Merit Badge Counselor Instructors Guide

Training Summary
This module will guide new and potential merit badge counselors through their responsibilities in the role and will give them an understanding of the methods of counseling Scouts. It is intended as a short orientation course for new merit badge counselors before they begin working with Scouts.

Time Required
One hour

Learning Objectives
At the end of this lesson, participants will be able to

- Understand the aims of Scouting, the BSA advancement process, and the merit badge counselor's role.
- Know a merit badge counselor's duties and responsibilities to the BSA and the Scout.
- Understand and complete the requirements to be a registered merit badge counselor with the BSA.
- List some methods of counseling and coaching.
- Successfully guide a Scout through the merit badge process.

Required Materials

- **Merit Badge Program Quiz** (for each participant)
- **Merit Badge Program Quiz Answers** (for each participant)
- **Adult Application, No. 28-501**
- **BSA Merit Badge Counselor Information form, No. 34405**
- A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling, No. 34532
- Application for Merit Badge, No. 34124
- Sample merit badge pamphlets in a variety of subjects
- *Boy Scout Requirements* (current year), No. 33215

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The **Merit Badge Program Quiz** is a precourse warm-up that allows participants to discover what they do or do not already know and focuses them mentally for the course.

Trainer: *Distribute copies of the quiz to each participant and allow enough time for everyone to finish.*

The Aims of Scouting

The Scouting program is an educational program aimed at teaching youth character development, citizenship, and mental and physical fitness. These aims of Scouting are accomplished by the use of eight fundamental methods:

- ∞ The ideals of Scouting (Scout Oath, Scout Law, Scout motto, Scout slogan)
- ∞ The patrol method
- ∞ The outdoors
- ∞ Advancement
- ∞ Association with adults
- ∞ Personal growth
- ∞ Leadership development
- ∞ The uniform

What Is Advancement?

Advancement is the process by which a Scout progresses from rank to rank in the Scouting program. It is simply a means to an end and not an end in itself. Everything done to advance and earn higher ranks is designed to help the Scout have an exciting and meaningful experience.

The advancement method is designed to encourage a young man to accomplish a progressive series of fun and educational tasks. Earning merit badges allows Scouts to explore many fields, helps them round out their skills, and perhaps introduces them to subjects that will become lifelong interests and rewarding careers.

What Is a Merit Badge?

A special part of a Scout's learning adventure, merit badges are awards presented to a Scout when he completes the requirements for one of the merit badge subjects. There are more than 100 different merit badges a Scout may earn. The subject matters range from vocational and careers introduction to personal development, hobbies, sports, high adventure, citizenship, and life-skills development.

Every merit badge is designed to teach the Scout new skills while outwardly encouraging him to challenge himself and have fun in the process. Merit badges offer a range of difficulty over a breadth of subject matters, and a Scout is free to pursue any merit badge he wishes. The merit badge itself is a simple embroidered patch, but the intangible end result of earning it is that the Scout gains self-confidence from overcoming obstacles to achieve a goal.

Why Does the BSA Use Merit Badge Counselors?

One of the methods of Scouting is association with quality adults. 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. Merit badge counselors provide an excellent means for a Scout to grow through his exposure to outstanding adults who serve as examples and mentors to them. The opportunity to deal with business leaders, trained specialists, and experienced hobbyists while in the pursuit of a merit badge offers the Scout a chance for personal growth and possibly a life-altering experience.

Trainer: *Ask participants if any of them were Scouts and, if so, whether any of the merit badges they earned influenced their choice of careers.*

The BSA recognizes that the merit badge counselor is the cornerstone to the merit badge program. By offering their time, experience, and knowledge to guide Scouts in one or more merit badge subjects, counselors help shape the future of our country. By assisting as the Scout plans projects and activities necessary to meet the merit badge requirements, and by coaching the Scout through interviews and demonstrations, the quality adult contact fostered by this working relationship can only enhance the Scout's self-confidence and growth.

What Is a Merit Badge Counselor?

A merit badge counselor is both a teacher and a mentor to the Scout as he works on the merit badge. Merit badge counselors should be satisfied that each Scout under their guidance meets all the requirements set forth for the merit badge. In this sense, a merit badge counselor is an examiner. In a larger sense, the real opportunity for a counselor lies in coaching—helping Scouts over the different hurdles of the requirements and helping make them aware of the deeper aspects of the subject from their knowledge and experience.

The merit badge counselor may help a Scout by providing instruction and guidance on the subject matter. However, the counselor must not complete the Scout's work on the requirements. The counselor needs to test the Scout to ensure that he has completed all the required work but ***may not modify the merit badge requirements*** in the process. This standard ensures that the advancement requirements are fair and uniform for all Scouts.

Trainer: *Lead a brief discussion to emphasize that counselors must not add or modify the merit badge requirements.*

A merit badge counselor must always ensure that a Scout has a "buddy" present at all instruction sessions. Working on merit badges is especially enjoyable when Scouts work together, and the BSA encourages this by making the buddy system a part of the merit badge program. Together the two meet with merit badge counselors, plan projects, and keep their enthusiasm high. The Scout's buddy could be another Scout, a parent or guardian, brother or sister, relative, or friend. The Scout should bring a buddy to all his appointments with his counselor.

Merit Badge Counselor Requirements and Registration

To qualify as a merit badge counselor, a volunteer must:

- Register annually with the Boy Scouts of America.
- Be at least 18 years old.
- Be of good character.
- Be proficient in the merit badge subject by vocation, avocation, or special training.
- Be able to work with Scout-age youth.
- Be approved by the district/council advancement committee.

To register with the Boy Scouts of America, a potential merit badge counselor must complete the BSA's Adult Application form (No. 28-501Y; available in Spanish as No. 28-502S) and submit it along with the BSA Merit Badge Counselor Information form (No. 34405) to the BSA local council office. Renewal of this registration annually is necessary to continue as a merit badge counselor.

Trainer: *Show participants the forms, books, and other resources as they are mentioned throughout this training. It might be fruitful to take a few minutes to go over the Adult Application.*

The Boy Scouts of America strongly recommends that merit badge counselors take BSA Youth Protection training. This program addresses strategies for personal safety awareness for youth as well as adults. BSA Youth Protection policies include

- Two-deep leadership
- No one-on-one contact
- Respecting privacy
- Reporting problems

The BSA Youth Protection guidelines have been adopted primarily for the protection of our youth members; however, they also serve to protect our adult volunteers and leaders from false accusations of abuse. BSA Youth Protection training is available online at http://olc.scouting.org.

The Merit Badge Process

The requirements for each merit badge appear in the current BSA merit badge pamphlet for that award and in the current edition of the *Boy Scout Requirements* book, available at Scout shops and council service centers.

When a Scout has decided on a merit badge he would like to earn, he obtains from his Scoutmaster the name and phone number of the district/council–approved merit badge counselor. At this time, the Scoutmaster also can issue the Scout a signed Application for Merit Badge (blue card).

The Scout telephones the merit badge counselor to make an appointment, and together they schedule a date and time for the Scout and his buddy to meet. The counselor suggests that the Scout bring the merit badge pamphlet, the Application for Merit Badge, and any work that he has started or accomplished, and that he prepare by reading over the requirements.

At their first meeting, the merit badge counselor and the Scout decide upon a tentative schedule for completing the requirements. They should keep the Scout's other obligations (Scouting, school, worship, etc.) in mind, and set the dates, times, and locations for future meetings. The counselor will explain the requirements for the badge and help the Scout plan ways to fulfill these requirements so that he can get the most out of the experience.

Merit badge counselors help Scouts meet the requirements for the merit badge. They may expand on the information in the merit badge pamphlet based on their knowledge, experience, and expertise in the subject. They are encouraged to tell about their own experiences that positively reinforce the subject matter, but new requirements or additional work may not be added. The Scout is expected to meet the requirements for the merit badge as stated—no more and no less.

The number of counseling sessions will depend on the difficulty of the merit badge requirements and the Scout's preparation and ability. The Scout and counselor are expected to meet as many times as necessary for the Scout to complete the requirements for the merit badge. The

advancement program allows the Scout to move ahead in his own way and at his own speed. Rather than competing against others, he challenges himself to go as far as his ambition will carry him. The rate of advancement depends upon his interest, effort, and ability.

As the Scout completes each requirement, he is always tested (but with a buddy present), and as each requirement is completed, the merit badge counselor marks it on the application. When all the requirements for the merit badge are fulfilled, the merit badge counselor certifies that the Scout has completed the requirements, and the Scout may return his completed Application for Merit Badge (blue card) to his Scoutmaster.

Counseling Techniques

Trainer: *Ensure the counselors are comfortable with counseling techniques by discussing any teaching experiences they have had and their comfort levels. Emphasize the positive.*

The most productive environment for the Scout when he meets with his merit badge counselor will be one in which he feels welcome and relaxed. Start the conversation by finding out what the Scout already knows about the subject, then stimulate his interest by showing him something related to it. (Be careful not to overwhelm the Scout—remember, he's probably a beginner.) Establish an atmosphere that encourages the Scout to ask questions and to ask for help when he needs it.

Spend some time helping the Scout learn the requirements, making sure he knows he should do exactly what the requirements call for, whether "show" or "demonstrate," "make," "list," "discuss," or "collect, identify, and label." Take a genuine interest in his projects, and encourage him to complete them.

Remember that the requirements must be completed exactly as presented—do not expand any requirement. However, the Scout may undertake more activities on his own initiative. The merit badge counselor can encourage this without pushing him off course.

Encourage the Scout to practice for his review session and to reflect on his accomplishments. The review process might be approached by the Scout with some apprehension. He is familiar with final exams in school and may see this meeting with the counselor as another such experience. The counselor can help by talking to him rather than grilling or examining him—there's a big difference, yet it still will be evident what he knows. Expressing honest enthusiasm for the things he has done will give the Scout confidence.

During testing, the merit badge counselor may find that the Scout needs help learning a particular area. The counselor teaches the needed skill, and then retests to ensure the area has been learned.

Fast Facts for the Merit Badge Counselor

- A merit badge counselor can counsel any Scout, including his own son—although this is discouraged in order to offer a Scout the chance to meet a diverse group of outstanding adults.

- ∞ A counselor may be certified in unlimited merit badge subjects, but he or she must be approved for each one.
- ∞ There is no limit on the number of merit badges that a counselor may counsel with one Scout. However, the Scout will benefit the most from working with a variety of outstanding adults.
- ∞ A merit badge counselor may limit his or her services to one unit but still must be approved by the council advancement committee.
- ∞ Scoutmasters and assistant Scoutmasters are not automatically approved as merit badge counselors.
- ∞ Group instruction is acceptable, but each Scout must be tested and passed individually.
- ∞ There is no time limit for completion of merit badges, but all work on merit badges must be completed before the Scout's 18th birthday.

Summer Camp Merit Badge Counselors

The same qualifications and rules for apply to counselors for council summer camp merit badge programs. All counselors must be 18 years or older, but qualified camp staff members under age 18 may assist the merit badge counselor with instruction. (These assistants are not qualified to sign off on a Scout's blue card.) As always, each counselor must maintain the exact standards as outlined in the merit badge requirements—nothing deleted, nothing added.

Partial completion of merit badges at summer camp should be credited to a Scout on the Application for Merit Badge (blue card) and given to his Scoutmaster at the end of the week.

Summary

Trainer: *Distribute the quiz answer sheet and go over the participants' answers, pausing to discuss where appropriate. Distribute the* ***Resources for Merit Badge Counselors*** *handout.*

Updated December 2006.

Merit Badge Program Quiz

Test your knowledge of the BSA merit badge counselor program.

TRUE or FALSE:

1. T F A merit badge counselor may be a counselor for only up to six merit badges.

2. T F A merit badge counselor may not coach his own son or close relative (i.e., nephew) unless he is part of a group of Scouts all working on the same merit badge.

3. T F A merit badge counselor who works only with a single unit needs only the unit committee's approval before being approved by the Scout executive.

4. T F Persons serving as merit badge counselors must be registered as a merit badge counselor with the Boy Scouts of America.

5. T F A Scout may earn no more than five merit badges from the same merit badge counselor.

6. T F Once a Scouter is approved as a merit badge counselor, he is approved for life and never has to be reapproved.

7. T F A Scout must complete all the requirements for a merit badge within 12 months or he must start over.

8. T F A merit badge counselor may require the Scout to work beyond the specific requirements of the merit badge so he may discover more about the subject and continue the learning process.

9. T F Due to the BSA policies related to Youth Protection and two-deep leadership, a merit badge counselor must have another adult present during all merit badge counseling sessions.

10. T F If the weather, locale, or some other condition makes meeting all of the conditions of the merit badge requirements impractical, the merit badge counselor may substitute requirements for those stated for the merit badge.

11. T F Merit badge counselors must be at least 18 years old.

12. T F If the requirements for a merit badge differ between the merit badge pamphlet and the current edition of *Boy Scout Requirements,* the requirements in the *Boy Scout Requirements* book supersede all others.

Merit Badge Program Quiz Answers

1. **False.** A counselor may be approved for as many badges as he or she is qualified. Since this is up to the members of the approving body to decide, they also may decide how many merit badges they feel it is necessary for a counselor to coach based upon need within the district or council.

2. **False.** A duly approved counselor may counsel any Scout who contacts him or her through proper procedures. However, it is suggested that wherever possible, Scouts should experience a variety of adult contacts and therefore, should use a diverse group of counselors.

3. **False.** All counselors must be approved by the district/council advancement committee.

4. **True.** Even volunteers who serve in multiple positions must fill out another form and show registration as a merit badge counselor.

5. **False.** A Scout may earn as many badges from a counselor as the counselor is qualified and approved to coach. However, since it is in the Scout's best interest that he experience a diversity of adult contacts, it is not in the spirit of the program to do so unless conditions warrant.

6. **False.** Counselor approvals are for one year only.

7. **False.** There is no time limit except that all requirements work must be completed before the Scout's 18th birthday.

8. **False.** No additions or deletions are permitted. The requirements are to be completed exactly as written. However, a counselor may share additional information or resources in the hope of encouraging the Scout to challenge himself.

9. **False.** There must always be a third person present, but it may be any other adult familiar to the Scout, a Scout's parent, or a Scout's "buddy." Common sense dictates that two adult counselors alone with only one Scout should be avoided.

10. **False.** No additions or deletions are permitted. The requirements are to be completed exactly as written.

11. **True.**

12. **True.** The *Boy Scout Requirements* book is revised annually and reflects any changes that have been made, whereas the merit badge pamphlets are not revised annually and may be outdated.

Resources for Merit Badge Counselors

Adult Application, No. 28-501
This adult registration form consists of a cover sheet, an instruction and information sheet, and a four-part registration form. It is used for all BSA volunteers, including merit badge counselors. Completion of the form is required of all merit badge counselors regardless of whether they are already a registered Scouter, and for each position the volunteer would like to serve. The form is available online at http://www.scouting.org/forms/28-501.pdf.

***Advancement Committee Policies and Procedures,* No. 33088**
This is the handbook for Scouters responsible for advancement at the council, district, and unit levels. It contains the current BSA advancement policies, procedures, rules, and regulations as well as other information.

Application for Merit Badge (commonly known as the "blue card"), No. 34124
This three-panel, blue wallet-sized card (1) shows that the Scout has permission to start working on a particular merit badge; (2) records his progress; and (3), when completed, provides a separate record for the Scout, the counselor, and the unit.

***Boy Scout Handbook,* No. 33105**
This is the critical document for a Scout, providing the basic information for all facets of Scouting, including a chapter on the merit badge program.

***Boy Scout Requirements,* No. 33215**
Updated yearly, this book contains the complete, official requirements for all BSA merit badges, ranks, and special awards. Requirements in this publication may be more current than the merit badge pamphlet; therefore, the *Boy Scout Requirements* takes precedence. The complete book will be available online in 2007.

***A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling,* No. 34532**
This folder gives potential merit badge counselors an introduction to the advancement program and the merit badge counselor's role. It also lists all the current merit badge subjects.

Merit Badge Counselor Information form, No. 34405
When attached to the Adult Application, this document specifies the merit badge subjects a counselor wants to coach and secures the counselor's agreement to follow the merit badge requirements and BSA policies. This form is available online as a PDF from http://www.scouting.org/forms/34405.pdf.

Merit Badge Pamphlet Series
The merit badge pamphlets are written for Scout-age boys. The information presented in the pamphlet will help the counselor understand what the Scout may be studying and the level of learning expected by the Boy Scouts of America. The pamphlets may also contain suggestions for projects or demonstrations that may stimulate the counselor's ideas. At times, the

requirements presented in the merit badge pamphlet may not match those in the current edition of the *Boy Scout Requirements* book. The *Boy Scout Requirements* criteria take precedence.

Once a Scout has started working on a merit badge, he may stay with the requirements in effect when he started and is not required to meet newly introduced changes unless the national office places a specific timeline on the implementation of new requirements.

***Scoutmaster Handbook,* No. 33009**
As the Scoutmaster's primary guide, the *Scoutmaster Handbook* contains a section on the merit badge program that includes tips on recruiting counselors and other advancement resources.