

BSA Troop 357

Advancement Guidelines

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

Advancement establishes 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 so that you may 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 (currently the 11th Edition). You may work on and practice the 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 or campout.

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.

To advance in Troop 357 requires a combination of being active at troop functions and meetings, paying attention and being persistent. If you think you are ready to be evaluated in a skill or would like some help in learning a skill, you should first attempt to work with a more experienced scout. Your Patrol Guide, Senior Patrol Leader, Patrol Leader or any scout the rank of Star or above may help you. When the two of you think that you are ready to be tested on a skill, the scout who has helped you initials your book in the requirements list found in the front of each rank section of your handbook.

You should then approach any assistant scoutmaster to help 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.

When an assistant scoutmaster or his designee signs off a requirement, then they as well as the scout should assure that it is reported to the scribe in charge of the troop computer database. Normally a list of advancement requirements for each rank and scout will be available on a bulletin board at the troop meeting. The adult should initial and date the appropriate requirement block after signing your book. The troop does maintain a database of all scout information, advancement and attendance records. Every effort is made to keep these records current and correct. However, it is incumbent upon each Scout to periodically review their record and report any apparent discrepancies

In Boy Scouts troop leaders, rather than parents, sign off advancement requirements. In order to avoid the appearance of impropriety, troop leaders should 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. Every effort should be made to have another leader sign off the instructing leader's son.

In keeping with the aims and ideals of the Boy Scouts of America, each requirement must be fulfilled as described in the handbook. The requirement may ask you to show, tell, do, describe, etc. We encourage, but cannot demand, that a scout meet or exceed this minimum requirement. By the same token, we expect that a scout learn the skill and be able to reasonably redemonstrate the skill to the Scoutmaster during a Scoutmaster Conference or the Board during a Board of Review.

While the troop, its leadership and its program plan attempt to assist all scouts in their advancement, particularly up through First Class, it's up to you to take advantage of the advancement opportunities available to you. You must 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, or other journal.

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.)

SCOUTMASTER CONFERENCE

When you have completed all the requirements for your rank, and feel you are ready for a scoutmaster conference, you must make an appointment with the Scoutmaster. ALL conferences must be conducted by the Scoutmaster or another adult that he assigns your conference to. You **MAY NOT** bypass the scoutmaster and have a conference with another assistant scoutmaster, without prior approval. To sign up for a conference you may sign the sheet located on the bulleting board at the troop meeting or send an email to the Scoutmaster. Normally one weeks notice is needed to arrange a conference. In some cases, the Scoutmaster may be in a position to conduct or assign a conference on a same night basis, but this should not be counted upon by the Scout.

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.

BOARD OF REVIEW

After the scoutmaster conference, you should arrange for your Board of Review (BOR) with the advancement chairman, following the same procedures as outlined for a conference. You must sign up at least one week in advance or send an email to the scoutmaster and advancement chair. In addition, you must obtain a current record of your advancement from the troop database.

Boards of Review for all ranks except Eagle Scout, are normally held once a month, and are composed of two to six registered members of the troop committee. (Eagle Scout Boards of Review are arranged through the 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 ask you to redo every skill that you completed but rather to ensure that you have completed all of the requirements, and that you have retained a sufficient working knowledge of the skill. The board will also determine the quality of your troop experience, and encourage you to advance toward the next rank. As established earlier in this document, the troop expects a scout to reasonably be able to redemonstrate a skill that they have completed for the rank in question. The BOR may always, for any rank, ask a scout to properly repeat the Scout Oath and Law, and to tie any of the six basic knots that have been learned to date.

Sometimes you will meet a BOR 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 BOR 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 must be in your class "A" uniform when you appear before a BOR. 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. They are likely to ask you to properly repeat the Scout Oath and Law. 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 a rank pin ("mother's pin"). Troop 357 normally has at least three 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, the troop committee, and a representative of your District Advancement Committee, as well as the benefiting organization, must approve your project before you begin carrying it out. More specific requirements for Eagle will be explained at this time. The council and national BSA organization has specific guidance for this rank.

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 120 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.

Troop 357 is a troop with a strong sense of tradition. Almost all scouts take the swimming merit badge during their first or second summer camp, depending upon the local water temperature. Most of our scouts have the pioneering merit badge. With the exception of one person, all Eagle Scouts in Troop 357 have earned the Cooking Merit Badge. The Scoutmaster and the Troop Committee expect all scouts to continue these traditions.

You can find information about merit badge requirements in the appropriate merit badge pamphlets and in the current year's Boy Scout Requirements book. Information is available on the troop web site, the Merit Badge University web site and at many sites on the world wide web. Some of the merit badge books should be available in the troop library. All of them are available from your Scout Shop or Council Trading Post, If you are finished using merit badge pamphlets that you own, many troops encourage you to donate them to the troop library.

There are a variety of ways to earn a merit badge. The traditional manner is to work one-on-one with a registered, qualified, merit badge counselor. Summer camp is a popular time to earn many merit badges, particularly the outdoor oriented ones. Troop 357 sponsors a merit badge college each spring, during which scouts may earn a merit badge. Members of the troop often travel to other merit badge colleges around the area. Troop merit badge counselors often run courses for groups of scouts from the troop. Regardless of how a merit badge is taught and earned, the following process must be followed.

1. Get a merit badge sign-up form or 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 or sign-up sheet, he or she will keep the Counselor's section and return the rest of the card to you. Bring the rest of the card or sheet 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.

To reiterate, you must have Scoutmaster approval PRIOR to working on a merit badge. Requirements for a merit badge must be done while you are working on a merit badge, with the exception of camping for Camping Merit Badge. For instance, going to see the city counsel in session, while you were a cub scout, does not qualify you for that requirement three years later when you finally work on Citizenship in the Community merit badge. Also, in accordance with Boy Scout rules, all merit badge counselors must be registered with the BSA. This is a free process for the counselor. If you are going to work on a specialty merit badge, such as Scholarship, with a person such as your teacher, let us know and we may be able to make provisions to have the merit badge application signed by a registered counselor for you.

SCOUT SPIRIT AND ATTENDANCE

The rank advancement requirements of the Boy Scout program include a requirement that each scout demonstrate Scout Spirit and also includes some provision for being active for a certain period of time. For the rank of Tenderfoot a scout must pass a physical fitness requirement that includes exercising for a month before retesting. For the Second and First Class ranks a Scout must attend five and ten, respectively, activities other than troop or patrol activities. Typically these are campouts, leading to service or attendance time of 5 months between ranks. For the rank of Star a scout must be in a position of leadership for four months and for the ranks of Life and Eagle the minimum time of service is six months each.

However, Scout Spirit is determined not only by how long a scout is registered between ranks. A major element of evaluating this is the attendance of the Scout during the months between ranks. We all have many claims on our time and may be involved in many other activities besides Scouts, including the adult volunteers. For a scout to achieve the rank of Star or above Troop 357 wishes that they make a commitment to the troop. Therefore, in addition to being registered we desire that a scout attend a minimum of 75% of the troop meetings and outdoor activities, like campouts, or the equivalent, to be eligible to advance to the next rank.

How does one meet this requirement? In addition to the passage of time, one must also have a total number of activities. For instance, Star requires four months of time. In that four months there are 16 possible troop meetings and at least four campouts possible. For 75% attendance credit, a scout needs to be at a minimum of 12 troop meetings and 3 outdoor activities. (18 troop meetings and six outdoor activities for Life and Eagle. A high adventure trip or Order of the Arrow activity may be substituted for one troop outdoor activity, and one OA meeting may be used for a troop meeting.) Thus if a scout has been registered the proper amount of time, but could not participate in troop activities he must wait to have his Scout Spirit requirement fulfilled until the minimum activity requirements are met. If there are any questions on this policy, please take advantage of the Scoutmaster Conference to seek clarification.

LEADERSHIP

The ranks of Star, Life and Eagle require that the scout show leadership by holding a troop office, such as patrol leader or senior patrol leader, scribe, quartermaster, etc. or fulfilling a scoutmaster assigned service project. The positions of responsibility that qualify for this requirement may be found in the scout handbook. Adequately demonstrating leadership is covered during the scoutmaster conference and BOR and there are separate documents explaining the policies and requirements.

RECORD-KEEPING

Your advancement records are kept in three places — the Council office, the troop Advancement Chairman (via the troop database), 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. Troop 357 maintains the advancement information on computers. Every effort is made to keep these records current and correct. However, it is incumbent upon each Scout to periodically review their record and report any apparent discrepancies

Advancement in Scouting is for the benefit of the scout. As such, you have a responsibility for your own records, regardless of the other places and people that keep them. As you advance you will receive certain 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 (if used), 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. Some sage advice is offered from scouts and their parents who have needed these records in the past; periodically make a photocopy of the cards and the signed pages of your handbook and store them with other valuable family papers.

We want to reiterate that even though the troop does maintain a database of all scout information and advancement records and every effort is made to keep this record current and correct, it is incumbent upon each Scout to periodically review their record and report any apparent discrepancies.

IN CLOSING.....

The previous pages of this handout highlight the goals, expectations, and processes of advancement within the guidelines of the Boy Scouts of America, and encompassing some unique interpretations, procedures and requirements of Troop 357. The subject is a complex one, with many possible permutations and interpretations. If there are any questions about this subject, please contact the Scoutmaster, Troop Advancement Chairman, or Troop Committee Chairman.

Official BSA requirements frequently change and will be updated within this document as needed. Official BSA rules and requirements in effect at the time of the advancement always take precedent. In the same manner, there are always unique circumstances in any scout or family situation. As such it is always appropriate for the Scoutmaster to use his discretion interpreting or advising a scout on these policies and procedures.

RECOMMENDED READING

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

INTERNET RESOURCES

- bsatroop357.org
- RaleighMBU.com
- Meritbadge.com
- www.occoneechee.org
- www.usscouts.org

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- The Scoutmaster Handbook, (No.33009)
- Advancement Committee Policies and Procedures, (No. 33088B)
- Troop 336, Longhorn Council, Ft. Worth, Texas
- Troop 125, Crossroads of America Council, Carmel, Indiana

The original version of this document was supplied to the US Scouting Service Project by Sarah G. Nunez, Troop 205, Longhorn Council, Ft. Worth, Texas. It was edited to make it generic, rather than specific to her Troop and Council. This document has been further edited to make it specific to the policies of BSA Troop 357, Highlands United Methodist Church, Raleigh, North Carolina, Occoneechee Council.