

Summary of Major Changes in Guide to Advancement 2025

The Guide to Advancement 2025 was updated and is the official source for administering advancement in all Scouting America programs. It replaces any previous Scouting America advancement manuals and previous editions of the Guide to Advancement.

<https://www.scouting.org/resources/guide-to-advancement/>

Almost every section of this guide has received some minor or major revisions since the last edition. Readers are encouraged to carefully review the entire guide, especially those topics frequently referenced. In particular, the following sections merit close review:

- 4.2.1.2 “Once a Scout has been tested and signed off by someone approved to do so, the requirement has been met.” Added “and cannot be rescinded.”
- 5.0.8.0 Added policy dealing with group/online instruction, and use of artificial intelligence
- 7.0.0.3 Clarified role of unit leader discussion prior to starting a merit badge
- 7.0.4.12 Online Merit Badge Classes
- 8.0.4.1 (and 9.0.1.8) Clarified the appeal process for rank advancement
- 9.0.1.7 Changed way Eagle Scout references are handled
- 9.0.4.0 Clarified that time extensions are only for Life scouts working on Eagle
- Section 10 Advancement for Members with Special Needs (completely reorganized and rewritten)

(Also removed all references to Advancement News, and National Advancement Program Team and changed all “Scoutbook” to “Scoutbook Plus”, not “Scoutbook Plus Internet Advancement”)

The Eagle Application (December 2024) has been updated to incorporate changes and is to be used for all Eagle Applications submitted after January 1, 2025. If Scouts have already started their application and have secured references as required on the previous version, they may continue to use it.

<https://www.scouting.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/512-72825-Eagle-Scout-Application.pdf>

A summary of the major changes is:

4.2.1.2 The Scout is Tested.

Once a Scout has been tested and signed off by someone approved to do so, the requirement has been met and cannot be rescinded. The unit leader is accountable for ensuring proper advancement procedures are followed. This includes the careful selection and training of those who approve advancement. If a unit leader believes a Scout has not learned the subject matter for a requirement that has been signed off, the unit leader should have the Scout practice or teach the requirement. Thus, Scouts may complete their learning and further develop the related skills without being retested.

5.0.8.0. Using Technology-Based Tools in Advancement

The use of technology has rapidly expanded into the culture of Scouting with tools such as videoconferencing, live streaming webinars, and mobile and web-based applications. These tools are useful and can save time for administrative tasks, especially in managing records for membership, training, and advancement. But Scout leaders must take care when using these tools to deliver and implement the advancement program. The preferred method for rank advancement and merit badge counseling is still face-to-face interaction that supports the Scouting America method of adult association, but there are occasions when use of technology might be supportive. Procedures for using web-based tools in advancement are established by the council advancement committee. *Note: The TFC Advancement Committee will be preparing procedures and when completed can be found on the TFC Website Advancement page.*

When a requirement says to “attend a meeting,” in-person participation is strongly recommended. While virtual participation may be convenient, in-person attendance allows for a significantly richer experience, with more socialization and more focus. Virtual attendance should be extremely rare, when extenuating circumstances prevent in-person participation, and the merit badge counselor must approve the substitution in advance.

Generative artificial intelligence and other tools (spell checkers, grammar checkers, autofill, etc.) may be used by a Scout to assist with written requirements, but their use must be fully disclosed to the person reviewing the work, and the final output must be the Scout’s own original work.

7.0.0.3 The Scout, the Unit Leader and the Merit Badge Counselor. The Scout and the unit leader. Any registered Scout, or qualified Venturer or Sea Scout, may work on the requirements for any merit badge at any time. However, before working with a counselor or attending a group or virtual merit badge opportunity, a Scout must meet with their unit leader or their delegate. This is the leader’s opportunity to give guidance on the wisdom of pursuing a selected badge, to advise the Scout on how work might be approached and what may be encountered along the way.

A Scout who avoids or ignores the unit leader’s role and completes a badge without first discussing it with the leader should be counseled about the proper way to start a merit badge, and the discussion should be documented. If the Scout (or the parents) continue to ignore the established process, merit badges will not be recorded as “earned” until the Scout has demonstrated, told, shown, etc. that they have met all the requirements to the satisfaction of a merit badge counselor acceptable to the unit leader.

7.0.1.1 Supervisory Qualifications and Certifications (e.g. High-Risk Merit Badges)

Several badges involve activities for which Scouting America has implemented strategies to improve safety, enhance the Scouts’ experiences, and manage risk. These activities often require supervision with specialized qualifications and certifications. *Note: TFC Advancement Committee is updating the TFC High Risk Merit Badge Policy on the TFC Website Advancement page.*

7.0.4.12 Online Merit Badge Classes

Merit badges are meant to be a personal activity, involving real interaction between a Scout and an enthusiastic expert in the subject at hand. Group instruction, online meetings, etc., may, depending on the implementation, dilute the value of this experience. While some merit badges easily lend themselves to virtual interaction, others are better conducted in an in-person environment. While the lack of merit badge counselors in some areas and advances in technology have increased use of virtual platforms, care must be taken that this does not diminish the learning experience.

Councils may implement guidance for virtual options, with specific policies based on availability of counselors, Scout's medical conditions, and so on. The following guidance will help determine whether or not virtual options should be authorized.

Requirements to show, tell, discuss, explain, or demonstrate must not be substituted with checklists or forms under any circumstances. *Note: TFC Advancement Committee is developing a policy and when complete can be found on the TFC Website, Advancement page*

- Just registering and being logged in is not sufficient. The Scout must be engaged and must actually and personally complete all requirements exactly as written, just as they would for an in-person class.
- Chat options should be disabled, to prevent one-on-one contact with Scouts.
- Cameras should be on, and a parent or guardian present with the Scout. Requirements to show, tell, or demonstrate may not be substituted with checklists or forms under any circumstances.
- Any merit badge counselors not following all procedures and policies outlined by this document and local councils, including but not limited to all youth protection policies, must be reported to their local council advancement committee for investigation.

8.0.4.1 Filing and Processing an Appeal

Adverse decisions for Star and Life ranks can be appealed to the local council. Should this occur, the National Program Committee or their designee is available for advice only. Adverse decisions for Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class are not appealable. The National Council reviews appeals only for the Eagle Scout rank. There is a two-week time limit for the council to document denial to the rank of Eagle Scout and two months for the Scout or parents to file an appeal.

9.0.1.7 The Eagle Rank: References

Must list names and contact information for four people who are willing to serve as references for the Eagle candidate. These may be Scout leaders, teachers, employers, coaches, other Scouts, etc. References do not need to be 21 or older. Parents and other relatives are strongly discouraged from serving as references. The current unit leader and committee chair are not eligible to serve as references; their signature on the application is their endorsement. **Updated TFC Reference Letter Policy and TFC Fillable Reference Letter form has been updated and is on the TFC Website, Advancement page**

9.0.4.0 Time Extensions

These should be granted very rarely and are reserved only for Life Scouts working on Eagle.