

**MERIT BADGE
COUNSELOR
TRAINING**

This information has been prepared by BSA Troop 810 to assist in the training of new Merit Badge Counselors affiliated with the Troop.

WHAT IS A MERIT BADGE?

- A small piece of cloth with a colored design.
- An award based on completing a set of specific requirements.
- A subject of interest to a Scout
- A subject of interest to an adult.
- An award needed to advance beyond the First Class Rank.
- A method of teaching life skills including self-reliance, initiative, confidence and specific subjects.
- A potential lifelong hobby.
- An idea of service to the community.
- A potential future vocation.
- An opportunity to expand a boy's horizons.

REQUIREMENTS TO BE A MERIT BADGE COUNSELOR

- Must be at least 18 years old.
- Must be a U.S. citizen.
- Must subscribe to the Scout Oath and Scout Law.
- Have unique skills, education, experience or knowledge in the subject.
- Have the interest to turn a piece of cloth into something of significance for a Scout who wants to earn it.
- The ability to work with Scout-age boys.
- Must complete an Adult Application (Position Code of “42”) and the Merit Badge Counselor Application Form of the BSA Harford District.
- Must be approved by the District Advancement Committee, the Scout Executive or his designee and the Council Advancement Committee.
- Must renew your registration annually.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS A MERIT BADGE COUNSELOR

- Be well-versed in the information contained in the Merit Badge pamphlet relating to your subject(s) and the specific requirements for the Merit Badge. The pamphlets are written for Scout-age boys and the Counselor should have knowledge of the level of learning expected by the BSA.
- Work with Scouts in accordance with the procedures established by the BSA as part of the Merit Badge counseling process.
- Satisfy yourself that each Scout that comes to you meets the requirements for the Merit Badge as stated.
- Act as a coach to Scouts – encouraging them as they work on a Merit Badge, helping them to overcome hurdles and making them aware of the deeper aspects of the subject from your own knowledge and experience.
- Act as a Counselor, not an examiner. Make the Scout feel at ease throughout the process. Talk with the Scout to determine his knowledge and work, rather than assume the role of the Grand Inquisitor.
- Recognize the individuality of each Scout. Scouts will answer questions differently, with different levels of verbal and written sophistication and neatness.
- Develop learning aids to help Scouts organize and present their work. See www.meritbadge.com for available worksheets, outlines and other materials for each Merit Badge.

THE MERIT BADGE PROCESS

Individual Setting

- A Scout is guided to the requirements for a Merit Badge.
- The Scout finds the requirements in:
 - Boy Scout Requirements publication;
 - Merit Badge Pamphlet from Troop library, public library, a friend, a local store (Sunny's), or the Scout shop; or
 - Internet (e.g., www.meritbadge.com).
- The Scout reads the requirements and decides whether he wants to pursue the Merit Badge.
- The Scout indicates his interest in a particular Merit Badge to his Scoutmaster, who:
 - Talks to him to determine his interest, enthusiasm and preparedness;
 - Gives him a signed Merit Badge Application (blue card);
 - Helps the Scout locate the name and phone number of an approved Merit Badge Counselor either within the Troop or the Harford District; and
 - Encourages the Scout to wear his Class A uniform when he visits the Counselor with his buddy.
- The Scout recruits a buddy to attend counseling sessions with the Scout and the Counselor. The buddy can be another Scout, a parent, friend, sibling, other relative, etc. (Note – two deep adult leadership is not required in a Merit Badge counseling setting).
- The Scout telephones the Merit Badge Counselor and makes an appointment.

- The Merit Badge Counselor sets the date, time and location to meet with the Scout and his buddy. The location may be a residence (Counselor's or Scout's), the Counselor's place of business, in the field, a Troop meeting, etc. The Counselor asks the Scout to:

Bring the Merit Badge Pamphlet;

Bring the Merit Badge Application signed by the Scoutmaster;

Prepare by reading over the requirements and maybe even start working on some of the areas; and

Bring any work he has started or accomplished.

Bring any other materials he may need.

- The Merit Badge Counselor verifies the current requirements for the Merit Badge. Note – the BSA is engaged in a project to rewrite all Merit Badges Pamphlets and requirements over the next five years. As a result, Counselors need to stay informed of any changes to their particular Badge requirements. The most recent Boy Scout Requirements publication states the current Merit Badge requirements and should be used, unless the specific pamphlet has a later publication date.

- At the first meeting, the Merit Badge Counselor and Scout decide upon:

Any projects that will be required (write these out).

A tentative schedule for completing the requirements, keeping the Scout's other obligations (home, school, church, troop, other extracurricular activities) in mind. Write out completion date goals.

Dates, times and locations of future meetings. Note, some Merit Badges may need only one follow-up meeting to review the Scout's work, while others may require multiple meetings.

Note: In some cases, the initial meeting may be accomplished over the telephone; although face-to-face meetings are recommended.

- The Counselor collects the Merit Badge Application at the first meeting and keeps it to track the completion of requirements. The Counselor may release the card to the Scout prior to completion of all requirements where the Scout so requests (e.g., Scout is moving, intends to complete requirements at summer camp, etc.)

- The number of counseling sessions depends on the difficulty of the Merit Badge requirements and the preparation and ability of the Scout.
- The Scout learns by reading the pamphlet, practicing the skills taught, and goes as far as he can to fulfill the requirements on his own.
- The Scout is expected to meet the requirements for the Merit Badge as stated – no more and no less. Furthermore, the Scout is to do exactly what is stated (e.g., if the requirement is to ‘show and demonstrate’, then that is what the Scout is to do). A Counselor may not add to, detract from or modify the requirements, but is responsible for determining whether the Scout has satisfied the requirements in the Counselor’s opinion. This is designed to ensure that the advancement standards are fair and uniform for all Scouts.
- The Scout is coached and encouraged by the Counselor with a buddy present. The Counselor may expand on the information in the Merit Badge pamphlet based on his/her knowledge, experience and expertise in the subject. The Counselor is encouraged to tell about his own experiences that positively reinforce the subject matter.
- The Merit Badge Counselor may assist the Scout to meet the requirements. However, the actual work must be performed by the Scout.
- The Scout is always reviewed individually, but with a buddy present, and as each requirement is completed the Merit Badge Counselor marks it on the Merit badge Application (see check-off section on the back of the portion of the blue card marked Applicant’s Record). The Counselor may require adult certifications, photographs, etc. to confirm project completion where it is not possible for the Counselor to witness the project firsthand.
- If the Counselor is not satisfied that the Scout has completed a requirement, he/she must explain what still must be done and help the Scout in overcoming any obstacles to completion.
- The Counselor certifies that the Scout has completed all of the requirements by filling out all blank spaces on the Application and signs and dates both the Applicant’s record and the Unit’s Record of the blue card. The Counselor hardily congratulates the Scout on a job well done.
- The Counselor retains the Counselor’s Record portion of the Merit Badge Application for his/her records and returns the remaining 2/3rd of the completed and signed Application to the Scout.

- The Scout retains the Applicant's Record in a safe place for proof of completion should the need ever arise and records the Merit Badge in his Boy Scout Handbook.
- The Scouts gives the Scoutmaster the Unit's portion of the Merit Badge Application which is kept in the Troop's permanent records.
- The Troop records are updated to reflect the completion of the Merit Badge. The Troop files an Advancement Report with Council indicating the date the Merit Badge was earned as reflected by the Counselor on the Merit Badge Application.
- The Merit Badge is purchased by the Troop.
- The Merit Badge is presented to the Scout at the Troop's next Court of Honor.

THE MERIT BADGE PROCESS

Group Setting

Frequently, the skills of a subject can be taught to several Scouts at one time. This has an advantage of time and efficiency for you as a Counselor. However, care must be exercised that each Scout is ultimately reviewed on an individual basis.

At the Counselor's request, the Greenbar and/or the Scoutmaster may provide Troop meeting time for a Counselor to give a 10-15 minute presentation of his/her Merit Badge to promote Scout participation. Likewise, Troop meeting time may be dedicated to Merit Badge work in individual or group settings.

- The Troop decides to offer a Merit Badge to the entire Troop or group of Scouts.
- A Merit Badge Counselor is selected using the Troop and/or District Merit Badge Counselor list and a tentative schedule is mutually developed by the Counselor and the Troop.
- The Counselor develops the presentations and learning aid handouts. Troop meeting sessions should usually be limited to 45 minutes or less. Games are useful in developing knowledge, skills and enthusiasm for the Scouts and should be liberally used.
- The Counselor should go over the requirements with the Scouts at the initial meeting and define the expectations for meeting each requirement with a positive outlook (please recognize the age dichotomy of the Troop).
- Some or all testing may be accomplished by written tests depending on the specific requirements. Remaining requirements must be reviewed on an individual basis.
- Some sessions may utilize guest experts to add variety. Also, visual and tactile aids help stimulate interest and attention.

NATIONAL BSA POLICIES

- There is no Board of Review procedure, as in the case of rank advancements, for Merit Badges. The Counselor shall solely determine whether a Scout has met the requirements of a Merit Badge.
- Only individuals approved by the District/Council Advancement Committee may serve as a Counselor for a particular Merit Badge.
- There is no limit on the number of Merit Badges an individual may be approved to counsel. Note – the Harford District has limited to a maximum of 7 Merit Badges, of which no more than 3 can be Eagle required.
- There is no limit on the number of Merit Badges a Scout may earn from any one Counselor (including a parent who is a Counselor).
- A Counselor may counsel and approve Merit Badge completion for any Scout, including his/her own son, ward or relative.
- A Counselor may choose to counsel only Scouts within the Troop or any Scout within the District, by noting such on the Merit Badge Counselor Application.
- It is possible for different Counselors to sign-off on requirements for a single Merit Badge (e.g., where a Scout's home Counselor signs off on summer camp prerequisites and the summer camp staff sign-off on requirements completed at summer camp).
- A Merit Badge cannot be taken away once it has been earned.
- There is no time limit for completion of a Merit Badge other than age 18.
- A Scout may work on as many Merit Badges as he desires at any one time, provided he has the approval of the Scoutmaster. Generally, we recommend that a Scout work on no more than 5 Merit Badges at any one time to maintain focus and aid in successful completion.
- Completed Merit Badge Applications should be retained by the Scout, Troop and Counselor for at least 7 years or until the Scout is officially awarded the Rank of Eagle.

COUNSELING TECHNIQUES

- Make the Scout feel welcome and relaxed.
- Stimulate the Scout's interest by showing him something related to the Merit Badge.
- Start the Scout with easy skills or questions.
- Share your enthusiasm for the subject – but don't overwhelm him – remember, he is probably at a beginner level. Don't talk down to him. Don't flaunt your vastly superior knowledge. Share your experience but don't bore him with never-ending tales of your adventures.
- Carefully review each requirement and the Scout's work.
- Encourage practice, reflection, completion.
- Establish an atmosphere that encourages the Scout to ask for help.
- Insist that the Scout does exactly what the requirements call for: show or demonstrate, make, list, collect and identify, explain, etc.
- Do not increase, delete or modify the requirements.
- Take a genuine interest in the Scout and his work.