

## MERIT BADGES – AN OVERVIEW

The “second part” of advancement – other than the ranks of Tenderfoot, Second Class, etc...are Merit Badges. You can learn about sports, crafts, science, trades, business, and future careers as you earn merit badges. There are more than 100 merit badges.

**Starting points:** You don't need to have had any rank advancement to be eligible. A registered Boy Scout may request to start any merit badge at any rank, although some are *recommended* only for older scouts, or for scouts who have completed other merit badges first. Some specific merit badges are required for the Star, Life and Eagle ranks.

**Pick a Subject.** Look over the list of merit badges offered. Talk to your Scoutmaster about your interests. Read the requirements of the merit badges you think might interest you – you can find these at the sources below. Pick one to earn. Your Scoutmaster will discuss the requirements with you and give you the name of a person from a list of Westchester-Putnam Council-approved counselors. These counselors have special knowledge in their merit badge subjects and are interested in helping you. Once a counselor is assigned, you will be given a “blue card” as a tool to track who is approved to start a merit badge, and for the counselor to record the progress/completion on each badge.

**Scout Buddy System.** A meeting with a Merit Badge Counselor must follow the scout “Buddy System”. You, the scout, must have at least one other person with you at each meeting with the merit badge counselor. This person can be another Scout, your parents or guardian, a brother or sister or other relative, or a friend. Arranging this additional person is your responsibility, not the counselors.

**Call the Counselor.** Get a signed merit badge application (known as a “blue card”) from your Scoutmaster. Get in touch with the merit badge counselor and tell him or her that you want to earn the merit badge. The counselor may ask to meet you to explain what is expected of you and to start helping you meet the requirements. *Remember: You are not authorized to start a merit badge without a blue card signed by the Scoutmaster.*

Note: Many merit badges have certain requirements that can only be done “with the approval of the counselor”. Therefore, you should not assume that any work done before the first merit badge meeting can be counted toward the merit badge. It is best to ask your counselor to review the things you need to know or do before you set out to do them.

IF the counselor says it is OK to communicate by email, protocol (and a good idea) from the BSA is to always “cc” a copy to your parents and have the counselor do the same. I would also suggest not relying solely on email – a phone call is a good way to make sure you both understand each other.

**You should read the latest merit badge pamphlet on the subject.** Our troop has a few, although note some are outdated. These cost \$ 4.99 each at the Scout shop, or online ([www.scoutstuff.org](http://www.scoutstuff.org)) and in my opinion are well worth it.

**Show Your Stuff:** When you are ready, call the counselor again to make an appointment to meet the requirements. When you go take along the things you have made to meet the requirements. If it is OK with the counselor, take pictures or have an adult describe *in writing* what you have done. The counselor will ask you to do each requirement to make sure that you know your stuff and have done or can do the things required.

**Get the Badge:** When the counselor is satisfied that you have met each requirement, he or she will sign your application. Give the signed application to your Scoutmaster so that your merit badge emblem can be secured for you, and your badge recorded at Council.

**Note on the Requirements:** You are expected to meet the requirements as they are stated—no more and no less. *No one can add to or subtract from the list.* You are expected to do *exactly* what is stated in the requirements. If it says "show or demonstrate," that is what you must do. Just telling about it isn't enough. *Just sitting in the same room with other scouts who are doing the requirements is not enough.* The same thing holds true for such words as "make," "list," "in the field," and "collect," "identify," and "label."

**Other information:**

Generally, if a Scout has already started working on a merit badge when a new edition of the pamphlet is introduced, he should continue to use the same merit badge pamphlet and fulfill the requirements therein to earn the badge. He need not start all over again with the new pamphlet and possibly revised requirements.

If conflicts or differences between documentation, the precedence of documentation is:

1. BSA Bylaws (and Rules)
2. Advancement Committee Policies and Procedures Pamphlet #33088 (including key Bylaws)
3. Policy support documents such as the:  
Boy Scout Requirements #33215  
Eagle Scout Application #58-728  
Eagle Scout Leadership Service Project Workbook #18-927  
Guide for Merit Badge Counselors, etc.
4. Handbooks, etc.: Boy Scout Handbook, Scoutmaster Handbook, Merit Badge booklets (pamphlets)

Overview with links to each merit badge (not an official BSA list, but good)  
[http://meritbadge.org/wiki/index.php/Merit\\_Badges](http://meritbadge.org/wiki/index.php/Merit_Badges)

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