



The Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling

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This Training Will Cover

- ♣ Scouting overview: mission, objectives, and methods
- ♣ Merit badge program role and benefits
- ♣ Merit badge counselor qualifications
- ♣ How to become a counselor
- ♣ The merit badge counseling process
- ♣ Merit badge requirements: fulfill as written
- ♣ Effective counseling
- ♣ Group instruction and camp settings



Boy Scouts of America Mission Statement

The mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Scout Law.

<https://www.scouting.org/>



Objectives of the Scouting Program

- ♣ Character development
- ♣ Citizenship training
- ♣ Leadership
- ♣ Mental and physical fitness

Every activity in Scouting should support one or more of these aims.



Methods of Scouting

- ♣ Scouting ideals
- ♣ Patrol method
- ♣ Advancement
- ♣ Association with adults
- ♣ Outdoors
- ♣ Leadership development
- ♣ Uniform
- ♣ Personal growth

Guide to Advancement topic 2.0.0.4



Four Steps In Scout Advancement

1. The Scout **learns**.
2. The Scout is **tested**.
3. The Scout is **reviewed**.
4. The Scout is **recognized**.



Merit badge counselors
are directly involved in the first two steps.

Guide to Advancement topic 4.2.1.0



Merit Badges: Their Role in Advancement

- ♣ Merit badges are integral to advancement.
- ♣ Any Scout may earn them at any time, including qualified Venturers and Sea Scouts.
- ♣ Merit badges are required for Star, Life, and Eagle ranks.
- ♣ A total of 21 must be earned for the Eagle rank.
- ♣ Some merit badges are “required;” some “elective.”
- ♣ Thirteen of the seventeen specific badges are required for Eagle.

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.0.1



Broad Range of Subjects

More than 135 merit badges in 14 subject areas:

Agribusiness

Arts and crafts

Business and industry

Communications

Conservation

Hobbies

Natural science

Personal development

Physical science

Professions

Public service

Sports

Trades

Transportation



<https://www.scouting.org/programs/scouts-bsa/advancement-and-awards/merit-badges/>



Benefits of Merit Badges

- ❖ Contribution to the objectives of Scouting: citizenship, character, leadership and fitness
- ❖ Development of confidence, self-reliance, and social skills
- ❖ Physical fitness and healthy lifestyles
- ❖ Career and hobby choices may result
- ❖ Exposure to positive role models:



You!

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.0.1



Qualifications to Become a Merit Badge Counselor

- ♣ At least 18 years of age
- ♣ Good character
- ♣ Recognized as having skills and education in the subject area
- ♣ Good rapport with leaders and Scout-age youth



Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.1.3



Special Certifications and Trainings

Specific training is required for some BSA activities, including merit badges.



A counselor *must* hold the specific certification or work with someone who does.

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.1.1



Registering as a Merit Badge Counselor

- ❖ New merit badge counselors must submit a BSA adult application for the position of merit badge counselor (code 42). In Chief Seattle Council, this requirement is waived for persons who are currently registered and have a BSA Adult Application on file.
- ❖ Merit badge counselors who are re-registering need not complete a new application.
- ❖ “Merit badge counselor” is a council or district position.
- ❖ *Approval of merit badge counselors is the responsibility of the council advancement committee, not the unit.*

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.1.2



Forms Needed to Register as a Merit Badge Counselor

ADULT APPLICATION

This application is also available in Spanish. Esta solicitud también está disponible en español.

Your participation in the BSA can help youth become better citizens.

Adult leaders serve as important role models for youth in the BSA and this application aids the chartered organization in selecting qualified adult volunteer leaders.

Youth Protection Training

All adult applicants are required to take this training in order to complete the adult application process. Go to my.Scouting.org to create an account and take the training online or contact your local council for classroom training. Include a copy of your completion certificate with this application.

Mission

The mission of the BSA is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Scout Law.

Criminal Background Check*

In order to complete the adult application process, you will need to review the different disclosures that have been separately provided to you. The separate authorization form must be signed and returned when you submit your application.

Excerpt From the Declaration of Religious Principle

The BSA maintains that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God and, therefore, recognizes the religious element in the training of the member, but it is absolutely nonsectarian in its attitude toward that religious training. Its policy is that the home and organization or group with which the member is connected shall give definite attention to religious life. Only persons willing to subscribe to these precepts from the Declaration of Religious Principle and the Bylaws of the BSA shall be entitled to register.

**The four different background check forms must be torn off and each separately given to the applicant.*

BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

Adult Application - position code 42.

**Boy Scouts of America
MERIT BADGE COUNSELOR INFORMATION**
(Please type or print legibly.)

Name: _____ Primary phone: _____ Home Cell Work
 Address: _____ Other phone: _____ Home Cell Work
 City/State/zip: _____ Other phone: _____ Home Cell Work
 Email address: _____ I do not have email. Age _____
 District: _____ Unit: Troop Team Crew Ship No. _____ BSA ID: _____
 I am not affiliated with a district. I am not affiliated with a unit.

***Required field. Primary phone and email address indicate how Scouts should contact you.**

To qualify as a merit badge counselor, you must

- Be at least 18 years old and of good character.
- Be registered with the Boy Scouts of America (position code 42).
- Complete Youth Protection training.
- Be recognized as having the skills and education in the merit badge subjects covered and hold any required qualifications and training as outlined in the Guide to State Scouting or the Guide to Advancement--no one others so qualified.
- Be able to work with Scout-age boys.

As a merit badge counselor, I agree to

- Follow the requirements of the merit badge, making no deletions or additions, ensuring that the advancement standards are fair and uniform for all Scouts.
- Have a Scout accompanied by his buddy during all instructional sessions.
- Keep my Youth Protection training current.
- Renew my registration annually if I plan to continue as a merit badge counselor.

Merit Badges <small>For more than eight merit badges, attach additional sheets.</small>	Add (A) Drop (D)	For each merit badge, list qualification(s) that support your request. <small>Qualifications could include college degrees, formal training certificates, positions held, and specific life experiences.</small>
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		

A = Adding a new merit badge that you will counsel in the near future. D = Removing your name from the roster for this merit badge.

Complete the following:

This is a new application (first time to register as a merit badge counselor).
 Attach this form to the USA Adult Application, indicating position code 42.
 This is an update to an existing list of merit badge subjects.
 I no longer wish to serve as a merit badge counselor.

Youth Protection training date: _____
(Attach copy of the summer certificate.)

I agree to work with:
 All Scouts
 All Scouts in these districts:
 Only with Scouts in these units (indicate whether troop, team, or crew).

Counselors are encouraged to be available to work with any Scout in any unit.
 I plan to serve as a merit badge counselor for this event or outside organization: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Council Approval:

Name (print): _____
 Position: _____
 Date: _____

MB Counselor Information 34405



Complete Youth Protection Training



Note: In Chief Seattle Council, YPT must be renewed yearly.

www.my.scouting.org

Good for

2
YEARS

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.1.1



Approval by Local Council

- ♣ Local councils establish procedures for registration, re-registration, approval, and for reviewing:
 - Background checks
 - Youth Protection Training
 - Any council-required certifications
- ♣ Approval is for specific merit badges.
- ♣ Counselors may work with just one unit, but registration and council advancement committee approvals are still required.



The Process of Counseling

- ♣ A Scout develops an interest in a subject.
- ♣ Scouts indicate their interest and discuss the badge with their unit leader.
- ♣ The unit leader signs a blue card and provides at least one counselor.
- ♣ The Scout contacts a counselor.
- ♣ The Scout and counselor meet**—often several times.
- ♣ The requirements are fulfilled.

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.3.0



The Process of Counseling

- ♣ The counselor approves completion and signs the blue card.
- ♣ The Scout returns the signed blue card to their unit leader for signature.
- ♣ The unit leader gives the Scout the applicant record section.
- ♣ The unit reports the merit badge as advancement.
- ♣ The merit badge is presented.

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.3.0



The Merit Badge Process

Scout indicates interest;
discusses with unit leader;
gets MBC name and blue card



Scout contacts counselor



Scout/counselor first meeting



Subsequent

Scout/counselor meetings



Scout completes requirements

Counselor approves completion
and retains the Counselor
portion of the blue card

Scout returns completed
merit badge card to unit leader

Unit reports advancement and
obtains badge for presentation



Application for Merit Badge

The Blue Card

The unit leader signature:

- ♣ Required for Scouts to work with counselors
- ♣ Does not indicate unit leader “approval”
- ♣ Evidence of discussion between unit leader and Scout
- ♣ Indicates registered counselor has been recommended
- ♣ Not required for Scout to get started on requirements

“I have discussed this merit badge with this Scout and recommended at least one merit badge counselor.”

APPLICATION FOR MERIT BADGE

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

is a registered
 Boy Scout Varsity Scout Venturer
of _____ No. _____
troop, team, crew, ship

District _____

Council _____

I have discussed this merit badge with this Scout and recommended at least one merit badge counselor.

Date _____ Signature of unit leader _____

BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA®

34124

Application for Merit Badge

The Blue Card – Reverse Side

Counselor's information →

Counselor signs in two places → once all requirements are complete

Unit leader's second signature

1/3 goes to the unit as application for the badge

1/3 goes to Scout for their record

1/3 goes to the counselor's records

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.0.2

Merit Badges in Scoutbook

Whether connecting with scouts in-person or virtually, individually (with a buddy) or in a group, Scoutbook provides a way to easily record requirements that will automatically be uploaded to Internet Advancement.

Steps for recording Merit Badges using Scoutbook:

- Connect with the Scout in Scoutbook
 - By invite from unit leader or parent
 - Connect yourself with scout using Scoutbook
- Check for “initial Unit Leader signature”
- Work with Scout on merit badge
 - In-person according to normal guidelines
 - Virtually – paying attention to BSA Social Media & Digital Safety guidelines
- Mark completed requirements in Scoutbook
- Print “blue card” if desired (this is not necessary for advancement record-keeping purposes).
- Unit leader or designee marks the Merit Badge as “Approved/Recorded”

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.3.3



Digital “Blue Card”

mb-app-blue-card-fillable.pdf - Adobe Acrobat Reader DC

File Edit View Sign Window Help

Home Tools MBC-work-on-m... MBC-Connect-to-a... Scouts-BSA-Requr... mb-app-blue-card-... Guide to Advance... Sign In

Information for Applicant

- A merit badge application can be approved only by a registered merit badge counselor.
- You **must** have a buddy with you (Scout buddy system) at each meeting with the merit badge counselor.
- Turn in your approved application to your unit leader. You will be awarded the merit badge emblem and certificate at a suitable occasion.

Information for Counselor

- Merit badge applications must be signed in advance by the applicant's unit leader.
- The Scout's buddy (Scout buddy system) must also be in attendance at all instructional sessions.
- You may not change any requirement, but you may share your knowledge or experience that will make counseling more interesting and valuable.

Requirement No. and letter	Date of approval	Counselor Initial															

APPLICATION FOR MERIT BADGE

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

Email _____

Is a registered
 Scout Venturer Sea Scout

of _____ Troop No. _____
 Troop, crew, ship


District _____

Council _____

I have discussed this merit badge with this scout and recommended at least one merit badge counselor.

Signature of unit leader _____ Date _____

Leader's Email _____

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To use this electronic blue card, we suggest the following process:

- 1) The Scout contacts the Scoutmaster to request a blue card.

Sample pdf provided

Role of a Merit Badge Counselor

Interview the Scout to determine:

- ♣ Their preparedness
- ♣ Their current knowledge
- ♣ Their interest

In subsequent meetings:

- ♣ Evaluate progress
- ♣ Review completed work



Role of a Merit Badge Counselor

Coaching:

- ♣ Teach required skills.
- ♣ Provide opportunities to practice.
- ♣ Provide encouragement and also praise when appropriate.
- ♣ Encourage goal setting and provide help and support in reaching goals.
- ♣ Evaluate progress and respond accordingly.



Role of a Merit Badge Counselor

Mentoring:

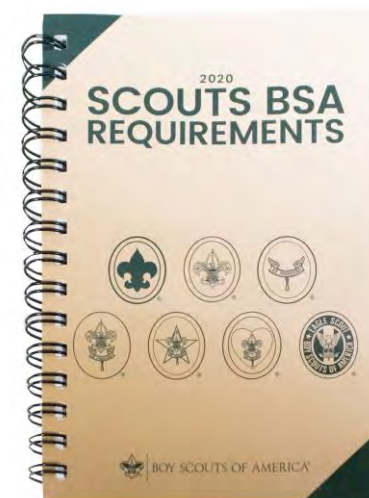
- ❖ Establish a relationship, taking a genuine interest in the Scout's projects.
- ❖ Spark curiosity.
- ❖ Go for the deeper dive.
- ❖ Encourage long term goal-setting.



Merit Badge Requirements

Finding current requirements for a merit badge

- ♣ *Scouts BSA Requirements* (current edition)
- ♣ Merit badge pamphlet (latest printing)
- ♣ www.scouting.org/advancement



Are the requirements flexible?

- ♣ No; they must be fulfilled as written.
- ♣ Wording matters!
- ♣ “Show,” “demonstrate,” “describe,” “make,” “list,” etc., are to be taken literally.



Meeting More Than One Requirement at a Time

A single activity may fulfill more than one requirement if...

- ♣ Requirements match and have the same intent.
- ♣ It is not specifically disallowed (ex: Cooking MB).
- ♣ The Scout remembers safety content.
- ♣ Common sense suggests that meeting the requirement more than once is unnecessary.

More work will be needed if requirements are only *similar*.

Guide to Advancement topic 4.2.3.6



Policy on Unauthorized Changes to Advancement Program

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. For details see section 10, “Advancement for Members With Special Needs.”

–*The Guide to Advancement*, No. 33088



Scouts with Special Needs

- ❖ Merit badge requirements must not be waived or changed for any Scout.
- ❖ Scouts with disabilities—either permanent or expected to last at least two years or beyond age 18—still may advance.
- ❖ The “Application for Alternative Eagle Scout Rank Merit Badges” may be found at:
www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-730.pdf



Guide to Advancement section 10



Two-deep leadership and no one-on-one contact between adults and youth members includes digital communication.

Leaders may not have one-on-one private online communications or engage one-on-one in other digital activities (games, social media, etc.) with youth members. Leaders should copy a parent and another leader in digital and online communication, ensuring no one-on-one contact exists in video chats, text, social media, or other forms of online or digital communication.

- ❖ <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/safety-moments/digital-safety-and-online-scouting-activities/>

Tips for Counseling

Make Scouts feel
welcome
and relaxed.



- ♣ First impressions matter.
- ♣ Ask a few simple questions.
- ♣ Show them something related to the subject.
- ♣ Invite them to demonstrate a simple skill.
- ♣ Remember: This is Scouting. Have fun.



Tips for Counseling

Use the EDGE method.

- ♣ **E**xplain
- ♣ **D**emonstrate
- ♣ **G**uide
- ♣ **E**nable



Group Instruction

Benefits

- ♣ Guest experts
- ♣ Interactive learning
- ♣ Slide shows, skits, demonstrations, and other dynamic approaches



The Challenge

Every Scout must actually and personally fulfill every requirement as written.

Group Instruction

Ensuring Quality

- ❖ Limit group instruction to cases where the benefits are compelling.
- ❖ See that all counselors are registered and approved.
- ❖ Establish processes where counselors confirm prerequisites have been completed.
- ❖ Report any issues to the council advancement committee.

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.3.2



Camp Settings

- ❖ No exemption from merit badge counselor qualifications.
- ❖ Staff members under 18 may assist, but must work with qualified counselors.
- ❖ Instruction must be done in accordance with the “group instruction” procedures found in the *Guide to Advancement*.



Guide to Advancement topics 5.0.1.3 and 7.0.3.2



Merit Badge Events

- ❖ Merit badge fairs may provide an overview or introduction to multiple badges.
- ❖ It should be rare that Scouts begin and finish badges at one- or two-day events.
- ❖ Prerequisites should be made known early.
- ❖ Scouts must actually and personally fulfill all requirements.



Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.3.2



Merit Badge Events

- ♣ Only minimal fees should be charged for events.
- ♣ Events staged as fundraisers are discouraged.
- ♣ Non-Scouting organizations or businesses are not allowed to use protected BSA trade names, images, logos, or artwork without national BSA permission.
- ♣ Non-Scouting organizations must have local council approval to present classes that are for the sole purpose of earning merit badges.

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.4.9 and 7.0.4.10



Worksheets and Learning Aids

- ❖ Merit badge “worksheets” from the Web or other sources are unofficial but may aid in learning.
- ❖ These tools must relate to current BSA requirements, which still must be fulfilled as written.
- ❖ Worksheets may be used to meet “in writing” requirements.
- ❖ Worksheets are not a substitute for “telling,” “showing,” or “demonstrating,” etc.
- ❖ *Scouts must not be required to use them.*

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.4.8



Completing the “Partial” Blue Card

- ✦ The merit badge counselor records and initials the front of the card in the middle section as each requirement is completed.
- ✦ The back of the card is not signed in either place until *all* requirements are fulfilled.
- ✦ Partials do not expire as long as the Scout is a registered youth member.
- ✦ Accepting a “partial” is at the follow-up counselor’s discretion.
- ✦ Scoutbook and/or the digital blue card make it easy to track partial work.

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.3.3



Once It's Earned, It's Earned

A Scout who has earned a merit badge from a registered and approved counselor by actually and personally fulfilling the requirements as written, will have met the purpose of the merit badge program and the contributions to the objectives of Scouting. The badge is theirs to keep and count.



Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.4.6



A Second Counselor Review May Be Warranted If...

- ❖ A Scout, to whom it has been made clear that only registered and approved counselors are to be used, chooses to ignore this mandated procedure.
- ❖ It becomes plainly evident that it could not have been possible for a Scout to actually and personally fulfill requirements as written. In this case a limited recourse is available, according to the details outlined in topic 7.0.4.7.

Guide to Advancement topics 7.0.4.6 & 7.0.4.7



Addressing Merit Badge Myths

1. At what age or rank may Scouts work on merit badges?
2. What is the maximum number of merit badges a Scout may work on at the same time?
3. Is a Scout allowed to begin work on a merit badge without their unit leader's approval?



Addressing Merit Badge Myths

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There is no limit once registered with Scouts BSA, Venturing or Sea Scouts.

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There is no limit.

3. Is a Scout allowed to begin work on a merit badge without their unit leader's approval?

Yes. Approval is not required; a discussion is now held before contacting a counselor.



Addressing Merit Badge Myths

4. If a Scout has too many unfinished merit badges, may the Scoutmaster limit how many others he or she may begin?
5. Is it appropriate to tell a Scout he or she must earn all or most of the Eagle-required badges before the Scout earns any others?



Addressing Merit Badge Myths

4. If a Scout has too many unfinished merit badges, may the Scoutmaster limit how many others he or she may begin?

No. During the discussion of a new merit badge, the Scoutmaster should provide counseling on what to do.

5. Is it appropriate to tell a Scout he or she *must* earn all or most of the Eagle-required badges before the Scout earns any others?



Addressing Merit Badge Myths

4. If a Scout has too many unfinished merit badges, may the Scoutmaster limit how many others he or she may begin?

No. During the discussion of a new merit badge, the Scoutmaster should provide counseling on what to do.

5. Is it appropriate to tell a Scout he or she *must* earn all or most of the Eagle-required badges before the Scout earns any others?

No. A Scout may earn merit badges in any order.



Addressing Merit Badge Myths

6. Is the Scoutmaster permitted to serve as a troop merit badge counselor for some merit badges like Camping or Hiking?
7. What is the maximum number of badges a youth may earn from one counselor?



Addressing Merit Badge Myths

6. Is the Scoutmaster permitted to serve as a troop merit badge counselor for some merit badges like Camping or Hiking?

Yes - *only* if the unit leader is registered and approved as a counselor for that badge.

7. What is the maximum number of badges a youth may earn from one counselor?



Addressing Merit Badge Myths

6. Is the Scoutmaster permitted to serve as a troop merit badge counselor for some merit badges like Camping or Hiking?

Yes - *only* if the unit leader is registered and approved as a counselor for that badge.

7. What is the maximum number of badges a youth may earn from one counselor?

There is no BSA limit. A unit leader may set a limit, but it must apply to all Scouts in the unit.



Addressing Merit Badge Myths

8. How many badges may one counselor be approved to counsel?

9. May you counsel your own son or daughter?

10. May you counsel in other units, districts, or councils?



Addressing Merit Badge Myths

8. How many badges may one counselor be approved to counsel?

The national office places no limit on this.
Councils may do so, within reason.

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The national office places no limit on this. Councils may do so, within reason.

9. May you counsel your own son or daughter?

Yes, but generally it is better for Scouts to learn from a variety of adults.

10. May you counsel in other units, districts, or councils?



Addressing Merit Badge Myths

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The national office places no limit on this. Councils may do so, within reason.

9. May you counsel your own son or daughter?

Yes, but generally it is better for Scouts to learn from a variety of adults.

10. May you counsel in other units, districts, or councils?

Yes – this is encouraged!



Addressing Merit Badge Myths

11. Due to tight schedules, is a camp staff member allowed to make minor adjustments so requirements can be finished at camp?
12. Once you are registered and approved as a counselor, at what point must you re-register and become re-approved?
13. When does a “partial” expire?



Addressing Merit Badge Myths

11. Due to tight schedules, is a camp staff member allowed to make minor adjustments so requirements can be finished at camp?

Absolutely not.

12. Once you are registered and approved as a counselor, at what point must you re-register and become re-approved?

13. When does a “partial” expire?



Addressing Merit Badge Myths

11. Due to tight schedules, is a camp staff member allowed to make minor adjustments so requirements can be finished at camp?

Absolutely not.

12. Once you are registered and approved as a counselor, at what point must you re-register and become re-approved?

Annually.

13. When does a “partial” expire?



Addressing Merit Badge Myths

11. Is a camp staff member allowed to make minor adjustments to requirements so they can be finished at camp?

Absolutely not.

12. Once you are registered and approved as a counselor, at what point must you re-register and become re-approved?

Annually.

13. When does a “partial” expire?

On the Scout's 18th birthday.



Merit Badge Counselors

- ♣ Share passion
- ♣ Teach skills
- ♣ Touch lives



Chief Seattle Council MBC registration

1. Complete a [BSA Adult Application](#) if you are not currently registered with a unit (Pack, Troop, Team, Crew).
2. Complete [BSA Youth Protection Training](#) and save a copy of your training certificate.
3. Complete the [Merit Badge Counselor Information](#) form.
4. Email the **Merit Badge Counselor Information** form, **BSA Youth Protection Training** certificate, and **Adult Application** (if needed) to membership@seattlebsa.org and CC both your district Merit Badge Counselor Coordinator and Advancement Chair.



MBC Registration Process pdf



For More Information

Resources

- *Guide to Advancement*, No. 33088
- BSA's *Guide to Safe Scouting*, No. 34416
- Merit badge pamphlets
- *A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling*, No. 512-065 (2018)
- *Scouts BSA Handbook* (previously Boy Scout Handbook)
- Merit Badge Counselor Information, No. 34405
- BSA Adult Application, No. 524-501
- Merit Badge Group Instruction Guide, No. 512-066
- Scouting.org: <https://www.scouting.org/programs/scouts-bsa/advancement-and-awards/resources/>

