

Troop Committee Support of Advancement

What is advancement?

Advancement is one of the eight methods of the Boy Scout program.

Scouting provides a series of surmountable obstacles and steps to overcome them through the advancement method. The Scout plans his advancement, and progresses *at his own pace* as he overcomes each challenge. The Scout is rewarded for each achievement, which helps him gain self-confidence. The steps in the advancement system help a boy grow in self-reliance and the ability to help others.

Who is responsible for a Scout's advancement?

In keeping with the aims of Scouting, the Scout himself is the primary person responsible for his own advancement. He is supported by his patrol, which provides the opportunities to experience Scouting and thereby accomplish much of the requirements for advancement just by doing what Scouts do. Patrols are supported by the troop leadership.

What is the adult role in advancement?

Troop youth leadership is supported by the Scoutmaster. Assistant Scoutmasters may work with individual patrols to support the planning and execution of their patrol activities. Oversight of the Scouting program is the responsibility of the Scoutmaster. Specific responsibilities that result in advancement include:

- Meeting with the patrol leaders' council for training and coordination in planning troop activities.
- Conducting Scoutmaster conferences for all rank advancements.
- Making it possible for each Scout to experience at least 10 days and nights of camping each year.

The troop committee supports the advancement program in a number of ways:

- Ensures that quality adult leadership is recruited and trained.
- Support leaders in carrying out the program.
- Ensures that the troop has an outdoor program with a minimum of 10 days and nights of camping each year.
- Serves on boards of review and courts of honor.

Much of the committee's involvement in advancement revolves around the *advancement coordinator*. This is a volunteer position on the troop committee. The advancement coordinator's responsibilities include:

- Encourage Scouts to advance in rank.
- Work with the troop scribe to maintain all Scout advancement records.
- Arrange quarterly troop boards of review and courts of honor.
- Develop and maintain a merit badge counselor list.

- Make a prompt report on the correct form to the council service center when a troop board of review is held.
- Secure Scout badges and certificates.
- Work with the troop librarian to build and maintain a troop library of merit badge pamphlets and other advancement literature.
- Report to the troop committee at each of its meetings.

The mechanics of advancement

Advancement in Boy Scouting is a four-step process.

- **The Scout learns** – A Scout learns by doing, not by being lectured to. He develops knowledge and skill through being an active member of his patrol. As he develops, he teaches others and begins to develop leadership. Scouts do not merely fulfill a checklist of items in order to advance; rather, when Scouts do what Scouts do, advancement happens as a result.
- **The Scout is tested** – Once a Scout has demonstrated that he can do a particular requirement, he is approved for that requirement. The Scoutmaster determines who is qualified to test and approve Scouts, but it can be the Scoutmaster, a troop committee member, or another Scout. In a truly boy-led troop, it is the Scouts who approve advancement. Again, boys do not learn requirements for the purpose of having them checked off; rather, during the normal course of being a Scout, they will experience many of the requirements, and it should be a simple matter for a Scout to sit down with the appropriate person (patrol leader, Scoutmaster, etc.) with his handbook and go over what was done.
- **The Scout is reviewed** – This is where the committee comes into play. After most or all of the requirements are fulfilled for a rank, the Scout has a conference with his Scoutmaster, and once all the requirements are completed, the Scout is granted a review with a board of committee members. For all ranks except Eagle, the board of review consists of between three and six members of the troop committee. (Eagle boards of review are handled in accordance with local council procedures.) A board of review is not a retest of the skills or requirements; rather, it is an opportunity for the committee to learn from the Scout about his experience as a member of the troop and his impression of Scouting from his perspective, and for the Scout to have a chance to get to know some of the adults in the troop, other than the Scoutmaster, who make the program happen.
- **The Scout is recognized** – A Scout's rank is effective as of the date of his board of review, and he should be recognized and given his rank insignia in front of the troop as soon as possible, usually at the current or next troop meeting. Periodically, the troop committee will arrange for a court of honor which all Scouts and their families attend. At the court of honor, each advancing Scout is formally recognized and presented with his certificate.

It's important to note that requirements for Tenderfoot, Second Class and First Class can be completed in any order. It's not necessary to complete all of the Tenderfoot requirements before beginning to work on Second Class requirements. However, the Scoutmaster conference and board of review must be held in sequence. Scouts may begin working on requirements as soon as they are registered and may continue to do so until their 18th birthday. Once completed and signed off, a requirement does not expire or have to be redone.

The merit badge program

Ranks above First Class require the completion of a certain number of *merit badges* which are awarded to Scouts for completing requirements in specific fields of interest. There are over 120 merit badges and more are added almost every year.

The Scout, and a buddy, work closely with a council-approved *merit badge counselor* to complete the requirements. Each counselor is a registered member of the Boy Scouts of America (position code 42) and must complete youth protection training. When a boy feels he is ready to earn a merit badge, his Scoutmaster issues him an application for merit badge, commonly called a *blue card*, and the name and contact information for a registered merit badge counselor from a list provided by the local council or district. The counselor may or may not be from the troop. The troop advancement coordinator can assist by recruiting counselors from the troop and developing a troop counselor list, especially for those merit badges that are in higher demand.

Service projects

A Scout is expected to give service to others as part of his participation in Scouting. Service is required for the ranks of Second Class, Star and Life. Any service to others is generally acceptable. Star and Life service must be approved by the Scoutmaster beforehand.

The troop committee can assist by gathering and providing referrals to local organizations in need of service, particularly employing the skills common to Scout-age boys. The committee can also provide the resources needed to complete a service project, such as equipment and transportation. The expenditure of money on a service project can be covered by a money-earning project, for which the troop must submit a permit request. Informed-consent forms (permission slips) and tour plans may also be needed and these are done by the committee.

(All of the above is taken from *Troop Committee Guidebook*)

Frequently-asked questions about advancement (Citations are from *Guide to Advancement*)

What does “active participation” mean?

- “Active” means that a Scout is registered with the BSA, is not dismissed for disciplinary reasons, and meets the unit's reasonable expectations, or a lesser level of activity is explained. (4.2.3.1)

What are “positions of responsibility” and how are they evaluated?

- Positions of responsibility are listed in *Boy Scout Requirements*. Meeting the time test may involve any number of positions but total service time must equal at least the number of months required. Some reasonable level of performance must be demonstrated, and the troop must provide support and direction. It is unacceptable for both the Scout and the troop for a boy to hold a position “on paper,” doing nothing and producing no results. (4.2.3.4)

Why require “positions of responsibility” rather than “leadership”?

- Taking responsibility is the foundation for leadership; one cannot lead without it, and one who

leads cannot do so without others taking responsibility as well. (4.2.3.4.6)

Must the Scoutmaster conference be the last step before the board of review?

- While it makes sense to hold a conference after all other requirements are met, it is not required to be the last step. In fact, many Scoutmasters frequently confer with their Scouts, and any of such meetings could qualify. (4.2.3.5)

May a Scout choose any registered merit badge counselor?

- Although it is the Scoutmaster's responsibility to see that a counselor is identified from those approved by the council, the Scout may have one in mind, or may want to take advantage of group or outside merit badge opportunities. This is permissible, but the Scoutmaster should still ensure that the merit badge instruction is provided by approved registered counselors. (7.0.0.2)

Is there a time limit for finishing a merit badge once it is started?

- Once begun, all work must be completed prior to the Scout's 18th birthday. There is no expiration time on partially-completed requirements. (7.0.3.3)

What if merit badge requirements change?

- Generally, once a Scout begins working on a merit badge, he uses the requirements then in effect. If the requirements change after he has begun, he may continue to use all of the old requirements or may choose to use all of the new requirements. However, if no progress has been made over a substantial time, the counselor may determine that the new requirements must be followed. (7.0.4.3)

Can a Scout be denied a board of review?

- No. Once a Scout believes he has completed all the requirements, including a Scoutmaster conference, it is up to the Scoutmaster and committee to ensure that an board of review is held. The Scoutmaster cannot expect a boy to request one. (8.0.0.2)

What if parents insist on attending a board of review?

- Parents do not participate or observe their own son's board of review. Their presence can change how the Scout addresses questions, and the opportunity for further self-reliance is lessened if parents are in the room. However, if after this is explained to them, the parents strongly insist on being present, they must be permitted to do so. (8.0.1.0)

What happens if board of review members cannot unanimously agree on a decision?

- Board members are expected to reach a unanimous decision. If there is dissent, the board must determine how the boy can improve, the board of review is suspended, and a new date is scheduled. If the candidate does not agree to this, the board must notify the Scout in writing as to why he was not approved and what he must do to be approved, and he is given an explanation of appeal procedures. (8.0.1.4)