

How Advancement Works

As scouts learn and demonstrate various skills and meet other requirements (e.g., holding leadership positions, service projects) they will advance in scouting's ranks. Those ranks are Scout, Tenderfoot, Second Class, First Class, Star, Life, and most prominently Eagle. (After Eagle, scouts can earn "palms" to wear on Eagle.)

Satisfying Requirements. The requirements for Scout, Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class, involve learning scouting's basic principles and skills (including basics of outdoor camping and cooking, first aid, use of map and compass, ropes and knots, and citizenship). The requirements for Star, Life, and Eagle involve earning specialized "merit badges," a number of which are required for advancement, as well as serving in leadership positions and undertaking service projects.

Once a scout learns a skill, he needs to demonstrate that skill to one of the adult leaders (the Scoutmaster or an Assistant Scoutmaster). (Sometimes the Scoutmaster will permit the skill to be demonstrated another adult or to one of the boy leaders, e.g., the Senior Patrol Leader and will find proficiency based on their recommendation.) The leaders can't just take the scout's word that he has accomplished a requirement. The Scoutmaster or Assistant Scoutmaster (or expressly designated other person) will then sign the requirement off in the boy's scout book. It is, therefore, essential, that each scout (1) have his own scout handbook (put the scout's name both in the book and on the edges), (2) regularly bring his handbook to meetings, campouts, and outings, (3) be responsible for not losing his book. The handbook usually contains all of the information that the leader is looking for in terms of demonstrating proficiency with the requirement. It is the scout's responsibility to find a leader to sign off requirements. If he wants to do so at a meeting, it is a good idea to call or email the Scoutmaster before the meeting, so a convenient time can be arranged. Campouts and outings provide another excellent opportunity to have requirements signed off. Scouts should bring their books with them.

The troop also keeps records of the scouts' progress. It does so by reviewing what has been signed off in their books. (It really helps if the books are neatly dated where signed off.) Periodically, the scouts should ask one of the adult leaders to update the white notebook maintained for that purpose and provide their book (usually during a meeting) for updating. It is essential not to lose the book or the advancement pages at the back of the book (if they start to fall out, staple or otherwise permanently attach them back in).

Merit badges are taught by authorized Boy Scout merit badge counselors. Their requirements vary. (www.meritbadge.com is an excellent reference.) It is the scout's responsibility to find a counselor and arrange to meet. Both the Verdugo Hills Council and Troop 209 maintain a list of counselors (the list is being updated, one copy of the list is in the white Troop 209 advancements binder). Once the scout has completed the merit badge's requirements, the counselor fills out a "blue card." There are three sections to the "blue card." The counselor fills out one section and retains it. The scout needs to submit both remaining portions of the blue card to the troop advancements chair. (The "applicant's record" portion will be returned.) (Some counselors, especially those at summer camps, provide only computer printouts.) Summer camp is an excellent place to earn merit badges.

The troop tries to make available to the scouts on a quarterly basis the advancement status that the troop has recorded, both to correct errors and to let them know what more they need to accomplish for the next rank.

Scoutmaster Conferences And Boards of Review. The last steps in any rank advancement are a Scoutmaster's Conference and (except for the rank of Scout) a "Board of Review." At the conference and board any of the requirements that the scout has satisfied are fair game for review as are the scout's experiences and goals in scouting. It is the scout's responsibility to arrange for a Scoutmaster's Conference. The scout needs to call or email the Scoutmaster at least a week in advance. Boards of Review are held on the 1st Tuesday of every month. Again, at least a week's notice the Board of Review Chair, is required. (A special Board of Review process run by the Council governs Eagle applicants.)

Courts of Honor. The scouts are recognized for their advancements at a quarterly "Court of Honor." At this time, they receive the various ranks and badges that they have earned. With each rank or merit badge comes a card the size of a sports trading card documenting the award. It is a good idea to keep these cards (as well as any returned merit badge "blue cards"), both as an official record of advancement and as a keepsake showing the scout's accomplishments. Plastic notebook inserts for trading cards work very well for this purpose. (When applying for Eagle, a scout has to list the name and date earned of every merit badge he has received.)

Separate, special Courts of Honor are held to recognize scouts who achieve the Eagle rank.