



## Advancement Overview

This document is meant to provide Scouts and parents with an overview of Scouting Advancement.

### **New in September 2017: What requires approval in advance**

BSA best practices for Merit Badges:

- Before starting on a merit badge, reach out to the Merit Badge Lead (“MBL”). We want to connect Scouts with a merit badge counselor (MBC) to guide them on the merit badge and potentially save re-work.
- If you return from camp with a partially completed merit badge, connect with the MBL to be put in touch with a local MBC.
- Before doing any service hours, you must get pre-approved from the Service Program Lead. Service hours need to be done through a third-party organization that will sign off on your hours.

### Contents

Overview..... 2

Timeline and Due Dates..... 2

Charting a Scout’s Advancement Progress ..... 3

Rank Advancement..... 3

    Overview ..... 3

    Rank Advancement – Process ..... 4

    Rank Advancement – Guidelines and Advice ..... 4

    Rank Advancement – Troop Guides..... 4

    Rank Advancement – Board of Review ..... 4

Merit Badges..... 5

    Overview ..... 5

    Merit Badge – Process ..... 6

    Merit Badge Counselors (Adults) ..... 7

Recognizing Rank Advancement, Merit Badges, Awards – Court of Honor..... 8

## Overview

Boy Scouts provides a progressive series of fun, educational and challenging tasks for boys to overcome through the “advancement method.” The Boy Scout is rewarded for each achievement (rank, merit badge or award such as the 50-Miler Award). The steps in the advancement system help a Boy Scout grow in confidence, self-reliance and in his ability to help others. (<http://www.scouting.org/scoutsourc/BoyScouts/AdvancementandAwards.aspx>)

Advancement is comprised of a) **rank** advancement, and b) **merit badges**.

- **Rank advancement should be the priority early in the Scout’s progression** yet they will also earn merit badges, especially if they go to summer camp.
- The **rank advancement** program is symbolized by earning seven ranks. The ranks are Scout, Tenderfoot, Second Class, First Class, Star, Life, and Eagle.
- The **merit badge** program is the second main area of advancement. Unlike ranks, there is a degree of choice in the merit badge program. Earning merit badges allows Scouts to explore many fields, helps them round out their skills, and introduces them to subjects that might become lifelong interests or rewarding careers. Once boys advance beyond the First Class rank, they must earn a certain number of merit badges to proceed through the remaining ranks. **To become Eagle, a Boy Scout must earn 21 merit badges**, which includes a subset of merit badges that are “Eagle-required.” After becoming an Eagle Scout, additional badges earned beyond 21 help active Scouts receive Eagle Palms.

### Boy-Led

Importantly, Scouting is meant to be “boy-led.” From an advancement standpoint, this means that **the Scout sets his pace and needs to manage his own advancement**. While we all know that a nudge is needed now and then, Scouts will learn more responsibility and how to “be prepared” if they take charge themselves. The older the Scout, the more initiative we expect them to take. **Parents: as painful as it can be, let your sons chart their own path.** Please have your Scouts reach out to the Advancement Chair if they have any questions.

**Summer camp** is an important way for Scouts to complete rank requirements and merit badges in addition to regular meetings and campouts. Advancement is a troop priority, yet it is not a requirement. It is important that Scouts have fun and enjoy the friendships, community service and activities associated with being part of our troop.

## Timeline and Due Dates

Advancement deadlines.

**Three weeks** before the Court of Honor:

- ALL rank requirements to advance rank must be completed and **signed off** by the Advancement Chair, and Scoutmaster Conferences **completed**.
- All merit badge blue cards must be **received** by the Advancement Chair

**One to two week** before the Court of Honor:

- Board of Review; only Scouts who completed their Scoutmaster Conferences by the deadline and are advancing in rank participate.

## Charting a Scout's Advancement Progress

Each troop uses advancement software to track Scout advancement and merit badges (such as TroopWebHost, Troopmaster, or Scoutbook)

- If Scouts completed rank advancements or merit badges at summer camp (and the camp provided us with blue cards and rank advancement completion sheets), it is entered in the database by the troop advancement chair.
- Many Scouts have Trail to First Class requirements signed off in their books. If they want to reflect this work in the troops database, they need to show their book to the Advancement Chair.

## Rank Advancement

### Overview

- **Rank advancement** refers to Scouts progressing through seven ranks in which they build skills—starting with Scout:



- Scout is the first rank, which we like boys to achieve by their first or second Court of Honor. Ideally, they will achieve Scout rank with their peers if they join as a group.
- During the year, we will have younger Scouts focus on “**Trail to First Class**” (TTFC) requirements. These ranks are Scout, Tenderfoot, Second Class and First Class. Note that there are no merit badge requirements for these first four ranks, so we encourage Scouts to prioritize rank requirements until they get to First Class.
- The Star and Life ranks are more about leadership, involvement in the troop, completion of Eagle-required merit badges and service projects **(service hours require approval in advance from the Service Program Lead)**
- To achieve the rank of Eagle, Scouts need to complete a minimum of 21 merit badges including 13 that are Eagle-required. They also must complete an extensive service project that the Scout plans, organizes, leads, and manages. For more on requirements for the rank of Eagle:  
<https://www.scouting.org/Home/BoyScouts/AdvancementandAwards/eagle.aspx>
- Rank requirements are listed in the back of the Scout book. Please encourage new Scouts to spend 20 minutes/week on advancement to keep moving forward.
- **You will not help your son by managing the process or doing their work for them.** Let them learn by making mistakes. It will benefit them in the long run. The steps in the advancement system help a Boy Scout **develop character, grow in self-reliance and in their ability to help others.**

**About 80% of boys who make it to First Class within 2 years of joining stick with Scouts. Many go on to Eagle. So, we really encourage our Scouts to achieve First Class within the first 2 years.**

## Rank Advancement – Process

- Review rank requirements in the back of the Scout Handbook.
- Work on requirements (focus most on the next rank you need to achieve). Ask your Troop Guide, Patrol Leader or one of the Scoutmasters to help you with your requirements.
- Obtain sign-off of requirements by Scoutmasters or Troop Guides.
- Once you confirm with the Advancement Chair that you have completed the requirements for a given rank, ask the Scoutmaster for a Scoutmaster conference (an individual meeting to discuss the rank requirements and get tested on the requirements). These must be finished three weeks prior to the Court of Honor.
- Appear before the Board of Review (except for the Scout rank) which is usually held one to two weeks before the Court of Honor.
- Receive recognition at the Court of Honor.

## Rank Advancement – Guidelines and Advice

- Boys have to achieve the **Scout** rank to officially become a Boy Scout. Upon joining the troop, boys should focus on completing the Scout rank so that they can be recognized at the next Court of Honor, or the following Court of Honor.
- If they join with a group of boys (for example, after the Open House in the spring), it is ideal if they advance to Scout together.
- We would like for Scouts to make it their goal to achieve **First Class** within two years of becoming Boy Scouts.
- We would like to see Scouts make good progress on the **Star** rank in their third year of Scouting.
- It will take a few years to achieve the ranks of **Star and Life** as they require the completion of Eagle-required merit badges, assuming leadership roles within the troop, and having strong participation in the troop.
- We strongly encourage boys to try to get their **Eagle-required merit badges** done by the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade so that they can work on their Eagle project in 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Most boys work on their **Eagle project** in their junior and senior years. This is not ideal given how taxing the junior year is scholastically. Boys must complete their Eagle Board of Review before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- Most boys achieve **Eagle** in their senior year (the US average is 17) yet they can achieve it earlier if they are ready. The Eagle Board of Review is rigorous. Boys can wait to do this until they feel that they have the maturity to handle it, but must be completed their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

## Rank Advancement – Troop Guides

Troop Guides (more senior Scouts) mentor and help Scouts achieve the First Class rank. They attend Patrol Leader Council (PLC) meetings and set a good example for other Scouts. In addition to the Scoutmaster and Assistant Scoutmasters, Troop Guides are authorized to test and sign off Scouts on rank requirements, except for their siblings.

## Rank Advancement – Board of Review

- The Board of Review (BOR) is like a job interview for rank advancement. BORs are required for ranks starting with Tenderfoot (Scout rank only requires a Scoutmaster conference).
- After a Scout receives sign-off on his requirements for a rank from the Advancement Chair and completes his Scoutmaster conference, he appears before a BOR comprised

of 3-5 parents from the troop. Its purpose is to determine the quality of his experience, decide whether he has fulfilled the requirements for the rank, and get the Scout's input regarding how things are going with the troop. It is not to *test* the Scout on requirements (the Scoutmaster will do that selectively in the Scoutmaster conference). Rather, it is to judge if he is ready to advance. The Board also encourages him to continue the quest for the next rank.

- BORs get progressively more difficult and philosophical to get Scouts ready for the Eagle BOR, which is a lengthy and challenging process in front of a panel of Scout leaders and administrators from the Piedmont Council who are not known to the Scout.
- We will recruit parents for the BOR and encourage all parents to participate as it is a nice way to get to know the Scouts and to hear about their experiences. Prior to the BOR, we will send out information about how to conduct one, and appropriate questions parents can ask for each rank.
- We will not hold a regular meeting the night of a BOR. Only Scouts who are participating in the BOR will attend.
- **The Class A uniform is mandatory for a BOR.** Please be sure that your Scout is dressed appropriately. This includes the Boy Scout shirt, sash, kerchief, kerchief clasp, and either BSA shorts with knee socks or pants . Athletic shorts are not OK. Flip flops are not OK. **If your Scout is not dressed appropriately, he will not be able to participate in the BOR.**

## Merit Badges

### Overview

- There are 138 Boy Scout merit badges. Scouts can learn about sports, crafts, science, trades, business, and future careers as they earn merit badges. The full list is here: <http://www.scouting.org/meritbadges.aspx>
- Scouts must complete a minimum of 21 merit badges to achieve Eagle, 13 of which are "Eagle-required."
- Some merit badges are straightforward (and good for younger Scouts) and some are more challenging—for example, Cooking, Hiking and Camping—and could take a few years to complete.
- Boy Scouts may work on merit badges from the time they join a Boy Scout troop until they turn 18 years old. There is no time limit for completion of merit badges other than before they turn 18.
- **It is each Scout's responsibility to manage their own merit badge process from start to end**, including following up to get the proper sign-offs and getting their blue cards to the Advancement Chair by the deadline. [Note some Merit Badge Counselors may choose to track advancement on a spreadsheet rather than using blue cards]
- **Parents are NOT permitted to sign off on requirements for their son even if they are the Merit Badge Counselor leading that merit badge.** If they are teaming with another parent, the other parent needs to determine if the Scout knows the content and can sign off. If the MBC is leading the MB alone, the MBL will meet with the Scout to review their work and understanding of the content.





## Merit Badge – Process

- If Scouts want to work on a merit badge that is *not* currently being offered, talk with the MBL. They can advise what you should do – i.e., wait for the merit badge to be offered as a Troop, or put you in touch with a Merit Badge Counselor (MBC). If there is not a MBC in our Troop, they will try to find one in the Piedmont Council. If one is not available, the MBL will talk with you about how to find one. **NOTE: Scouts are not permitted to start on a merit badge without prior approval from the MBL to ensure they are getting proper guidance from a MBC.**
- It is advised that you review the merit badge pamphlet for the Eagle-required merit badges. They are an efficient way to learn the material. They can be viewed online or purchased at the Boy Scout Store in San Leandro. *Requirements change often, so be sure to check that you are working from the most current book if you get a hand-me-down from another Scout.*



- Scouts typically find it helpful to use a worksheet to capture their progress. [http://meritbadge.org/wiki/index.php/Merit\\_Badge\\_Worksheets](http://meritbadge.org/wiki/index.php/Merit_Badge_Worksheets)



- Complete the requirements as they are stated.
  1. If it says "show or demonstrate," that is what Scouts must do. The same thing holds true for such words as "make," "list," "in the field," and "collect," "identify," and "label." Some merit badges request that work be done in order.
  2. If a requirement says, "with your counselor's approval," Scouts must get their MBC's approval before proceeding. If in doubt, ask. It may save rework and disappointment.
  3. If it is not possible for the MBC to "see" the completion of a requirement (for example, demonstrating a line rescue in the water), the Scout needs to talk with the MBC **in advance**, and then show a photo or video of the requirement being completed.
- Meet with the MBC to discuss the completed requirements and get signed off. This can happen over several meetings.

- The MBC will give the Scout a signed “blue card” when s/he believes the Scout has completed all of the requirements to their satisfaction. Or, they may sign off on requirements gradually. Blue cards are paper records of completion of a merit badge.

The image shows a form titled "APPLICATION FOR MERIT BADGE". On the left side, there are two sections of instructions: "Information for Applicant" and "Information for Counselor". The "Information for Applicant" section includes points such as "A merit badge application can be approved only by a registered merit badge counselor" and "You must have a buddy with you". The "Information for Counselor" section includes points such as "Merit badge applications must be signed in advance by the applicant's unit leader" and "The Scout must have the fully Scout Oath". To the right of these instructions is a table with columns for "Counselor Name", "Date of Signature", "Merit Badge", and "Date of Signature". Below the table is a section for the applicant's personal information, including Name, Address, City, and a checkbox for "Is a registered Scout". There is also a section for the counselor's signature and the Boy Scouts of America logo.

- It is the Scout’s responsibility to deliver the signed blue card to the Advancement Chair prior to the deadline for the next Court of Honor.

### Merit Badge Counselors (Adults)

The MBL is responsible for the merit badge curriculum and will recruit Merit Badge Counselors (MBCs). **If you are interested in becoming a MBC for a merit badge, contact the MBL. The MBL is responsible for communicating the availability of MBCs to the Troop.** MBCs are key players in the Boy Scout advancement program. MBCs offer their time, knowledge and other resources to help Scouts learn and complete requirements of a merit badge. One of the methods of Scouting is association with adults who act as mentor and guides. Besides a Scout's parents and relatives, his schoolteachers, his religious leaders, and possibly his sports coaches, most Scout-age youth do not have much contact with many other adults or professionals. MBCs provide an excellent means for a Scout to grow through his exposure to outstanding adults who serve as examples and mentors to them. It offers Scouts the opportunity to deal with business leaders, trained specialists and experienced hobbyists.

- The Advancement Team (Advancement Chair and MBL) recruits and trains MBCs to support Eagle-required merit badges—although not all at the same time. In addition to tapping into parents of our Scouts, we leverage MBCs outside of the troop.
- **MBCs need to register with the Piedmont Council (Scout office) as an adult leader, merit badge counselor for a particular merit badge, and take Youth Protection Training (YPT).**
- **Boy Scouts adheres to “two-deep leadership” meaning a MBC (or any adult) should never be alone with a Scout. A “buddy system” also works.**
- For some of the Eagle-required merit badges, MBCs will need to organize time outside of Scout meetings to work with a group of Scouts to plan and complete requirements.
- MBCs are responsible for ensuring that Scouts have met the requirements for their merit badge. MBCs will test the Scout upon completion of requirement(s) and sign off the requirement on their blue card or workbook.
- When the Scout has completed all of the requirements, the MBC will sign their blue card. **It is the Scout’s responsibility to provide the blue card to the Advancement Chair.**
- Note that MBCs will encourage Scouts to complete requirements, yet the Scout advances at their own pace.
- If you have expertise or strong interest in a particular area and are interested in being a MBC, please contact the MBL. The list of 138 Boy Scout merit badges is here: <http://www.scouting.org/meritbadges.aspx>
- For more information about being a MBC, look at the document, **“What it means to be a Merit Badge Counselor”**.

## Recognizing Rank Advancement, Merit Badges, Awards – Court of Honor

The Court of Honor (COH) is a public ceremony to formally recognize Scouts for successful achievements—rank advancement, merit badges and awards. It also provides incentive for other Scouts to advance. Parents and families are encouraged to attend the ceremony. All Scouts should attend, even if they are not advancing in rank or receiving any merit badges, to show Scout Spirit and support their troop (and peers).

- Each troop has two to three Court of Honors per year—early in the fall, to recognize achievements at summer camp; winter; and before we break for the summer. Some troops combine the fall and winter COH into one.
- Upon advancing in rank, the Scout receives a patch for his new rank and a pin that he pins on a parent who is present for the ceremony.
- Scouts who earn merit badges will receive the patch for their sash.
- There is no regular meeting the night of a COH (the COH is the meeting).
- **Class A dress is required for the COH.** Please be sure that your Scout is dressed appropriately. This includes the Boy Scout shirt, sash, kerchief, kerchief clasp, and BSA shorts with knee socks or pants. Sweats are **not** OK. Athletic shorts are **not** OK. Flip flops are **not** OK. This goes for ALL Scouts.

The **Eagle Court of Honor (COH)** is held when a Scout has achieved all of the requirements for Eagle including the completion of his Eagle project, and has passed his Eagle BOR. It is a celebration of this significant achievement. Scouts can have their own Eagle COH or one with friends with whom they have journeyed through Scouting together. Eagle COHs are held separately from other Scout meetings or COHs and organized by the family. The troop, family, friends and Council representatives are invited.