

COUNSELOR'S COMPASS

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Things to Do

Small Group Sessions—The Ideal Teaching Approach

The 2015 *Guide to Advancement* points out in Section Seven, topic 7.0.3.0, “A small-scale approach in merit badge counseling is encouraged. Teaching a badge to a Scout and his buddy or a small group affords the counselor coaching and guidance opportunities not possible in a large group setting.” Mentoring Scouts requires establishing a relationship with the Scout and his buddy not likely achievable in an auditorium-sized merit badge fair. The Scouts whom you mentor may even get more serious about the subject matter in order to gain a deeper understanding.

Another benefit in conducting small-group sessions is the counselor’s ability to help Scouts set long-term goals to accomplish not only the required work, but additional studies if they so desire. Goal setting, of course, helps Scouts prioritize merit badge tasks that call for more preparation and planning. But more importantly, the discipline of setting and attaining challenging objectives may carry-over into adulthood.

The biggest challenge to teaching a merit badge to a large group is monitoring the Scouts’ individual progress. The larger the group, the more difficult it is to maintain a degree of personal attention to every participant. In this situation, more counselors must be involved, or other methods must be used to ensure every Scout actually and personally fulfills every requirement. If this challenge cannot be met, then large-group instruction must be abandoned. Furthermore, awarding merit badges to Scouts on (Continued on page 2)

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the basis of sitting in class watching demonstrations or remaining silent during discussions is totally and completely unacceptable.

Thus, teaching a merit badge to a small group of Scouts like the one pictured below ensures mentoring opportunities and positive learning experiences are taking place. For more information, counselors are urged to read the 2015 version of the *Guide to Advancement* (No. 33088) recently posted in the Advancement Resources web page: www.scouting.org/advancement.



Steps for Success

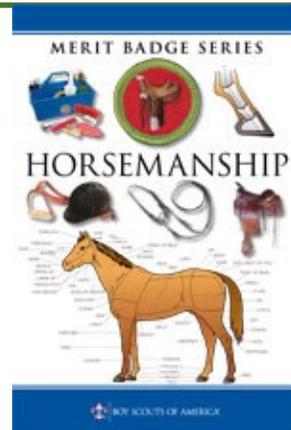
Recommending Improvements to Merit Badges

BSA's electronic mailbox: merit.badge@scouting.org is more than just a place where counselors can get their questions answered. It's also Scouting's official e-mail address where counselors can recommend improvements to merit badges that Scouts can earn. These range from simple typos in the pamphlets to more extensive changes that effect both requirements and content.

Correcting errors is by far the most common improvement brought to National staff's attention. These include: misspelled words, misplaced or dangling modifiers, and mathematical or grammatical errors. Another type of error is discovering the wrong knot or technique was used to explain a step or process. For example, a unit leader once noted in an earlier version of the Canoeing merit badge an illustration showing the trucker's hitch being tied incorrectly. If tied as shown in the pamphlet, the knot would collapse under strain, causing equipment damage and possible injury to others.

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Reframing a statement for better clarity is another improvement worth mentioning. Case in point: in the 2010 Horsemanship merit badge pamphlet edition, the following sentence appeared in one of the sidebars: “Stallions should never be chosen for young or novice riders.” The subject-matter expert who reviewed the pamphlet suggested reframing the sentence to better reflect BSA’s cautionary approach. Her recommendation led to a new sentence in the current pamphlet which reads: “Common sense should be exercised when deciding whether or not to put a young or novice rider on a stallion.”



Revising or removing a requirement deemed too advanced for younger Scouts is another improvement considered actionable. Horsemanship requirement 11(f) required Scouts to lope or canter a horse in a half-circle not more than 30 feet in radius. The requirement was removed after several horse trainers asserted a level of skill was necessary to accomplish the requirement successfully. Merit badges certainly should be challenging, but they must also be attainable by Scouts.

Shortly after the Sustainability merit badge was rolled-out at the 2013 National Jamboree, a district volunteer pointed out a concern in requirement 2a. The requirement originally read:



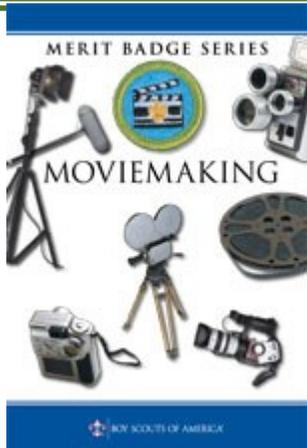
“Develop and implement a plan that attempts to reduce your family’s water usage. Examine your family’s water bills reflecting usage for three months (past or current). As a family, choose three ways to help reduce consumption. Implement those ideas for one month. Share what you learn with your counselor, and tell how your plan affected your family’s water usage.”

As written, it would be highly unlikely for Scouts living in apartment dwellings or rural communities where some families get their water supply from wells to produce a water bill needed to successfully complete the requirement. Hence, the following alternative was approved by the National Advancement Committee:

“Develop and implement a plan that attempts to reduce your family’s water usage. As a family, discuss water usage. To aid in your discussion, if past water bills are available, you may choose to examine a few. As a family, choose three ways to help reduce water consumption. Implement those ideas for one month. Share what you learn with your counselor, and tell how you think your plan affected your family’s water usage.”

This option became new requirement 2a that went into effect when the pamphlet was reprinted in 2014.

Though rare, it becomes necessary to change the name of a merit badge because the title does not represent what the badge is about. When Cinematography was reviewed, a film director (Continued on page 4)



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noted the merit badge's name represented a process used in making a film, not the overall art of film-making. Thus, to remain true to the spirit of the badge, Cinematography was changed to Moviemaking in 2014.

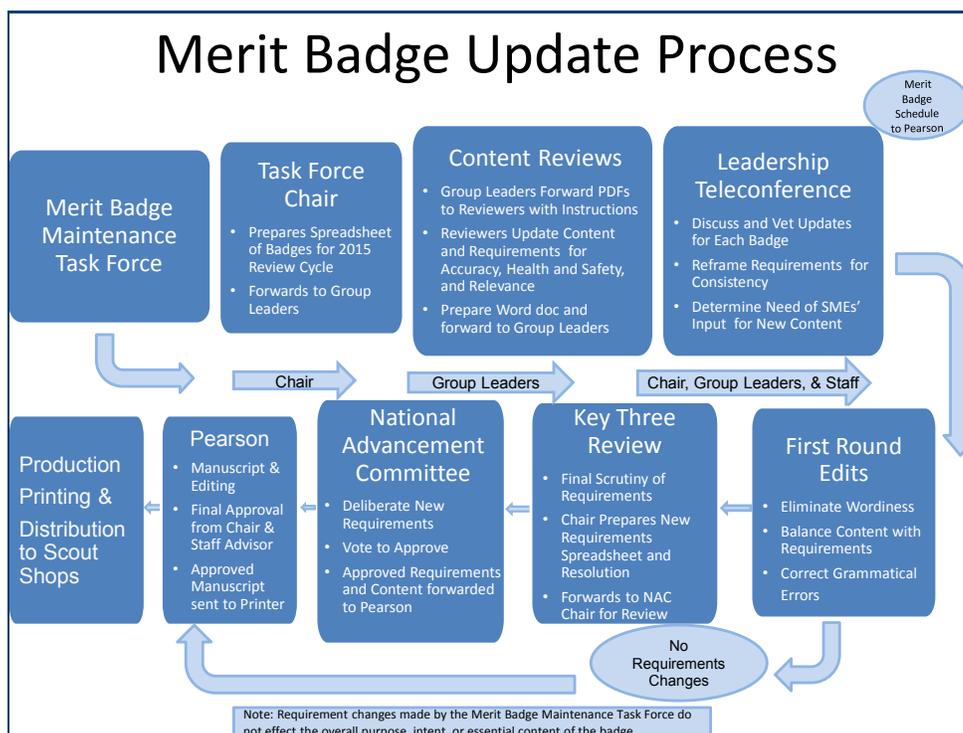
One final area worth noting: ensuring every badge is relevant for today's youth. For example, requirements that specified using dated techniques or resources have been updated to include current technology popular among young people. So, if a project required the use of a film camera to take pictures, the text now includes use of an electronic device such as a cell phone.

Likewise, where reading newspapers were required to gather data for a report, Scouts can now surf the internet to complete requirements. Such improvements are necessary in order to ensure Scouts are experiencing a quality program that's keeping up with the times.

Glad You Asked

Merit Badge Updating Process

One of the most organized, highly efficient team of volunteers is the National Merit Badge Maintenance Task Force. Established in March, 2011, volunteers and subject matter experts update merit badges to ensure program content remains relevant for today's youth. An understanding of how task force members actually go about updating badges is emphasized in the diagram below:



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At the beginning of each year, the task force chair identifies all of the merit badges slated for review on an EXCEL spreadsheet, and forwards the list to his volunteer group leaders, each responsible for overseeing groups of related merit badges. Group leaders maintain regular communications with each of their reviewers to gauge individual progress. The chair relies on their ability to contact reviewers to get necessary supportive information needed during the final review and editing process.

Reviewers are essential to task force operations. Their primary task is to review assigned pamphlets thoroughly and efficiently, and make actionable improvements to requirements and text. After completing their reviews, they draft their updates in a Word document which gets forwarded to the group leader for consideration. Group leaders in turn provide the chair with update summaries of each merit badge that was updated. This is the second step in the process.

As part of the third step, the chair holds a teleconference with group leaders and the consistency consultant to review and discuss each update. After the meeting, the chair, consistency consultant, and staff advisor give requirements and supportive content one final review and make further edits to ensure a high level of accuracy and consistency is maintained.

During the fourth step, the chair prepares a spreadsheet listing the proposed new requirements for each badge, the old requirements being replaced, and the reason for the change. Accompanied by a resolution, new requirements are forwarded to the National Advancement Committee for approval. Once approval is granted, updates are forwarded to BSA's publisher—the Pearson Group, which produces the manuscript used to manufacture new pamphlets for sale and distribution.

The recent implementation of Experience Oriented Scouting (EOS) has led to regular reviews of specific groups of badges like the technology-based STEM and Eagle-required group. Not surprising, these are among the first group of badges being converted digitally. In summary, updating the merit badge library takes a highly-skilled, dedicated team of volunteers all working together for one common purpose: ensuring all Scouts have gratifying experiences through a quality merit badge program.

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.

News You Can Use

Frequently Asked Questions

Many of the same questions frequently arise from merit badge counselors, especially those who are new to the program. Here are the answers to some of those FAQs.

Question: Must individuals who are serving as a merit badge counselor register as a merit badge counselor with the Boy Scouts of America?

Answer: Yes, an Adult Application must be completed for each position in which the individual wants to serve. The application allows only one position per form. For instance, an individual who wants to serve only as a merit badge counselor will need to complete only one application. However, a Scoutmaster or assistant Scoutmaster who wants to serve as a merit badge counselor must complete two applications—one for the Scoutmaster position and one for the counselor position.

Question: Once the adult leader application has been submitted, how long does the approval process take?

Answer: The process usually takes from four to six weeks.

Question: What is the minimum age requirement for merit badge counselors?

Answer: An individual must be at least 18 years of age to serve as a merit badge counselor.

Question: Once a volunteer is registered and approved as a merit badge counselor, is that registration for life?

Answer: Approvals for merit badge counselors and all other adult volunteer positions are valid for one year only and must be renewed annually.



Updates to *Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling*

Learning effective counseling techniques is part of the advancement educational presentation: *The Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling*. This self-paced resource introduces counselors to the merit badge process, helps them gain an understanding of their unique role in advancement, and provides them with good instructional techniques for working with Scouts. Some slides have been updated to reflect consistency with the 2015 *Guide to Advancement*. Updates include:

- Bears new expiration date of December 31, 2016
- “Process of Counseling” section now highlights a 12-step process
- Major process change: Scouts may begin working on requirements before discussing the badge with his unit leader

Counselors can access the PowerPoint presentation by visiting: http://www.scouting.org/filestore/training/advancement/Merit_Badge_Counselor/The_Essentials.pptx



The Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling

National Advancement Committee

Expiration Date

This presentation is not to be used after May 31, 2016.
Obtain an updated version at www.scouting.org/advancement



A Peek Ahead:

Topics Planned for Next Issue:

- Merit Badge Group Instruction Guide
- New Exploration Merit Badge in the Horizon
- Photography Merit Badge Gets A Major Face-Lift

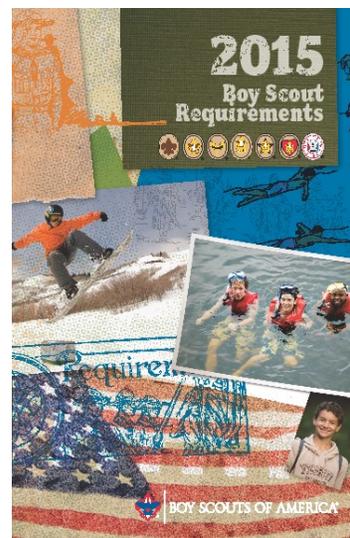
Helpful Resources

Publications in Print and Materials Posted on Scouting.org

- Merit badge requirements: www.scouting.org/meritbadges
- *Guide to Advancement*: www.scouting.org/advancement
- *Guide to Safe Scouting*: www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/34416.pdf

The Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling: http://www.scouting.org/filestore/training/advancement/Merit_Badge_Counselor/The_Essentials.pptx

- 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



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