

DOES IT MATTER IN WHAT ORDER SCOUTS EARN THE EAGLE REQUIRED MERIT BADGES?

PROBABLY!

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“The mission of the Boy Scouts of 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.”

As adult Scout leaders, our responsibility is to guide our Scouts along the Scouting Trail in a manner that allows **“the greatest opportunity for our Scouts to develop into responsible adult citizens of high moral character and individual skill and knowledge”**. If we do that well, we benefit all Scouts and might not only get better Eagle Scouts, but we might also get better Scouts generally.

In order to do that, we need to ensure that we do our best to provide an adequate quantity of guidance, but even more importantly, the highest possible quality of guidance.

So, how do we do that? By having a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Scouting program – its methods and its purposes.

Because all youth are different and one order cannot fit all, the current Guide to Advancement states that merit badges, including Eagle required merit badges, can be earned in any order and at any time. However, the important question is, “Should they”? The Guide doesn’t mean, just let Scouts do as they want. So therefor the answer is “Probably not.”

The Guide means that as adult leaders, we can and should provide guidance as to what may be best for each one of our Scouts as they work on merit badges. That is why they need to get approval prior to working on all merit badges. But, its more than just approving what they chose to work on.

As adult leaders we need to know each individual Scout’s development and ability levels as that Scout moves along the Advancement trail and importantly as it relates to merit badges, to understand the Eagle required merit badges, their purposes, their requirements, their difficulty and their appropriateness for that scout. If we are truly committed to providing **“the greatest opportunity for our Scouts to develop into responsible adult citizens of high moral character and individual skill and knowledge”**, we are each obligated to become knowledgeable to best help guide them in making their best decisions. We need to do our best so they can do their best.

So, let us look at the Eagle required merit badges as they are listed on the **Eagle Scout Rank Application**. There are 17 total Eagle merit badges, from which 14 must be earned, some specifically and others electively.

Just like Scouts, not all merit badges are the same. Some are more difficult than others. So, doesn't it make sense that the less difficult would be better earned by younger, less experienced Scouts and the more complex by older more mature Scouts? Sure, it does. So how can these 17 merit badges be placed in an order that would complement the age and maturity of the Scouts?

These 17 merit badges can be divided into 3 categories based on difficulty and maturity level with each category building upon the previous.

1. **Personal Development** – those that help build the individual Scout's foundation;

Family Life, Personal Fitness, Personal Management and Communication.

2. **Skill & Knowledge Development** – those that increase the Scout's skills and confidence;

**Camping, Cooking, First Aid, Swimming or Hiking or Cycling,
Emergency Preparedness or Lifesaving, Environmental Science or Sustainability.**

3. **Citizenship Development** – those that help develop and prepare the Scout
to be a responsible fully participating young adult citizen;

**Citizenship in the Community, Citizenship in the Nation, Citizenship in the World,
Citizenship in Society.**

As leaders, we cannot require that Scouts earn merit badges in an order, but if we can help guide them in choosing the best path to follow. As adult leaders, if we do not adequately guide them along the Advancement Trail, can we really expect them to develop as fully as if we had?

For example, does it really make sense that a Scout should try to learn about Citizenship in the Nation or World before he learns about being a good citizen, a good family member (Family Life MB) in his own home? The answer is obvious.

We owe it to them to do our best to guide them to **the greatest opportunity to develop into responsible adult citizens of high moral character and individual skill and knowledge.** Again, if we do that, we will not only get better Eagle Scouts, we will get better Scouts generally.

One additional thought to consider; "Doesn't it also make more sense for a Scout earning the early ranks, Tenderfoot through First Class, to work first on elective merit badges more about doing what the Scout already is doing or may want to learn about, then working the required merit badges after reaching First Class Rank?" It sure does. So, also what's the rush to work on Eagle required merit badges?

When reviewed fully, it becomes obvious that there are benefits to the Scout who earns merit badges in a logical, systematic method. And, after all, isn't that what being a good adult Scout Leader is all about? Guiding Scouts as they go, to help them better grow.

So, let us look at what this might look like.

The chart below demonstrates how these three categories can be applied to the corresponding merit badges as the Scout advances through Star, Life and Eagle ranks.

EAGLE REQUIRED MERIT BADGES

(Based on Scout's Development, Maturity, and Difficulty)

	Eagle Required Merit Badges	Timing Preference
	Star Rank – 4 Required	
	Life Rank- 3 Additional Required	
	Eagle Rank- 7 Additional Required	
	Personal Development	
1	Family Life	Star
2	Personal Fitness (3 months)	Star
3	Personal Management (3 months)	Star
4	Communication	
	Skill and Knowledge Development	
5	Camping	Star, Life
6	Cooking	Star, Life
7	First Aid	Star, Life
8	Swimming or Hiking or Cycling	Star, Life
9	Emergency Preparedness or Lifesaving	Star, Life
10	Environmental Science or Sustainability	Star, Life
	Citizenship Development	
11	Citizenship in the Community	Life
12	Citizenship in the Nation	Life
13	Citizenship in the World	Life
14	Citizenship in Society	Life
**	Eagle Scout Service Project	Begin as soon as becoming a LIFE Scout