

## Important excerpts from the [Guide To Advancement - 2021](#), No. 33088 (SKU-648216)

**NOTE:** *In the topics below, procedures that apply to merit badges typically also apply to other advancements, such as Nova and Supernova awards.*

### Introduction

The current edition of the **Guide to Advancement** replaces any previous editions and is the official Boy Scouts of America source on advancement procedures. The most current and official version of the **Guide to Advancement** can be accessed from [www.scouting.org/advancement](http://www.scouting.org/advancement).

### 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 members with special needs. For details see Section 10, "Advancement for Members With Special Needs."

### The Guide to Safe Scouting Applies

Policies and procedures outlined in the Guide to Safe Scouting apply to all BSA activities, including those related to advancement and Eagle Scout, Summit, and Quartermaster service projects.

### How Is a "Month" Defined?

A month is a month regardless how many days it has. It is not defined as 30 days or four weeks. February 2 up to August 2, or August 31 up to February 28 (or 29th if leap year) are examples of six-month periods. Six months does not mean 180 days.

#### 4.0.0.1 Changes to Requirements

Advancement requirements change from time to time. For each program's requirements, consult the following web pages, which are expected to be updated annually:

**Cub Scouting:** [www.scouting.org/programs/cub-scouts/what-cub-scouts-earn/the-advancement-trail](http://www.scouting.org/programs/cub-scouts/what-cub-scouts-earn/the-advancement-trail)

**Scouts BSA:** <http://www.scouting.org/programs/scouts-bsa/advancement-and-awards>

**Venturing:** <http://www.scouting.org/programs/venturing/venturing-awards-and-advancement/rank-advancement>

**Sea Scouts:** <http://www.seascout.org/advancement-central>

Please note that web addresses appearing in the Guide to Advancement are confirmed prior to publication, but they are subject to change.

Once a new or revised requirement appears on one of those web pages, any Cub Scout, Scouts BSA member, Venturer, or Sea Scout beginning work on the next rank (or Eagle Palm) must use the new or revised requirement as stated there.

Changes may also be introduced in youth handbooks or various official BSA publications or releases before appearing on one of the above web pages. In this case, unless official communications set forth a different procedure or establish a date by when use of the old requirements must cease, youth members have through December 31 of that year to decide what to do. They may continue—or begin work—using the old requirements, or may switch to—or begin work—using the new requirements. Scouts who choose to use the old requirements may continue using them until the rank (or Palm) has been completed. Those who have not begun work on a rank (or Palm) by December 31 of the year a change in its requirements is announced must use the new requirements.

For handling changes to merit badge requirements, see "What to Do When Requirements Change," 7.0.4.3.

Former members who rejoin a BSA program, still as youth members, may carry on in the advancement program and pick up where they left off, but they will not receive credit for activities while not registered. A former member who is no longer eligible to participate in a BSA program as a youth member due to age, for example, can neither receive credit for completing advancement requirements nor be awarded any advancement-oriented recognition such as ranks or merit badges, etc., that the individual was ineligible to earn as a youth member under the rules in effect at that time.

#### 7.0.3.1 Counseling Sessions and Certifying Completion

A youth member must not meet one-on-one with an adult. Sessions with counselors must take place in accordance with the *Guide to Safe Scouting* ([www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss/gss01](http://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss/gss01)). Notwithstanding the minimum leader requirements, age- and program-appropriate supervision must always be provided. Youth should be encouraged to bring a buddy, such as a friend, parent, guardian, brother, sister, other relative—or, better yet, another Scout working on the same badge. If merit badge counseling includes any web-based interaction, it must be conducted in accordance with BSA's social media guidelines ([www.scouting.org/training/youth-protection](http://www.scouting.org/training/youth-protection)). For example, always copy one or more authorized adults on email messages between counselors and Scouts.

When meeting with the counselor, the Scout should bring any required projects. If these cannot be transported, the Scout should present evidence, such as photographs or adult verification. The unit leader, for example, might state that a satisfactory bridge or tower has been built for the Pioneering merit badge or that meals were prepared for Cooking. If there are questions that requirements were met, a counselor may confirm with adults involved. Once satisfied, the counselor signs the blue card or otherwise documents completion using the date upon which the Scout completed the requirements, or in the case of partials, records the individual requirements passed.

Note that from time to time, it may be appropriate for a requirement that has been met for one badge to also count for another. See "Fulfilling More Than One Requirement With a Single Activity," 4.2.3.6.

### **7.0.3.2 Group Instruction**

It is acceptable—and sometimes desirable—for merit badges to be taught in group settings. This often occurs at camp and merit badge midways, fairs, clinics, or similar events, and even online through webinars. These can be efficient methods, and interactive group discussions can support learning. Group instruction can also be attractive to "guest experts" assisting registered and approved counselors. Slide shows, skits, demonstrations, panels, and various other techniques can also be employed, but as any teacher can attest, not everyone will learn all the material. Because of the importance of individual attention and personal learning in the merit badge program, group instruction should be focused on those scenarios where the benefits are compelling.

There must be attention to each individual's projects and fulfillment of all requirements. We must know that every Scout—actually and personally—completed them. If, for example, a requirement uses words like "show," "demonstrate," or "discuss," then every Scout must do that. It is unacceptable to award badges on the basis of sitting in classrooms watching demonstrations, or remaining silent during discussions.

It is sometimes reported that Scouts who have received merit badges through group instructional settings have not fulfilled all the requirements. To offer a quality merit badge program, council and district advancement committees should ensure the following are in place for all group instructional events.

- A culture is established for merit badge group instructional events that partial completions are acceptable expected results.
- A guide or information sheet is distributed in advance of events that promotes the acceptability of partials, explains how merit badges can be finished after events, lists merit badge prerequisites, and provides other helpful information that will establish realistic expectations for the number of merit badges that can be earned at an event.
- Merit badge counselors are known to be registered and approved.
- Any guest experts or guest speakers, or others assisting who are not registered and approved as merit badge counselors, do not accept the responsibilities of, or behave as, merit badge counselors, either at a group instructional event or at any other time. Their service is temporary, not ongoing.
- Counselors agree to sign off only requirements that Scouts have actually and personally completed.
- Counselors agree not to assume that stated prerequisites for an event have been completed without some level of evidence that the work has been done. Pictures and letters from other merit badge counselors or unit leaders are the best form of prerequisite documentation when the actual work done cannot be brought to the camp or site of the merit badge event.
- There is a mechanism for unit leaders or others to report concerns to a council advancement committee on summer camp merit badge programs, group instructional events, and any other merit badge counseling issues— especially in instances where it is believed BSA procedures are not followed. See "Reporting Merit Badge Counseling Concerns," 1 1.1.0.0.
- Additional guidelines and best practices can be found in the "Merit Badge Group Instruction Guide," developed by volunteers in conjunction with the National Advancement Program Team. This guide for units, districts, and councils includes several important event planning considerations as well as suggestions for evaluating the event after it is over to identify opportunities for improvement. The guide can be downloaded from [www.scouting.org/advancement](http://www.scouting.org/advancement).

**There must be attention to each individual's projects and fulfillment of all requirements. We must know that every Scout—actually and personally- completed them.**

**It is permissible for guest speakers, guest experts, or others who are not merit badge counselors to assist in the counseling process. Those providing such assistance must be under the direction of a registered and approved counselor who is readily available on-site and provides personal supervision to assure all applicable BSA policies and procedures—including those related to BSA Youth Protection—are in place and followed.**

### 7.0.3.3 Partial Completions

Scouts need not pass all the requirements of one merit badge with the same counselor. It may be that due to timing, location issues, etc., they must meet with different counselors to finish a badge. The Application for Merit Badge has a place to record what has been finished—a "partial." In the center section on the reverse of the blue card, the counselor initials and dates each requirement passed. In the case of a partial completion, the counselor does not sign or retain his or her portion of the card. A subsequent counselor may choose not to accept partial work, but this should be rare. A Scout who believes he or she is being treated unfairly may work with the unit leader to find another qualified counselor. An example for the use of a signed partial would be to take it to camp as proof that the camp's prerequisites have been met. Partials have no expiration except the Scout's 18th birthday. Units, districts, or councils shall not establish other expiration dates for partial merit badges.

**If blue cards are not used, the council advancement committee must assure that an alternative system for recording partial merit badge completion is available.**

### 7.0.4.3 What to Do When Requirements Change

Merit badge requirements, along with changes to them, can be found at the Scouting.org Merit Badges web page: <http://www.scouting.org/programs/scouts-bsa/advancement-and-awards/merit-badges>. Once new or revised requirements appears on that page, any Scout beginning work on a merit badge must use the requirement as stated there.

Changes may also be introduced in a revised merit badge pamphlet, youth handbook, or other official BSA publication or release before appearing on the Merit Badges web page. In this case, unless official communications set forth a different procedure or establish a date by when use of the old requirements must cease, youth members have through December 31 of that year to decide what to do. They may continue—or begin work- using the old requirements, or they may switch to—or begin work—using the new requirements. Scouts who choose to use the old requirements may continue using them until the merit badge is completed. Scouts who have not begun work on a badge by December 31 of the year a change in its requirements is announced must use the new requirements.

There is no time limit between starting and completing a badge, although a counselor may determine so much time has passed since any effort took place that the new requirements must be used.

### 7.0.4.8 Unofficial Worksheets and Learning Aids

Worksheets and other materials that may be of assistance in earning merit badges are available from a variety of places including unofficial sources on the internet and even troop libraries. Use of these aids is permissible as long as the materials can be correlated with the current requirements that Scouts must fulfill. Completing "worksheets" may suffice where a requirement calls for something in writing, but this would not work for a requirement where the Scout must discuss, tell, show, or demonstrate, etc. Note that Scouts shall not be required to use these learning aids in order to complete a merit badge.