

# Advancement Guidelines

We believe that a Scout should receive recognition for his achievements.

Advancement sets a pattern of setting positive goals and reaching them throughout life. Even though it's not one of the primary aims of Scouting, advancement is a natural byproduct when your Scouting experience is acquainting you with the BSA ideals, the patrol method, the outdoors, association with adults, personal growth, leadership development, and the Scout uniform. It's easy to advance by following these four basic steps:

1. Learning
2. Testing
3. Review
4. Recognition

## **RANK ADVANCEMENT**

The requirements for the ranks of Tenderfoot through First Class prepare you to take full advantage of all that Scouting has to offer. Star, Life, and Eagle requirements focus on service to others and developing leadership skills.

Requirements for each rank are outlined in the Boy Scout Handbook. You can work on advancement requirements with your parents or other family members, with other Scouts and with adult Scout leaders. This can be done on your own, in patrol and troop meetings, and during other troop functions such as campouts. A good rule of thumb is to try to complete one or two rank requirements at each troop meeting.

Scout skills cannot be mastered by performing them just once. You will have many opportunities to practice each skill, and you will be thoroughly tested on each requirement before it is "signed off". In addition, expect to practice each skill repeatedly, even after it has been signed off. As you progress, you will also have opportunities to teach these skills to less experienced Scouts, which will further reinforce your knowledge and skill.

As you complete each requirement, you will be tested and signed off in the BACK section of your handbook (pp. 438 - 449) by the Scoutmaster or by someone he designates. This person may be an Assistant Scoutmaster, a Troop Committee Member, or another, more experienced, Scout. (In Boy Scouts troop leaders, rather than parents, sign off advancement requirements. In order to avoid the appearance of impropriety, in most troops, troop leaders will not normally sign off rank requirements for their own sons. Infrequent exceptions may be made in the case of a leader who is teaching skills to several Scouts at once at a patrol or troop meeting or other Scouting function, but every effort should be made to have another leader sign off the instructing leader's sons if possible.)

It's up to you to take advantage of the advancement opportunities available to you, and to take initiative to ask for someone to test you when you are ready. You are responsible for keeping your own personal advancement record in your handbook. You should also record your service hours, campouts, troop activities, and leadership positions in your handbook.

You must earn the ranks in order, but you may complete any requirement for Tenderfoot through First Class at any time. (For example, you may complete a First Class requirement before finishing your Tenderfoot requirements, but you must earn Tenderfoot rank before you are awarded Second Class and First Class ranks.)

You will be meeting regularly with the Scoutmaster to discuss your activity in the troop and your understanding and practice of the ideals of Scouting. This Scoutmaster conference is also used to discuss your goals and accomplishments and is required for each rank advancement.

You do not have to wait until you have completed the requirements for a rank in order to ask for a Scoutmaster conference. You may talk with the Scoutmaster at any time that is convenient to both of you. However, for a Scoutmaster conference to count toward rank advancement it must take place after all other requirements are complete and before the Board of Review. At this required conference the Scoutmaster will also help you determine whether or not you are ready to go before the Board of Review.

After this Scoutmaster conference, you should arrange for your Board of Review following the procedures your troop has established. Boards of Review for all ranks except Eagle Scout, are normally held once a month, and are composed of three to six registered members of the troop committee. (Eagle Scout Boards of Review are arranged through your Council or District Advancement Committee and can have other members.) The Board of Review may not include the Scoutmaster, Assistant Scoutmasters, or your family members.

The purpose of the Board of Review is not to retest you but rather to ensure that you have completed all of the requirements, to determine the quality of your troop experience, and to encourage you to advance toward the next rank. (Sometimes you will meet a Board of Review even when you are not ready for the next rank, in order to check your progress and to see how things are going for you in the troop and in your patrol. The troop Advancement Chairman may schedule you for such a Board of Review when (s)he feels that an extended period has passed since your last Board of Review.)

You need to have your Boy Scout Handbook and should be in your field uniform when you appear before a Board of Review. At the beginning of the review, the president of the board will bring you into the room, introduce you to the board, and invite you to be seated. During the review the board will discuss your development along your trail to Eagle, ask you questions about skills that were required for your particular rank, and evaluate you in terms of troop activities and readiness for the next rank. It is also a time for you to ask any questions you might have and to give feedback to the troop committee about activities and your Scouting experience in your troop and in your patrol. At the end of the review you will be asked to leave the room while the board discusses your qualifications. The board will then call you back into the room and inform you either that you have been approved for the next rank or what additional actions you must take to qualify.

After passing the Board of Review, you will be recognized in front of the troop as soon as possible. You will receive your new rank patch shortly after, usually at the next troop meeting. You will be formally recognized for your rank advancements and merit badges in front of family and friends during a ceremony at a Court of Honor. At this time you will be presented with your wallet-sized certificate card and, if your troop presents them, a rank pin ("mother's pin"). Most troops schedule four Courts of Honor each year. Your parents, other family members, and friends are invited and encouraged to attend all Courts of Honor.

After reaching the rank of Life Scout, you will meet with one of the adult leaders in the troop. At this meeting you will receive your Life to Eagle packet and discuss ideas and suggestions for your Eagle Service Project. This project must conform to special guidelines that have been outlined by the Boy Scouts of America. Your Scoutmaster, troop Advancement Chairman, and a representative of your District Advancement Committee, as well as the benefiting organization, must approve your project before you begin carrying it out.

## **MERIT BADGES**

Earning merit badges allows you to explore many fields, helps you round out your skills, and introduces you to subjects that will perhaps become lifelong interests or a rewarding career.

There are more than 100 merit badges for you to choose from. You may earn any merit badge at any time, with Scoutmaster approval. Don't wait for someone to tell you when and which merit badge to work on. You don't need to reach a certain rank in order to be eligible. However, you should concentrate on achieving the rank of First Class before devoting a lot of time to working on merit badges.

Don't overwhelm yourself by trying to complete too many badges at one time. We recommend that you actively work on no more than two at one time until you reach the rank of First Class, and no more than five at one time thereafter.

You can find information about merit badge requirements in the appropriate merit badge pamphlets and in the current year's Boy Scout Requirements book. Some of these should be available in your troop library or at your public library. All of them are available from your Scout Shop or Council Trading Post, or a store which sells Scouting supplies in your area. If you are finished using merit badge pamphlets that you own, many troops encourage you to donate them to the troop library.

Here are the steps to earning a merit badge:

1. Get a blue merit badge card from the Advancement Chairman, or Scoutmaster, fill in your name, address, and the name of the badge, and ask the Scoutmaster to sign it. Then get the name and phone number of a qualified counselor from the Advancement Chairman or scoutmaster.
2. Call the counselor and set up an appointment. This can be at any place that is suitable to both of you. Along with a buddy (another Scout, a family member, or a friend), meet with the counselor. The counselor will explain the requirements for the merit badge and help you get started.
3. Work on the badge requirements until you complete them, meeting with the counselor (along with your buddy) whenever necessary. You must complete the stated requirements and satisfy the standards of each merit badge. The merit badge counselor may *encourage* you to do more than the requirements state but he or she may **not** require it. YOU (not the counselor, Scoutmaster, or Advancement Chairman) keep the merit badge card until you have completed the requirements and the counselor has signed the card. If you lose this card, you will have to start the badge over unless the counselor is willing and able to vouch for what you already completed.

If you change counselors for any reason, it is up to the new counselor whether or not he or she will accept the work you did with the previous counselor. Normally the new counselor will ask you a few questions, and if the counselor is satisfied that you actually did the work that was signed off, he or she will accept it.

4. After you complete the merit badge and the counselor signs your merit badge card, he or she will keep the counselor's section and return the rest of the card to you. Bring the rest of the card to the Advancement Chairman, who will keep the troop section and return the Scout section to you.

You will receive your merit badge shortly after you turn in the blue card (usually the next troop meeting). Your wallet-sized certificate card will be presented to you at the next Court of Honor.

## **RECORD-KEEPING**

Your advancement records are kept in three places — your Council office, the troop Advancement Chairman, and yourself. The Council office keeps records supplied to them by the troop Advancement Chairman, who also keeps copies of these records for the troop. Many troop Advancement Chairmen also maintain their advancement information on computers. You will receive three kinds of documents that you need to **KEEP IN A SAFE PLACE UNTIL AFTER YOU TURN 18** (or receive your Eagle Scout Award, whichever is later)! These documents are: your Scout Handbook with requirements signed off, your portion of completed blue merit badge cards, and the wallet-sized certificate cards for rank advancement and merit badge completion. Make sure all of them are signed or initialed by the appropriate Scout leader. All of the cards are the same size and can be safely kept in plastic protector pages (available at Wal-Mart, etc.) which are designed for baseball and other sports cards. **IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOU KEEP THESE DOCUMENTS IN A SAFE PLACE AND DO NOT LOSE THEM!!!** If it should happen that there is a discrepancy or missing records, your personal records are your most important ally in proving what you completed and when.

## **RECOMMENDED READING**

- Boy Scout Handbook (No. 33105)
- Current year's Boy Scout Requirements (No. 33215)
- Merit badge pamphlets