merit badge program is one of the most unique educational tools ever devised.

*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 (see the merit badge link under the *Trail to Eagle* tab at the Troop’s website), 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.

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 and at least 18-years old. A counselor must have approval from our Patriot’s Path Council via an application process. All volunteers are expected to complete BSA Youth Protection training, available online. See the *BSA Leader Training* doc posted on the Troop website under the *Scouters/Parents* tab.

Merit badge counselors must be proficient in the merit badge subject by vocation, avocation, or special training.

* + Vocation: Is this subject in line with your job, business, or profession?
  + Avocation: Do you follow this subject as a hobby, having more than a casual working knowledge of the requirements?
  + Special Training: If not, do you have any special training or other qualifications for this subject?

**What Do I Agree to Do?**

As a merit badge counselor, you 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 or parent 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. Alternatively, a parent can accompany the Scout to merit badge meetings if no buddy is available.

The requirements for each merit badge appear in the current BSA merit badge bookfor that award and in the book *Boy Scout Requirements*. 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 or *blue card*. See the *Merit Badge Blue Cards* document posted on the Troop website under the *Trail to Eagle* tab.
* 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.

**How the Process Works**

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. On his first visit, the Scout should bring a merit badge blue card signed by his Scoutmaster. He must always be accompanied by a buddy or parent.
3. 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.
4. The Scout should make another appointment with you when he thinks he is prepared to prove his ability. You set the date, time, and place.
5. 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 certification. His Scoutmaster 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 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.
6. When you are satisfied that the Scout has met the requirements, you sign his merit badge blue card.

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.

**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’s there for you 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 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. That's the key. The Scout does not have to show his knowledge of those things beyond the requirements.

**Where Do You Meet?**

You can meet anyplace you see fit. The library, for example is a good meeting place. 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 are usually 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.

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 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.

**Do You Need a Merit Badge book?**

The information in the official merit badge book is probably familiar to you, but it will help you to know what the Scout has read. The books are written for Scout-age boys. They also contain suggestions for projects.

It's a good idea to obtain the latest printing of the book on your subject. It will contain the latest requirements and information. The printing date can be found on page 2 of each book. A complete list of merit badge books is printed on the inside back cover of all books with the latest revision date of each. By checking this list in any current year's book, you can find out whether your book has been updated. Most books are reprinted each year, and the contents are updated periodically.

**I Want to Get Authorized as a Counselor**

First step is to get registered as an Adult Leader if you’re not already. See the Troop Committee Chairman for a registration form. Even if you are already registered, you’ll need to fill out another Adult Leader registration form and submit it along with your Youth Protection Training certificate and the merit badge counselor application found here: [advancement.ppbsa.org/pdf/meritbadgecounselor.pdf](http://advancement.ppbsa.org/pdf/meritbadgecounselor.pdf).