



# Merit Badge Counselor Orientation

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Hightower Trail District, Atlanta Area Council, Boy Scouts of America  
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# Training Objectives

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- ✓ Understand the purpose of the merit badge program.
- ✓ Explain the use and understand the importance of the buddy system for merit badge counseling.
- ✓ Understand the merit badge process, including BSA policies and procedures.
- ✓ Understand the role of the merit badge counselor.
- ✓ Understand effective methods of counseling and coaching.
- ✓ Understand the proper method of registration for merit badge counselors.

# References

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- ✓ *Boy Scout Requirements*
- ✓ *Advancement Committee Guide: Policies and Procedures (2004 Printing)*
- ✓ *A Guide to Merit Badge Counseling*
- ✓ *Application for Merit Badge*
- ✓ *Individual Merit Badge Pamphlets*
- ✓ *Boy Scout Handbook*
- ✓ *The Scoutmaster Handbook*

# Agenda

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- ✓ What Are Merit Badges?
- ✓ Purpose of the Merit Badge Program
- ✓ Buddy System
- ✓ Merit Badge Process
- ✓ Role of the Counselor
- ✓ Counseling Techniques
- ✓ Registering as a Merit Badge Counselor
- ✓ Questions and Answers

A large, faint, light blue watermark of a merit badge emblem is centered in the background. The emblem features a triangular top section with a smaller triangle inside, a central rectangular section with vertical lines, and a bottom section with a curved, ribbon-like shape.

# **What Are Merit Badges?**

# Merit Badges Are Courses of Instruction for a Particular Subject

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- ✓ Over 100 merit badges are offered, ranging from American Business to Woodwork.
- ✓ Each merit badge has specific, detailed requirements for completion.
- ✓ Scouts must earn a specified number of merit badges to earn the ranks of Star, Life, and Eagle (and Eagle Palms).
- ✓ 21 merit badges are required for the rank of Eagle Scout, 12 of which are specifically mandated:
  1. First Aid
  2. Citizenship in the Community
  3. Citizenship in the Nation
  4. Citizenship in the World
  5. Communications
  6. Personal Fitness
  7. Emergency Preparedness OR Lifesaving
  8. Environmental Science
  9. Personal Management
  10. Swimming OR Hiking OR Cycling
  11. Camping
  12. Family Life

# What Do They Look Like? How Do I Tell Them Apart?

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“Eagle-required”  
merit badges have a  
silver border



**Citizenship  
in the Nation**

**First Aid**

**Personal  
Management**

“Electives” have a  
green border



**Dog Care**

**Orienteering**

**Wilderness  
Survival**

A large, faint watermark of a merit badge emblem is centered in the background. The emblem features a five-pointed star at the top, a central shield with a vertical line, and a curved banner at the bottom.

# **Purpose of the Merit Badge Program**

# Necessary for Advancement within the Scouting Program

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- ✓ As one of the eight methods of Scouting, advancement includes both merit badges and rank advancement.
- ✓ *Rank advancement* provides breadth of knowledge in many areas, including:
  - Learning Scout skills
  - *Earning merit badges*
  - Demonstrating leadership
  - Providing service
  - Living by the Scout Oath and Law
  - Participating in a Scoutmaster conference
  - Participating in a board of review
- ✓ *Merit badges* provide depth of knowledge in a particular subject area.

**But also . . .**

# Provides Other Important Benefits to the Scout

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- ✓ Furthers his knowledge base outside of school.
- ✓ Allows him to learn about subjects he might not otherwise be exposed to.
- ✓ Introduces him to potential career skills.
- ✓ Provides opportunities for:
  - Character-building (e.g., citizenship, service).
  - Physical fitness and hobbies that will give a lifetime of pleasure.
  - Becoming a more well-rounded person.
  - Interacting with knowledgeable adults they might not know.
- ✓ Builds self-confidence.



# Buddy System

# Designed to Protect Both the Scout and the Adult

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- ✓ A Scout **MUST** have a buddy with him at **EACH** meeting with a merit badge counselor.
- ✓ Buddies may be:
  - Another Scout
  - Parent or guardian
  - Brother or sister
  - Relative
  - Friend
- ✓ A Scout can **NEVER** meet with a merit badge counselor **ALONE**.

# Further Safeguards Have Been Established

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- ✓ Merit badge counselors MUST:
  - Register with the Atlanta Area Council as a Merit Badge Counselor.
  - Agree to submit to a background check.
  - Complete BSA Youth Protection Training.
  
- ✓ Details on how to register are provided later in this presentation.



# **Merit Badge Process**

**When a Scout has decided he wants to work on a merit badge, he must follow these 4 steps:**

# STEP 1:

## Meet with the Scoutmaster

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- ✓ The Scout tells his Scoutmaster (or his designee, for example, the troop advancement committee) that he's interested in working on a merit badge.
  
- ✓ The Scoutmaster gives the Scout:
  - An interview to determine his interest, enthusiasm, and preparedness.
  - A signed *Application for Merit Badge* (aka "Blue Card").
  - The name and phone number of a council and district approved merit badge counselor.

# STEP 2:

## Contact the Counselor

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- ✓ The Scout and counselor get the *current* merit badge pamphlet from the troop library or buy one at the Scout Shop.
- ✓ The Scout calls the counselor and makes an appointment.
- ✓ The counselor suggests that the Scout bring the following items:
  - Current merit badge pamphlet
  - Scoutmaster signed Blue Card (and proof of any partial work already recorded for this merit badge)
  - Any projects he may have started
  - Any other indication of preparedness
- ✓ At the first interview, the counselor and Scout discuss:
  - All requirements that need to be completed, ensuring the Scout knows exactly what is expected
  - Short-term and long-term goals with dates of completion
  - Dates, times, and places for further meetings
- ✓ The counselor completes applicable sections of the Blue Card.
- ✓ The buddy system **MUST** be followed to ensure youth protection.

# STEP 3:

## Complete the Requirements

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- ✓ The Scout completes the requirements exactly as stated – no more and no less.
  - “If it says ‘show or demonstrate,’ that is what you 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.’”
- ✓ If the Scout has proper documentation that he previously completed some of the requirements with another counselor, it is not necessary to repeat these requirements.
- ✓ The number of sessions between the Scout and the counselor during this period depends on the difficulty of the subject and the preparation and ability of the Scout.
- ✓ The Scout and counselor agree when the Scout will be examined (either some requirements periodically or all requirements at the same time).
- ✓ The buddy system **MUST** be followed in all follow-up meetings to ensure youth protection.

# STEP 4:

## Get Proper Documentation

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- ✓ On the back panel of the Blue Card, the counselor initials and dates requirements as they are completed.
- ✓ Once the merit badge is completed, the counselor signs and dates the "Applicant's Record" and "Counselor's Record" sections of the Blue Card.
- ✓ The counselor keeps Counselor's Record.
- ✓ The Scout keeps the Applicant's Record.
- ✓ The Scout takes the front panel ("Application for Merit Badge") and gives it to the appropriate troop leader for posting to his records.

# Why the Blue Card Is Important

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- ✓ It is the official completion record recognized by BSA prior to recording and presentation of the merit badge card by the troop.
- ✓ It is the FINAL arbiter of disputes if all other records are missing, including loss of the merit badge card that is presented with the badge.
- ✓ Scouts should keep Blue Cards and the presented merit badge cards for reference.
- ✓ Counselors should keep their copy of the Blue Card in the event a Scout should lose his copy or his merit badge card and need proof of completion.

# Group Instruction Policy

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*"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 this 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 [emphasis added]. In harmony with this policy, a troop or team may use merit badge counselors in unit meetings ..."*



# **Role of the Counselor**

# Who Can Be a Merit Badge Counselor?

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- ✓ Men or women of good character.
- ✓ Age 18 or older.
- ✓ Have the skills and education in the subjects they wish to teach, wither by vocation (job) or avocation (hobby).
- ✓ Able to work with Scout-age boys.
- ✓ Must register with the Boy Scouts of America as a merit badge counselor AND have submitted the BSA Merit Badge Counselor Information form, indicating which merit badges he/she wishes to counsel.
- ✓ Does NOT have to be a registered BSA leader (as with a troop or crew).

# The Counselor's Overall Role

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- ✓ Provide the benefit of his or her knowledge.
- ✓ Help the Scout learn.
- ✓ Make the experience enjoyable.

# The Counselor's Specific Roles

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- ✓ **Counselor**
  - Meets with the Scout and his buddy.
  - Helps the Scout set short- and long-term goals.
  - Follows-up with the Scout on his progress.
  - Helps the Scout evaluate his work.
  - Encourages the Scout to ask for help.
  
- ✓ **Coach**
  - Teaches the Scout the skills required.
  - Gives the Scout an opportunity to practice the skills.
  - Takes a genuine interest in the projects and encourages completion.

# The Counselor's Specific Roles

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## ✓ Examiner

- Ensures he/she has the most current requirements for the merit badge – and follows these requirements fairly and uniformly.
- The current *Boy Scout Requirements* book is the source for the most up-to-date merit badge requirements.
- Insists that the Scout does exactly what the requirements call for – no more and no less.

## ✓ Representative of the District and Council

- Notifies the district advancement chairman if he/she no longer wants to be a merit badge counselor. Otherwise, there is no annual re-submission of paperwork after the initial application has been approved.
- Get Youth Protection Training. Follow youth protection guidelines.
- Follow BSA policies.



# **Counseling Techniques**

# Set a Relaxing and Inviting Atmosphere

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- ✓ This is very important!
- ✓ Ask some easy, general questions to put the Scout at ease:
  - "Where do you go to school?"
  - "What do you like to do?"
  - "How long have you been in Scouting?"
  - "How did you get interested in this merit badge?"
- ✓ Younger Scouts (especially) may feel intimidated, especially if the counselor is a stranger to them.

# Set Expectations. Provide the Benefit of Your Knowledge.

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- ✓ At the first meeting:
  - Review each requirement to ensure that there is no confusion as to what the Scout must do. This will avoid later misunderstandings and frustration on both sides.
  - Make sure to ask the Scout if he has any questions and encourage him to contact you if he has future questions.
  
- ✓ When reviewing completed requirements:
  - You may find that the Scout needs help. You may help him as much as possible – provided he himself ultimately does the work.
  - While you may **test** for neither more or less than the requirements state, you should feel free to **teach** more than is required to provide a richer teaching experience and to encourage a Scout's further interest in the subject.
  
- ✓ Be available when the Scout needs you.

# **Registering as a Merit Badge Counselor**

# Step 1

## Complete a BSA Adult Application.

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- ✓ Include BOTH the unit number AND council and district name at the top.
- ✓ For "position code," write "42."
- ✓ For "position (description)," write "merit badge counselor."
- ✓ Complete the entire the form.
- ✓ Sign and date at the bottom.
- ✓ Include at least one unit signature (committee chair and/or chartered organization representative) on the right side of the form.
- ✓ Provide your Social Security Number. This is mandatory. The application will not be processed without it.

# Step 2

## Complete a BSA Merit Badge Counselor Information Form.

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- ✓ Include all personal information requested.
- ✓ List the merit badge(s) you want to teach.
  - IMPORTANT: Provide a brief summary of your qualifications in the box provided for Vocation, Avocation, or Special Training. Use the back of the form or an attachment if necessary.
  - This is how the district and council will determine your proficiency to teach a badge.
- ✓ Indicate whether you want to work only with a specific unit or all units in the district.
- ✓ Sign and date at the bottom.

# Step 3

## Submit to the District Advancement Chairman.

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- ✓ Mail BOTH the Adult Application AND Merit Badge Counselor Information forms to the District Advancement Chairman:

Paul Porwoll  
1583 Withmere Way  
Dunwoody, GA 30338

- ✓ There is no fee to register as a merit badge counselor.
- ✓ Paul will review and sign the forms and submit to the council for processing. He will contact you if he has any questions before sending the forms on.
- ✓ Do NOT send only one form. Your submission cannot be processed.
- ✓ Do NOT mail or take your forms directly to the council. The council will just have to mail them to Paul for his review and approval.

## **Important:**

**A separate BSA Adult Application  
(along with the Merit Badge  
Counselor Information form)  
must be submitted by**

***anyone***

**who wants to become a  
registered merit badge counselor,**

## However:

**Registered merit badge counselors who want to add another badge they wish to teach need only submit a new Merit Badge Counselor Information form (not another BSA Adult Application).**



# Questions and Answers

# Why does it matter that merit badge counselors be registered separately?

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1. Because it's BSA policy.
2. Because merit badge counselor is a completely separate position from a unit or district position you might already hold.
3. Because official merit badge counselor records are maintained by the district and council not the unit.
4. Because the district and council must approve merit badge counselors.
5. Because BSA requires a background check of all adults who participate in Scouting.
6. Because a Scout is Trustworthy. Someone from your unit attests to the following statement on the Advancement Report every time advancement badges are bought at the Scout Shop:

"To: Council Advancement Committee

"I certify that the following record of advancement is correct and that it meets the standards requirements of the Boy  
*merit badge*

and  
Scouts of America, and that  
*counselors are registered adult members*

**Even if I only want to work with Scouts in my troop, do I still have to register as a merit badge counselor?**

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✓ Yes.



# Is there a limit to the number of merit badges a person can register to counsel?

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- ✓ No. The only limit is by qualification – counselors must be qualified by vocation (job) or avocation (hobby).
- ✓ It is important that applicants provide a short summary of why they believe they are qualified, so that the council advancement committee (which reviews and approves merit badge counselors) has enough information on which to judge an applicant's merits.

# Does a Scout need to be a certain rank before he can begin working on merit badges?

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- ✓ No. For most merit badges, a Scout can work on any one at any time, subject to approval by his Scoutmaster.
- ✓ Note that there are some exceptions.
- ✓ For example, earning the First Aid merit badge is requirement #1 for the Emergency Preparedness merit badge.

# Is there a time limit, from start to finish, for completing a merit badge?

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- ✓ The only time limit is the Scout's 18th birthday.\*
- ✓ There is no BSA policy that stipulates that a Scout must earn all requirements for a merit badge within a stipulated time period (e.g., within 6 months) or he must start over again.

\* The only exception relates to disabled Scouts with prior approval, via the procedures outlined in BSA's *Advancement Policies and Procedures Guide*.

# Can Scouts work on more than one merit badge at a time?

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- ✓ Yes. There is no limitation on how many merit badges a Scout can work on at any given time, subject to following the proper process.

# Can Scouts work with me as their counselor for a lot of their merit badges?

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

# Can a knowledgeable Scout be a merit badge counselor?

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- ✓ No. The minimum age for a merit badge counselor is 18.
- ✓ A Scout may assist in merit badge sessions, but a registered adult counselor must supervise these sessions.

# Can a person be a merit badge counselor for his/her son?

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- ✓ Yes. "An approved merit badge counselor may counsel any youth member, including his or her own son, ward, or relative."
- ✓ Since one of the benefits of the merit badge program is association with adults with whom the Scout might not be acquainted, many troops routinely assign a merit badge counselor other than a parent.
- ✓ However, an excellent way to involve parents (as merit badge counselors) and their sons is for the parent to teach a group session where his or her son is involved with other Scouts.

# How do I handle partials that were completed with another counselor?

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- ✓ If the previous counselor signed off the Scout, this indicates that the requirement was done to his/ her satisfaction.
- ✓ Therefore, the Scout should not have to re-do the requirement.

**Thanks for  
Making a  
Difference in the  
Life of a Boy!**