

Troop 48 Advancement Guide for Parents

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Introduction

We all want our children to succeed. This is true in school, in sports, and in scouts. But what does it mean to succeed in scouts? The answer may surprise you, but it isn't just becoming an Eagle Scout. I know that may come as a shock (it would have been to me a few years ago).

The mission of the Scouting 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 Law". One method for accomplishing this mission is through the advancement program.

Having said that getting scouts to the Eagle rank is not the goal of scouting, I do want each scout to become an Eagle Scout, and I will do all I can do to support him in his quest. Our troop and all of the adult leaders are committed to helping each scout become the best he can be and, in the process, attain the rank of Eagle Scout.

Ultimately it is up to the individual scout whether or not he becomes an Eagle Scout. I have seen many frustrated parents trying to push their son across the finish line. I have had my own frustration; both as a Scoutmaster and as a parent. A Scoutmaster can be more objective than a parent, but it is still frustrating to watch an extremely capable scout not making the effort. What seems so simple to us as adults just isn't as clear to a young boy who has different priorities. Be patient and be understanding.

This guide was prepared to help parents develop a better understanding of the Boy Scout advancement process. Parents want to help their scout advance, but may not know how to do so or even what the process is. I hope this guide will help.

I suggest using this guide as follows. New scout parents should read over the entire guide to get the broad view of advancement, but concentrating on the overview and early rank information. The parents of older scouts should revisit the guide after the scout gets to First Class and again after the scout gets to Life rank. This will help you understand what your scout needs to do to advance.

As always, please feel free to talk to me about any questions or concerns you have.

Advancement Overview

Advancement in Scouting America consists of earning ranks by completing a set of requirements for each rank. Early ranks consist primarily of learning outdoor skills. Higher ranks turn more toward leadership, service, and individual interests. Figure 1 shows the rank progression and an ideal (but rarely met) timeline for advancement to Eagle.

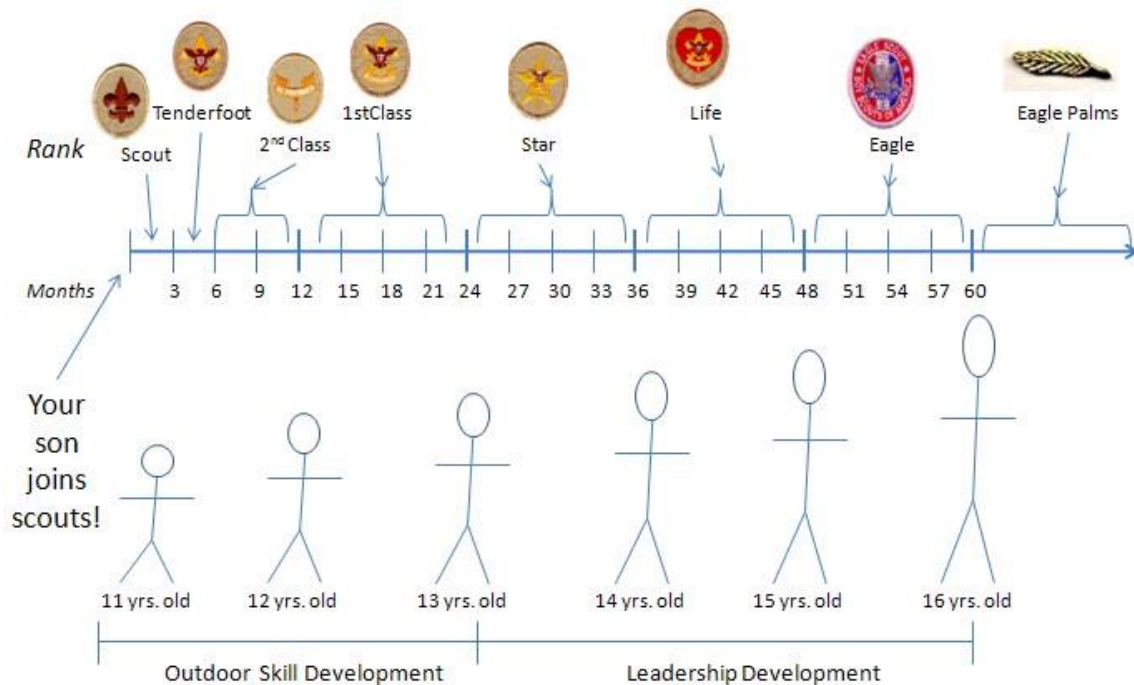


Figure 1: Progression towards Eagle (idealized).

The process for each rank is the same. The scout (under the guidance of an older scout or adult) completes requirements. The scout is tested or the requirement is verified (by an approved leader or registered adult) and completion of the requirement recorded in his Scout Handbook. When all the requirements for a rank are complete, the scout has a Scoutmaster Conference. The final step is a Board of Review conducted by the Troop Committee. Once he has passed the Board of Review, the scout has earned that rank.

The only exception to this process is for the rank of Eagle Scout. The Eagle Board of Review is conducted by the District Advancement Committee and will not include any adults from the troop.

As part of the advancement process for Star, Life, and Eagle, scouts must earn merit badges. Merit badges are badges that deal with a particular topic. There are approximately 120 merit badges. Twenty-one merit badges must be earned for the rank of Eagle Scout. Eleven are required; the scout, based on his interest, selects the other ten.

While 21 merit badges are required, there is no upper limit on the number that can be earned.

All scouts, but particularly young scouts should have their scout handbooks with them at all functions. They need them for reference. They may need to look up how to tie a knot they are learning. They may need the handbook for planned advancement activities. Most importantly though, they need the handbook as their record of advancement. When a scout completes a requirement, someone (approved older scout or adult) needs to mark the requirement complete in the scout's handbook. We do our best to keep the troop records up to date, but invariably things are overlooked. A scout can always come to the Scoutmaster and show where a requirement has been marked complete in his handbook.

Importance of summer camp

Summer camp is an extremely important part of scouting. Early rank requirements and many merit badges will be completed at summer camp. More importantly though, it is an opportunity for a scout to become part of his patrol, part of the troop, and to develop independence.

For first year scouts summer camp can be a little intimidating. Many have not been away from home for a week. Some have never been away from their parents. For these scouts, summer camp is often harder on the parents than the scout. The scout may be dreading camp before going, but once there will be so busy he will forget his fears.

First-year scouts get a jump on requirements for Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class at summer camp. Also, they get the opportunity to see other parts of camp where they will be spending future years working on merit badges, high adventure programs, or perhaps becoming a lifeguard.

After the first year, scouts participate in merit badge classes. Several Eagle required and elective merit badges are earned each year at summer camp. Some merit badges are started but not completed at summer camp, and the scout must spend some time finishing them when he returns home.

Older scouts may participate in high adventure programs at summer camp. These programs do not offer any advancement, but are intended to provide a challenge to older scouts.

Advancement Timeline

In Scouting, each scout works at his own pace. The only time limit in Scouting is that a scout must reach the rank of Eagle prior to his 18th birthday.

The general guideline is that scouts should attain the rank of First Class in about a year. Scouts who do so are more likely to reach the Eagle rank. However, we have had numerous scouts who do not get to First Class that quickly.

My goal is to get most scouts to Eagle around the age of 16. I don't believe most scouts have developed or demonstrated the leadership skills of an Eagle Scout much earlier than that. Most scouts (not just in our troop) get their Eagle rank as they approach their 18th birthday. Why? Because it isn't imperative until then.

Early Ranks

The early scout ranks are Scout, Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class. These ranks are focused on teaching skills to young scouts. All of the camping, first aid, safety, knot tying, fire building, and other basic skills are learned and practiced while earning these ranks.

The Scout rank is the first rank a Boy Scout will attain. This rank requires completing some basic requirements that are normally completed during the first month.

Tenderfoot, Second-Class, and First-Class requirements will be learned in three settings: scout meetings, campouts, and summer camp. Activities will be planned for scout meetings and campouts for the younger scouts to learn the required skills from the older scouts.

During the first-year summer camp, scouts can participate in the “Eagle Bound” course. This program focuses on skills from each of the ranks, Tenderfoot through First-Class. Scouts will still need to complete the ranks, but they will make great progress on them at summer camp.

In addition to skills, these ranks have requirements relating to citizenship and service. Scouts will have ample opportunity to participate in community service projects. However, it is not necessary to participate in service projects through the troop. A scout may volunteer at his church, school, or other civic organization for advancement credit. Service projects should have prior approval by the Scoutmaster and will require documentation.

Completing a requirement (Competency)

In my experience, scouts tend to think of rank requirements like homework, e.g. “I successfully tied a bowline, I'm done”. What we want to see is some competency with a skill. Just because a scout can do it at the meeting where it was taught, doesn't mean he will remember it next week. As is the case with many things, repetition is key to truly

mastering the skill. So, in order to complete a requirement, the goal is to see that skill demonstrated at any time. This may be in a competition among patrols, at a camporee, or during a Board of Review. In scouting, a boy is recognized for what he can do, not for what he has done in the past.

Competency applies to leadership as well as skills. Just because a scout has a leadership position, doesn't mean he gets credit. He must actually fulfill the requirements of the position. Suppose there was a scout who was a Patrol Leader, but he rarely came on camping trips or attended meetings. Could that scout claim to have been an effective Patrol Leader?

So, who decides when a requirement is complete? An approved youth leader or registered adult (Scoutmaster or Assistant Scoutmaster). In the case of the lower ranks, requirements will often be tested by the scout's Patrol Leader, Troop Guide, or other scout assigned to teach that skill. An adult leader will sign to complete the sign-off. For upper ranks, it will typically be an approved registered adult. Unlike Cub Scouts, parents may not approve completed items (although they may be consulted on requirements to be done at home).

If a scout cannot demonstrate competency during the test, he may not be advanced that night, but asked to return and demonstrate competency at a later date. We will ask the scout to practice these skills then return to complete adult review.

Note: For merit badges, only the registered and approved merit badge counselor may mark a requirement complete.

The Ranks of Star and Life

As scouts start working on the Star and Life ranks, the focus changes from the acquisition of new skills to leadership and personal interests (through merit badges). All of the upper ranks (Star/Life/Eagle) have leadership requirements. Also, all of the upper ranks require earning merit badges to advance.

Leadership is one of the key skills that the Boy Scout organization strives to develop and scouting does provide boys with an excellent opportunity to lead. Scouts, like all young people, would prefer to follow their peers rather than adults. Older scouts can develop teaching and leadership skills with an eager audience of young scouts, while being supported and mentored by adults. This is one of the great things about scouting.

Note to parents: It is generally more of a challenge for adults to let scouts lead than it is for scouts to lead. Scouts are used to having adults in charge, making all the plans and handling all the issues. A goal of scouting is to let boys learn to lead in a safe environment and to learn from their mistakes. And they do. Maybe not the first time, but

eventually. Eventually scouts do learn that cooking and cleaning while it is still light outside is better than playing football until it gets dark and then cooking and cleaning in the dark.

Merit Badges

The merit badge program in scouting is intended to help scouts learn more about topics they are interested in, not just ones they are told to do. There are approximately 120 merit badges. A scout may earn as many merit badges as he chooses, but he must complete a total of 21 (14 required, plus 7 of his choice) to earn the rank of Eagle Scout.

The process for earning a merit badge is simple. A scout selects a merit badge he is interested in and asks the Scoutmaster or advancement chairman for the name of a merit badge counselor (MBC). The scout is either provided a "blue card" with the name of the merit badge and the name of the MBC, or is registered in TroopMaster. The scout then contacts the MBC to arrange to meet to begin the merit badge. The scout will meet with the MBC (following BSA guidelines) as many times as necessary to complete the merit badge. There is no time limit on merit badges, but as is the case with most things, the longer it drags on the less likely it is to be completed. The blue card or other sign-off form is used by the MBC to track the requirements that have been completed. Once all requirements are complete, the scout or MBC returns the blue card or other documentation (signed by the MBC) so that it can be recorded. The advancement chairman records the completion in Troop Master. This is the scout's official documentation that he has completed the merit badge.

Only a registered and approved merit badge counselor can approve completion of merit badge requirements. Also, the merit badge counselor may not add or take away any requirements as specified by the BSA.

A list of Eagle required merit badges and how they can best be earned is included in Appendix A. Some Eagle-required merit badges must be earned at summer camp (Swimming and Lifesaving) since these are much harder for the troop to teach.

Merit Badge Counselors are adults registered with the BSA to teach a particular merit badge. An MBC may teach one or more merit badges (there are no limits) based on his/her interests. The MBC must follow all requirements for working with scouts (no one-on-one contact) and may not add or take away requirements from those listed in the merit badge pamphlet. Anyone can become an MBC; just contact the Scoutmaster or Advancement Chairman.

Note: Participation in some school courses or activities may meet merit badge requirements and if coordinated with school staff could be accepted for MB requirement approval.

The Rank of Eagle Scout

As you probably know, the Eagle rank is the highest rank of scouting. No boy comes to scouting without seeing himself as an Eagle Scout. However, by design, becoming an Eagle Scout is a challenge. It is not something accomplished quickly. This fact alone makes it difficult for young boys who generally are inexperienced in laying out and tracking long-term goals.

The Eagle rank must be earned by the scout's 18th birthday. To a 13-year-old scout, this seems like plenty of time. However, many scouts find themselves running out of time to beat this deadline. Why? There are two major factors: 1) the time available to work on the project and 2) new interests, priorities, and opportunities.

The time available to work on and complete an Eagle project seems immense to a young scout. At 11 years old, the boy's 18th birthday seems far away. Plenty of time. Right now, he is absorbed with learning new skills and participating in new activities. At this age, most scouts don't have the ability to set goals and work towards achieving them. That is one of the skills they need to learn.

The second challenge is changing interests, priorities, and opportunities. As scouts get older, their interests evolve. In school, they have many more opportunities for sports and clubs. Also, there is more homework, and the homework is more demanding. Then there are the two G's - girls and gasoline.

Eagle Scout Leadership Service Project

The Eagle Scout Leadership Service Project (referred to as the Eagle Project) is intended to allow a scout to demonstrate the ability to plan and carry out a service project. A key element is that the scout must demonstrate his ability to lead others. First the scout plans the project and prepares a proposal. The scout identifies a project for a charitable or community organization (this cannot be the BSA) or the chartering organization. The scout works with a representative of the organization to plan the project. The plans include what exactly needs to be done, any constraints (e.g., time), and any resources available. The scout prepares a proposal for the project using the Eagle Scout Leadership Project Workbook. Aspects of the project to be covered in the proposal are what is to be done, a general plan for accomplishing the project, a schedule, a budget, how it will be funded, and how the organization will benefit from the project.

The proposal is presented to the Troop Committee. The committee will give advice and likely make suggestions (or require changes). Once the proposal is complete, someone representing the organization being served, the Scoutmaster, and a Troop Committee member approve it.

The proposal is then taken to the District Advancement Committee Chairman for review and approval. The project should not begin until the Advancement Committee Chairman has approved the proposal.

The scout may then execute the project. He is responsible for organizing volunteers (not necessarily scouts). For most scouts, executing the Eagle project during the summer works well. During the school year there are too many other activities (football games, homework, band, tennis matches, hanging out with friends, etc) that conflict with the project. In my experience, little happens on Eagle projects during the school year, unless the scout is facing his 18th birthday.

Tip for parents: Most teenage boys are not good at planning longer-term projects. They get their homework done because it has a relatively short time frame. They struggle more with longer-term school projects. Teachers have learned not to leave all the planning up to the students. They give them intermediate assignments that build to the final project. The Eagle project is no different. Things that have obvious urgency for adults do not necessarily seem priorities for teenagers. One reason we have a troop adult to work with Eagle Scout candidates is to remove some of the parent/child dynamics from the project.

Note for scouts: I have done a number of Scoutmaster conferences for Eagle candidates. I always ask what advice they would give younger scouts. Consistently the scouts say their Eagle project "takes longer than you think it will." Scouts tend to think their project will only take a short time to accomplish. Most scouts put off writing their proposal or the summary, though neither takes long if the scout would just sit down and do it. Also, the scout needs support from many others. He needs signatures from the Scoutmaster, committee members, etc. Most of these people work and many of them travel for their jobs so they may not be available the exact day the scout need their signature. I have seen scouts complete their Eagle project and then take over a year to complete the write-up. How long it takes to completely finish the Eagle project is very much up to the individual scout.

Once the project is complete, the Eagle project workbook must be completed. This will include a write-up of what was actually done, what changed from the proposal, a list of materials used (if any), a list of donations and purchases, and a list of volunteers. A representative of the service organization and the Scoutmaster must approve the completed workbook. The workbook is then submitted with the Eagle Scout Rank Application to the Great Smoky Mountain Council.

Eagle Application

The Eagle Application includes the pertinent information to show that the scout has accomplished all of the requirements. The dates of ranks, merit badges, and leadership positions are included. In addition, the scout lists people from whom he has requested a letter of reference. Letters are requested from parents, a religious leader, employer (if

applicable), a teacher or principal, and two others. Finally, the application requires a statement of ambitions and life purpose.

The Eagle Board of Review

Once the Eagle project workbook and application have been received and reviewed by the council, they are turned over to the District Advancement Committee for an Eagle Board of Review. Unlike other Boards of Review, this is not done by the troop, but by the District Advancement Committee will organize a Board of Review. The board will ask the scout about himself, his scouting experience, his goals in life, and his Eagle project. The Board of Review may award the Eagle rank at that time or ask for additional information. Once approved by the Board of Review, the application is forwarded to the national scout office for review and final approval. Once approved by the national office, the scout is then an Eagle Scout. An Eagle ceremony can be arranged for the presentation of the rank.

Appendix A

Eagle Required Merit Badges

Eagle Merit Badge	Merit Badge Offered/Earned	Notes
Camping	Summer Camp (SC)	Several years of participation needed to complete the required number of nights camping
Citizenship in the Community	Merit Badge University, SC	Should be in at least 8th grade
Citizenship in the Nation	Merit Badge University, SC	Should be in at least 8th grade
Citizenship in the World	Merit Badge University, SC	Should be in at least 8th grade
Citizenship in Society	Merit Badge University	Should be in at least 8 th grade
Environmental Science	Summer Camp 2nd or 3rd year	
Family Life	Troop	
First Aid	Summer Camp 2nd year	
Lifesaving	Summer Camp 3rd year	
Personal Fitness	Summer Camp 2nd or 3rd year	
Personal Management	Troop	
Swimming	Summer Camp 2nd year	Prerequisite for many aquatics merit badges including Lifesaving, Canoeing, Small Boat Sailing, etc
Hiking or Cycling	Troop	May be earned in lieu of Swimming
Emergency Preparedness	Summer Camp	May be earned in lieu of Lifesaving

Troop – Merit Badges generally earned as part of Troop functions

Summer Camp – Merit Badges best earned at summer camp. Some merit badges will have requirements to complete after camp.

Merit Badge College – Merit Badges best earned at Merit Badge College. Some merit badges will have requirements to complete after Merit Badge College. Merit Badge College is held at Roane State Community College in February each year.

Appendix B

Advancement Resources

Merit Badges and Requirements -

<http://www.scouting.org/sitecore/content/Home/BoyScouts/AdvancementandAwards/MeritBadges.aspx>

Eagle Scout Leadership Service Project Workbook –

<http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-927.pdf>

Eagle Scout Rank Application - http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-728_web.pdf