

Signs, Signals, and Codes

Merit Badge Workbook

Merit badges are earned by doing: reading the pamphlet, practicing the skills, and showing your counselor what you have learned.
This workbook gives you a place to organize your notes and track your progress along the way.
Merit badge counselors may not require the use of this or any similar workbook.
You still must satisfy your counselor that you can demonstrate each skill and have learned the information.
Use the space under each requirement to note what you have done and what you want to talk about, not to write out full answers.
When a requirement says discuss, show, tell, explain, or demonstrate, that is what you must do.
No one may add to or subtract from the official requirements found on scouting.org (Guide to Advancement 7.0.4.8).
Scouting America last updated this badge's requirements page on December 31, 2025.
Requirements change from time to time. Double-check scouting.org before you start.

Scout's name: _____ Unit: _____ Date started: _____

Counselor's name: _____ Phone no.: _____ Email: _____

Links marked "Scouting America resources" are the ones Scouting America shares on its official badge page.
This workbook is unofficial and not endorsed by Scouting America.

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1. Discuss with your counselor the importance of signs, signals, and codes, and why people need these different methods of communication. Briefly discuss the history and development of signs, signals, and codes.

Scouting America resources: History of Communication: From Cave Paintings to TikTok (video)

Why people need signs, signals, and codes

A brief history of signs, signals, and codes

Requirement 1 completed on _____ counselor initials _____

2. Explain the importance of signaling in emergency communications. Discuss with your counselor the types of emergency or distress signals one might use to attract airborne search-and-rescue personnel if lost in the outdoors or trying to summon assistance during a disaster. Illustrate these signaling examples by the use of photos or drawings.

Scouting America resources: Signaling in Emergencies—A Beginners Guide to Getting Noticed (video)
How To Send a Rescue Signal by Semaphore (video)

Why signaling matters in an emergency

Emergency or distress signals (lost outdoors or in a disaster)

Signal	How it works and when I would use it

My photos or drawings of these signals (draw here or attach)

Requirement 2 completed on _____ counselor initials _____

3. Do the following:

(a) Describe what Morse code is and the various means by which it can be sent. Spell your first name using Morse code. Send or receive a message of six to 10 words using Morse code.

Scouting America resources: How Does Morse Code Work? (video) · International Morse Code (website)

What Morse code is, and the ways it can be sent

My first name in Morse code

Sent or received _____ Date _____ With whom _____

My message (six to 10 words)

(b) Describe what American Sign Language (ASL) is and how it is used today. Spell your first name using American Sign Language. Send or receive a message of six to 10 words using ASL.

Scouting America resources: Learn ASL Alphabet (video) · A Few Things To Know About American Sign Language (video)

What ASL is, and how it is used today

Spelled my first name in ASL on | For whom

Sent or received | Date | With whom

My message (six to 10 words)

Requirement 3 completed on | counselor initials

4. Do the following:

(a) Give your counselor a brief explanation about semaphore, why it is used, how it is used, and where it is used.

Scouting America resources: Semaphore (video) · Semaphore Chart (photo)
How To Use Semaphore Flags in a Treasure Hunt (video)

Semaphore: why, how, and where it is used

	My notes
Why it is used	
How it is used	
Where it is used	

(b) Explain to your counselor the difference between semaphore flags and nautical flags.

Scouting America resources: How To Read Signal Flags! (video) · Nautical Flag Word Search Activity (video)
Crack the Code of NATO's Flag Signals (video)

How semaphore flags and nautical flags are different

(c) After 4(a) and 4(b) have been completed, do the following:

(1) Spell your first name using semaphore. Send or receive a message of six to 10 words using semaphore.

Spelled my first name on | For whom

Sent or received | Date | With whom

My message (six to 10 words)

(2) Using illustrations or photographs, identify 10 examples of nautical flags and discuss their importance.

10 nautical flags

Flag	What it means	Why it is important

10 nautical flags (continued)

Flag	What it means	Why it is important

My illustrations or photos of these flags (draw here or attach)

Requirement 4 completed on _____ counselor initials _____

5. Explain the braille reading technique and how it helps individuals with sight impairment to communicate. Then do the following:

Scouting America resources: The Story of Reading Braille (video)

How braille reading works, and how it helps people with sight impairment communicate

(a) Either by sight or by touch, identify the letters of the braille alphabet that spell your name. By sight or touch, decode a braille message at least six words long.

Scouting America resources: Write and Read Braille (video)

Identified my name on _____ By sight or by touch _____

The braille message I decoded (at least six words)

(b) Create a message in braille at least six words long, and share this with your counselor.

What my message says _____ Date shared _____

My braille message (draw the dots here or attach)

Requirement 5 completed on _____ counselor initials _____

6. Do the following:

(a) Describe to your counselor six sound-only signals that are in use today. Discuss the pros and cons of using sound signals versus other types of signals.

Scouting America resources: How To Use Sound Signaling Devices on a Boat (video)
Ship Whistle Signals Explained—Fog, Anchor, Warnings (video) · Musical Communication in the Navy (video)

Six sound-only signals in use today

Sound signal	What it means, and where it is used

Pros of sound signals compared with other types of signals

Cons of sound signals compared with other types of signals

(b) Demonstrate to your counselor six different silent Scout signals. Use these Scout signals to direct the movements and actions of your patrol or troop.

Scouting America resources: Silent Scout Signals (website) · Scout Silent Hand Signals (PDF)

Used them to direct my patrol or troop on _____ Patrol or troop _____

Six silent Scout signals

Signal	What it tells the group to do

Requirement 6 completed on _____ counselor initials _____

7. On a Scout outing, lay out a trail for your patrol or troop to follow. Cover at least one mile in distance and use at least six different trail signs and markers. After the Scouts have completed the trail, follow the Leave No Trace Seven Principles and the Outdoor Code by replacing or returning trail markers to their original locations.

Scouting America resources: Tracking Signs (PDF)
Understanding the Debate on Rock Cairns: Environmental Impact and Folklore Explained (video)

Outing _____ Date _____ Trail length _____

Trail signs and markers I used

Trail sign or marker	What it told the Scouts following

☐ Replaced or returned every trail marker to its original location
☐ Followed the Leave No Trace Seven Principles and the Outdoor Code

Requirement 7 completed on _____ counselor initials _____

8. For THREE of the following activities, demonstrate five signals each. Tell what the signals mean and why they are used:

☐ **(a)** Sports official's hand signs/signals

Scouting America resources: Soccer Referee Hand Signals (video) · Basketball Referee Penalties and Signals (video)
How To Know What the Referee Is Signaling While Watching Football (video)

Five sports official's signals

Signal	What it means	Why it is used

☐ **(b)** Heavy-equipment operator's hand signals

Scouting America resources: Basic Hand Signals for Heavy Equipment Operators (video)
Cascadia Tech Excavator Hand Signal (video)

Five heavy-equipment operator's signals

Signal	What it means	Why it is used

☐ **(c)** Aircraft carrier catapult crew signals

Scouting America resources: Aircraft Carrier's Crew Hand Signals Explained—Preflight and Launch (video)

Five aircraft carrier catapult crew signals

Signal	What it means	Why it is used

☐ **(d)** Cyclist's hand signals

Scouting America resources: How To Use Hand Signals While Cycling | Essential Group Ride Communication for Bike Riders (video)

Five cyclist's hand signals

Signal	What it means	Why it is used

☐ **(e)** An activity selected by you and your counselor

Activity my counselor and I picked

Five signals for this activity

Signal	What it means	Why it is used

Requirement 8 completed on counselor initials

9. Share with your counselor 10 examples of symbols used in everyday life. Design your own symbol. Share it with your counselor and explain what it means. Then do the following:

10 symbols used in everyday life

Symbol (sketch or name it)	Where I see it, and what it means

My own symbol (draw here)

What my symbol means

(a) Show examples of 10 traffic signs and explain their meaning.

Scouting America resources: Understanding Road Signs || Traffic Signs (video)
Learning Traffic Signs/Road Signs With Their Meanings (video)

10 traffic signs

Traffic sign (sketch or name it)	What it means

(b) Using a topographical map, explain what a map legend is and discuss its importance. Point out 10 map symbols and explain the meaning of each.

Scouting America resources: How To Read a Topo Map (video)

Topographic map I used

What a map legend is, and why it is important

10 map symbols

Map symbol (sketch or name it)	What it means

10 map symbols (continued)

Map symbol (sketch or name it)	What it means

(c) Discuss text-message symbols and why they are commonly used. Give examples of your favorite 10 text symbols or emoticons. Then see if your parent, guardian, or counselor can identify the meaning or usage of each symbol.

Scouting America resources: What Do Emojis Mean? | Understanding Emoji Meanings and Usage (video)

My 10 favorite text symbols or emoticons

Symbol	What it means or how I use it	Could they identify it?

Why people use text-message symbols

Requirement 9 completed on _____ counselor initials _____

10. Briefly discuss the history of secret code writing (cryptography). Make up your own secret code and write a message of up to 25 words using this code. Share the message with a friend or fellow Scout. Then share the message and code key with your counselor and discuss the effectiveness of your code.

Scouting America resources: A Short History of Codes (video) · Cryptography: The Vigenere Cipher (video)
The History of Crypto Goes Further Back Than You Think (video)

A brief history of secret code writing (cryptography)

My code key

My coded message (up to 25 words)

Shared with a friend or fellow Scout _____ Date _____

How well my code worked

Requirement 10 completed on _____ counselor initials _____

Counselor sign-off

Your counselor signs your blue card or approves the badge in Scoutbook, and your unit records it. This line is for your own records.

Counselor's signature _____ Date completed _____

Official Scouting America resources

Scouting America resources: Signs, Signals, and Codes merit badge page (requirements and resources)
Signs, Signals, and Codes merit badge pamphlet (free PDF) · All merit badges

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