

# COUNSELOR'S COMPASS

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Winter 2015



## From the National Advancement Committee

### How We Support You

The Boy Scouts of America's National Advancement Committee, a group of dedicated Scouters, supports merit badge counselors in several ways. They implement merit badge guidelines found in Section 7 of the *Guide to Advancement*. Topics ranging from the process of counseling, badge group instruction, what to do when requirements change, and advancement policies and procedures – are covered in this section.

Producing educational presentations like *The Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling* is another way we support you. These resources are accessible at [www.scouting.org/Home/BoyScouts/Resources/advancement\\_presentations.aspx](http://www.scouting.org/Home/BoyScouts/Resources/advancement_presentations.aspx), and the presentation's e-learning format enables counselors to grasp effective techniques in the comfort of their own homes.

The Committee's Merit Badge Maintenance Task Force not only updates badge requirements and content on a regular basis, but volunteers also ensure the merit badge program remains relevant for today's youth. A measurable result for many Scouts is an introduction to a lifelong hobby, skill, or career.

### IN THIS ISSUE

- **From the National Advancement Committee:** How We Support You
- **Things to Do:** Understanding the Process of Counseling
- **Steps for Success:** Promoting Signs, Signals, and Codes
- **Glad You Asked:** Merit Badge Myths: Fact vs. Fiction; Fulfilling More Than One Requirement with a Single Activity
- **News You Can Use:** 2015 Merit Badge Updates
- **Helpful Resources:** Publications in Print and Materials Posted on Scouting.org

# Things to Do

## Understanding the Process of Counseling

Effective counselors understand creating a hands-on, interactive learning environment, where the Scout's goal is to participate and take full responsibility in working towards and earning the badge, is part of the merit badge plan. Counselors coach Scouts to help them understand the subject. Topic 7.0.3.0 in the *Guide to Advancement* suggests a 10-step process to ensure a gratifying experience between Scouts and counselors is achieved. The collaborative process of how the unit leader and counselor help Scouts earn merit badges begins with an initial discussion.

1. **The Scout indicates an interest and discusses it with his unit leader.** The Scout develops an interest in a merit badge and may begin working on requirements. He discusses his interest in the badge with his unit leader. This is intended to be a growth-oriented and positive conversation to encourage the Scout and offer guidance on how he can approach the required work, as well as to inform the Scout of possible challenges he may encounter along the way.
2. **The unit leader signs a blue card and provides the Scout with at least one counselor contact.** The unit leader signs the front of the blue card and gives it to the Scout. He also provides at least one currently registered counselor's contact information. The Scout may want to work with a different counselor, which is permitted as long as he has discussed it with his unit leader.
3. **The Scout contacts the counselor.** This is usually done by phone or e-mail. The counselor tells the Scout what is expected of him and sets up a meeting with the Scout and his buddy. Personal contact makes earning the badge a better experience for all concerned.
4. **The Scout, his buddy, and the counselor meet, often several times.** During the initial meeting, the counselor starts by finding out what the Scout already knows about the subject. He may set up additional meetings to coach him on completing the challenging requirements or projects. If the Scout has already started working on requirements, he should provide evidence of completed work. It is the counselor's decision whether to accept work completed prior to the initial discussion with the unit leader.



(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

5. **The Scout completes the requirements.** The counselor must be satisfied the Scout actually and personally completed all requirements. During review sessions, the counselor may ask questions to get an idea what the Scout has learned.
6. **The counselor approves completion.** Upon successful completion of requirements, the counselor signs the Scout's blue card on the reverse side (to the left) and on the applicant's record (in the middle.) He tears off and retains the Counselor's Record, and gives the Scout his remaining two-thirds. If the Scout did not complete all the requirements, the counselor simply indicates and initials those fulfilled in the spaces provided on the back of the applicant's section, and returns the card to the Scout.
7. **The Scout returns the signed blue card to his unit leader.** The Scout meets with his unit leader to discuss his experience. The unit leader then signs the applicant record section of the card.
8. **The unit leader gives the Scout the applicant record.** The Scout is responsible for retaining his applicant record. This becomes especially important because it is proof the badge was earned.
9. **The unit reports the merit badge to the council.** The troop advancement chair records the Scout's advancement and reports the badge earned.
10. **The Scout receives his merit badge.** The Scout is presented his badge either during a troop meeting or later during a formal court of honor.

Counselors devote much of their time to steps three through six. The process begins with the initial discussion, continues through counselor sessions, and culminates in advancement while providing Scouts a unique learning experience. Fields of interest are explored beyond the limits of the school classroom.



If merit badge counseling or instruction includes any Web-based interaction, it must be conducted in accordance with the *BSA Social Media Guidelines* ([www.scouting.org/Marketing/Resources/SocialMedia](http://www.scouting.org/Marketing/Resources/SocialMedia)). For example, always copy one or more authorized adults on email messages between counselors and Scouts.

# Steps for Success

## Promoting Signs, Signals, and Codes

Merit badge counselors can be popular guests when invited by unit leaders to present topics related to advancement at troop meetings and district events. When new merit badges are introduced, counselors may find themselves in a unique position to generate youth interest. Commissioners and district advancement committees can be very supportive in that endeavor.



TIP: Once a troop visit has been scheduled, counselors should plan a brief 10- or 15-minute overview of what Scouts will learn while working on the new badge and why it might be interesting to them. Successful counselors tell us that encouraging participation in a selected requirement can create enthusiasm.

For example, when promoting Signs, Signals, and Codes, highlight a hands-on, interactive requirement like requirements 5a:

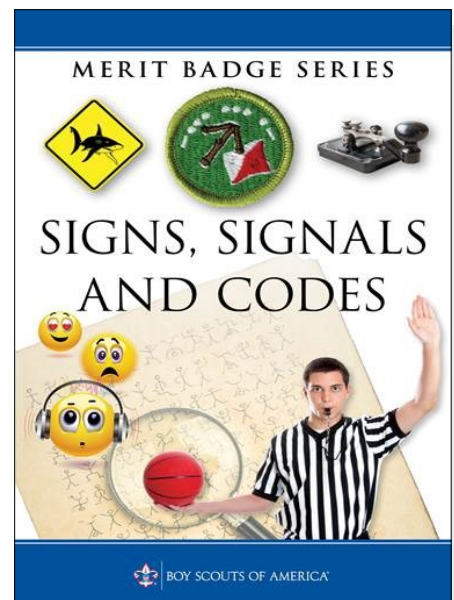
*“Either by sight or by touch, identify the letters of the Braille alphabet that spell your name . By sight or touch, decode a Braille message of at least six words long.”*

Discussion is encouraged when the counselor asks a question, such as: “Who are the people likely to use Braille?”

TIP: After a Scout volunteers his answer, the next step might be to hand out merit badge pamphlets and direct attention to the Braille insert. Scouts will be able to see and feel the raised dots representing characters and numbers. To add a challenge, Scouts can learn how to spell their names using Braille.

The counselor’s presentation does more than introduce Scouts to the new badge. It creates an opportunity for Scouts to meet the merit badge counselor in person before deciding whether to pursue the badge.

Before departing, the counselor should encourage Scouts interested in working on the badge to speak with their unit leader. The introductory session will hopefully inspire Scouts to request the blue card needed to begin meeting with the merit badge counselor.



# Glad You Asked

## Merit Badge Myths: Fact vs. Fiction

In forthcoming issues, we'll review topics that have generated much discussion among Scouters over the years, and provide answers supported by the *Guide to Advancement*. Let's begin with the first merit badge myth:

**Myth 1:** A Boy Scout must be at least 15 years of age and have achieved the First Class rank in order to begin working on merit badges.

**Fact:** There is no minimum age or rank. A few merit badges have certain restrictions. But otherwise, any registered Scout can work on any merit badge at any time according to topic 7.0.0.3 in the *Guide to Advancement*. Once he turns 18 though, he can no longer work on merit badges.

**Myth 2:** A counselor may only be approved to counsel up to five merit badges.

**Fact:** The National Council places no limit on the number of badges a counselor may be approved to counsel (topic 7.0.1.4, *Guide to Advancement*). It is permissible for councils to limit the number of badges that one person counsels; however, it must not do so to the point where Scouts' choices, especially in small or remote units, are so limited as to serve as a barrier to advancement.

**Myth 3:** A Scoutmaster has the authority to deny a Scout's request to work on more merit badges if he has too many unfinished ones.

**Fact:** Any registered Scout can work on any merit badge at any time (*Guide to Advancement*, topic 7.0.0.3). In this scenario, all the Scoutmaster can do is counsel the Scout to perhaps finish what was begun.

*"No council, committee, district, unit, or individual has the authority to add to, or subtract from, advancement requirements. There are limited exceptions relating only to youth members with disabilities." – Guide to Advancement.*





## Fulfilling More Than One Requirement with a Single Activity

Leaders often ask, “Can one activity count for multiple requirements?” Topic 4.2.3.6 of the *Guide to Advancement* explains it can, as long as these three conditions are met:

- The two requirements match up exactly.
- The two requirements have the same intent.
- The requirements do not state otherwise.

In some cases, the underlying activity may be the same, but different actions are necessary to fulfill the requirements as written. For example, camping in a tent on a troop outing counts towards the Second or First Class camping nights requirement and satisfies certain requirements for the Camping merit badge. Here, the requirements and intent are the same.

For the Scout working on Communications and Citizenship in the Community merit badges, additional work is required. Communications requires him to attend a public meeting where several points of view are given on a single issue, carefully taking notes of each view, and then presenting a report to his counselor that includes all points of view. Citizenship in the Community, however, requires the Scout to attend a public meeting and report back to his counselor on what he heard and which side he agreed with.

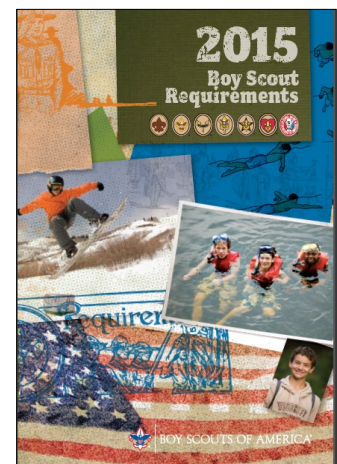
Thus, if the Scout plans ahead to ensure the meeting program includes a discussion of issues, then both requirements could be met as written. He should report on all sides of the discussion for Communications and take a position on which side he favored for Citizenship.

The Cooking merit badge, on the other hand, states in the notes at the bottom of requirement 4, “Meals prepared for Cooking merit badge requirements 5, 6, and 7 will count only toward fulfilling those requirements and will not count toward rank advancement or other merit badges.” This is a good example of where the requirement states otherwise. Counselors will encounter these types of situations. Understanding the intent of requirements is important.

## News You Can Use

### 2015 Merit Badge Updates

The *2015 Boy Scout Requirements* book contains the official requirements in effect for this calendar year. Any Scout just beginning work on a merit badge must use the current requirements listed in the book. Thus, it is important that counselors know which badges were updated.



(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

Merit badges updated and in effect this year include:

**Badges with Extensive Requirement Revisions:**

Canoeing — Insect Study — Swimming — Whitewater

**Badges with Minor Requirement Updates:**



Architecture (3b)	Energy (2a, 4b)	Fish and Wildlife Management (5b, 7c)	Public Health (1, 2c, 5a, 7a)
Backpacking (3d, 6b, 8a, 9)	Environmental Science (3E2)	Fishing (4)	Sustainability (2a)
Basketry (1)	Family Life (3, 6b)	Mammal Study (3c, 4b)	Water Sports (4b)
Drafting (2a, 2b, 3a, 3b)	First Aid (2b)	Personal Fitness (1a, 3d, 3h)	Wood Carving (4c, 4d, 6)

If a Scout started working on any of these merit badges prior to January 1, 2015, he may continue using the old badge requirements and pamphlet until he has completed the badge. If he chooses, he may switch to or begin work using the new requirements and pamphlet. See topic 7.0.4.3, “What to Do When Requirements Change” in the *Guide to Advancement*.

Were there any new or discontinued merit badges listed this year? Yes. Those include:

**New Merit Badges:**

Mining in Society — Signs, Signals, and Codes — Animation

**Discontinued Merit Badges:**

- Cinematography (replaced by Moviemaking)
- Computers (replaced by Digital Technology)



Counselors are encouraged to pick up their own copy of the *2015 Boy Scout Requirements* book at their local Scout shop. The book may also be purchased through [www.scoutstuff.org](http://www.scoutstuff.org) or by calling the National Distribution Center toll-free at 800-323-0732.

## About Counselor's Compass

*Counselor's Compass* is the official e-letter of the Boy Scouts of America's National Advancement Committee and Content Management Team. Its intent is to provide volunteers with practical counseling advice through a concise, informative approach in order to communicate advancement procedures more efficiently. Therefore, districts and councils may reprint articles from this publication. Our plan is to distribute *Counselor's Compass* quarterly, but special editions may go out whenever there is important information to share. Feedback, suggestions, and letters to the editor are welcome at [merit.badge@scouting.org](mailto:merit.badge@scouting.org).

# Helpful Resources

## Publications in Print and Materials Posted on Scouting.org

- Merit badge requirements: [www.scouting.org/meritbadges](http://www.scouting.org/meritbadges)
- *Guide to Advancement*: [www.scouting.org/advancement](http://www.scouting.org/advancement)
- *Guide to Safe Scouting*: [www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/34416.pdf](http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/34416.pdf)
- *The Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling*: [www.scouting.org/Home/BoyScouts/Resources/advancement\\_presentations.aspx](http://www.scouting.org/Home/BoyScouts/Resources/advancement_presentations.aspx)
- *Merit Badge Counselor Information*, No. 34405: [www.scouting.org/advancement](http://www.scouting.org/advancement)
- Merit badge pamphlet series
- *Boy Scout Requirements* book, No. 33216
- *Application for Merit Badge*, No. 34124
- *A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling*, No. 34532
- *Boy Scout Handbook*, No. 34554



## Managing Subscriptions to *Counselor's Compass*

*Counselor's Compass* is designed for merit badge counselors, council and district advancement committees, and related staff advisors. Any Scouting volunteer or professional may subscribe.

**Subscribing.** Send a message to [merit.badge@scouting.org](mailto:merit.badge@scouting.org), with "SUBSCRIBE" in the subject line. Indicate your name, email address, and council in the message text.

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