

Whitewater

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. Do the following:

(a) Explain to your counselor the most likely hazards you may encounter while participating in whitewater activities, including branches and trees in water along a shore and stretching across the stream, rocks, hydraulics over ledges or low-head dams, strong wind, low water or air temperature, and thunder and lightning storms. Explain what you should do to anticipate, help prevent, mitigate, and respond to these hazards.

Scouting America resources: River Features (video) · Low-Head Dams: Get Out and Scout (video)
What To Do When Kayaking in a Thunderstorm (website)

Whitewater hazards

Hazard	How I anticipate and help prevent it	How I mitigate and respond to it
branches and trees in water along a shore and stretching across the stream		
rocks		
hydraulics over ledges or low-head dams		
strong wind		
low water or air temperature		
thunder and lightning storms		

(b) Review with your counselor the prevention, symptoms, and first-aid treatment for the following injuries or illnesses that could occur while participating in whitewater activities: cold-water shock; hypothermia; head, neck, and back injuries; heat-related illnesses; sunburn; dehydration; blisters; bruises; cuts; sprains and strains; shoulder dislocation; and submersion injuries.

Scouting America resources: Cold Water Immersion and Drowning (playlist)

Injuries and illnesses on whitewater

Injury or illness	Prevention	Symptoms	First aid
cold-water shock			
hypothermia			
head, neck, and back injuries			
heat-related illnesses			
sunburn			
dehydration			
blisters			
bruises			
cuts			
sprains and strains			
shoulder dislocation			
submersion injuries			

(c) Discuss with your counselor the Scouting America Safety Afloat policy and the American Whitewater safety guidelines, including the use of helmet and life jackets.

Scouting America resources: Safety Afloat (website) · American Whitewater Safety Guidelines (website)

Topic	Key points I discussed
Safety Afloat policy	
American Whitewater safety guidelines	
Use of helmet	
Use of life jackets	

Requirement 1 completed on _____ counselor initials _____

2. Do the following:

(a) Demonstrate understanding of the following river features by drawing lines to show the flow of water: upstream V, downstream V, riffle, eddy with an eddy line, ledge, river bend, shallows, current at different depths, drop, horizon line, and hydraulic.

Scouting America resources: River Hydrology 101—Part 1: How To 'Read' Whitewater Rapids (video)
River Hydrology 101—Part 2: How To 'Read' Whitewater Rapids (video)

- ☐ upstream V
- ☐ downstream V
- ☐ riffle
- ☐ eddy with an eddy line
- ☐ ledge
- ☐ river bend
- ☐ shallows
- ☐ current at different depths
- ☐ drop
- ☐ horizon line
- ☐ hydraulic

Draw here or attach: river features with lines showing the flow of water

(b) Describe how waves form including standing waves and wave trains.

Scouting America resources: Wave Train Rafting: The Pro's Guide to Safe Navigation (website)

How waves form, including standing waves and wave trains

(c) Explain how to tilt or edge the boat without leaning your body

Scouting America resources: Edging Your Whitewater Kayak (video) · Basic Canoe Control: Edge (video)

(1) When entering and exiting an eddy.

Edging when entering and exiting an eddy

(2) When ferrying in downstream and upstream directions.

Edging when ferrying downstream and upstream

(d) Explain when, why, and how you should scout a river while ashore, while on the river, and when you should portage your boat.

Scouting America resources: Advanced River Running—Scouting and Breaking Down Rapids (video)

Situation	When	Why	How
Scouting while ashore			
Scouting while on the river			

When I should portage my boat

Requirement 2 completed on _____ counselor initials _____

3. Before doing requirements 4 through 12, earn the Canoeing merit badge if you will be using a canoe to earn this merit badge. If you will be using a kayak, earn the Kayaking merit badge. Then do ONE of the following:

Scouting America resources: Canoeing Merit Badge (website) · Kayaking Merit Badge (website)

Canoeing merit badge earned on _____ Kayaking merit badge earned on _____

☐ **(a)** If you will be using a canoe to earn this merit badge, demonstrate strokes and maneuvers from the Canoeing merit badge to the satisfaction of your counselor.

Date _____ Strokes and maneuvers I showed _____

☐ **(b)** If you will be using a kayak to earn this merit badge, demonstrate strokes and maneuvers from the Kayaking merit badge to the satisfaction of your counselor.

Date _____ Strokes and maneuvers I showed _____

Requirement 3 completed on _____ counselor initials _____

4. Do ONE of the following:

☐ **Option A—Tandem Canoeist. Do ALL of the following strokes and techniques on calm water:**

Scouting America resources: Essential Strokes for Tandem Maneuvers (video)

(1) Demonstrate the following strokes in the bow: cross forward, bow draw, cross bow draw, bow pry, and sculling draw.

Date _____ Where _____

- ☐ cross forward
- ☐ bow draw
- ☐ cross bow draw
- ☐ bow pry
- ☐ sculling draw

(2) Demonstrate the following strokes in the stern: stern draw, stern pry, sculling draw, and forward with stern pry.

Date _____ Where _____

- ☐ stern draw
- ☐ stern pry
- ☐ sculling draw
- ☐ forward with stern pry

(3) Demonstrate a high brace, low brace, and righting pry.

Date _____ Where _____

- ☐ high brace
- ☐ low brace
- ☐ righting pry

☐ **Option B—Solo Canoeist. Do ALL of the following strokes and techniques on calm water:**

(1) Demonstrate the following strokes: cross forward, bow draw, cross bow draw, stern draw, pry, stern pry, sculling draw, and forward with stern pry.

Scouting America resources: Cross Forward Stroke (video) · Stationary Bow Draw (video) · Cross Bow Draw (video) Running Bow Pry (video) · Sculling Draw (video)

Date _____ Where _____

- ☐ cross forward
- ☐ bow draw
- ☐ cross bow draw
- ☐ stern draw
- ☐ pry
- ☐ stern pry
- ☐ sculling draw
- ☐ forward with stern pry

(2) Demonstrate a high brace, low brace, and righting pry.

Scouting America resources: How To Keep Your Canoe From Flipping—Low and High Braces (video)

Date _____ Where _____

- ☐ high brace
- ☐ low brace
- ☐ righting pry

☐ **Option C—Solo Kayaker. Do ALL of the following strokes and techniques on calm water:**

(1) Demonstrate the following strokes: bow draw, rudder, and sculling draw.

Scouting America resources: The Bow Draw (video) · Rudder Stroke (video) · Draw Stroke (video) · Sculling Draw (video)

Date _____ Where _____

- ☐ bow draw
- ☐ rudder
- ☐ sculling draw

(2) Demonstrate a high brace and low brace.

Scouting America resources: Kayak High Brace (video) · Kayak Low Brace (video)

Date _____ Where _____

- ☐ high brace
- ☐ low brace

Requirement 4 completed on _____ counselor initials _____

5. Do the following:

(a) Explain the International Scale of River Difficulty and apply the scale to the stretch of river approved by your counselor.

Scouting America resources: Whitewater Rafting: Rapid Classes Demystified (video)

The International Scale of River Difficulty

River and stretch _____ Class I gave it _____

(b) Identify the specific characteristics of the river that are factors in your classification according to the International Scale.

Characteristics of the river behind my classification

(c) Discuss how the level of flow changes a river from one class to another and what effects different flow rates have on the features of a river and its hazards.

How flow level changes a river from one class to another

Effects of different flow rates on river features and hazards

Requirement 5 completed on _____ counselor initials _____

6. Explain the importance of communication during every whitewater outing. Demonstrate knowledge and ability to use the following American Whitewater Universal River Signals, both visual and auditory: "Stop," "Are you OK?," "Help/emergency," "Run river right," "Run river left," and "All clear—come ahead."

Scouting America resources: Hand Signals on the River (video)

Why communication matters on every whitewater outing

Universal River Signals

Signal	Visual signal	Auditory signal
Stop		
Are you OK?		
Help/emergency		
Run river right		
Run river left		
All clear, come ahead		

Date I demonstrated them _____

Requirement 6 completed on _____ counselor initials _____

7. Do ONE of the following:

☐ **(a)** If completing this merit badge in a canoe, describe the various types of canoes used on moving water and how they differ in design, materials, and purpose.

Scouting America resources: How To Choose a Canoe (website)

Canoes used on moving water

Type of canoe	Design	Materials	Purpose

☐ **(b)** If completing this merit badge in a kayak, describe the various types of kayaks used on moving water and explain how they differ in design, materials, and purpose.

Scouting America resources: Kayaking | How To Choose a Kayak (video)

Kayaks used on moving water

Type of kayak	Design	Materials	Purpose

Requirement 7 completed on _____ counselor initials _____

8. Review with your counselor the personal and group equipment necessary for a safe whitewater outing and how and why it is used.

Scouting America resources: Beginners Guide to Whitewater Kayaking Gear (video)
Top 5 Pieces of Paddling Gear | The Essential Kayak and Canoe Gear (video)

Personal equipment

Item	How and why it is used

Group equipment

Item	How and why it is used

Requirement 8 completed on _____ counselor initials _____

9. Demonstrate your ability to read a Class II section of river approved by your counselor. Describe the most desirable paths or lines of travel as well as alternative routes and options. Point out how to use the existing water features to your advantage, and explain how to best avoid the hazards present.

Date _____ River and section _____

Topic	What I described
Most desirable lines of travel	
Alternative routes and options	
Water features I can use	
Hazards and how to avoid them	

Requirement 9 completed on _____ counselor initials _____

10. Wearing a proper life jacket and being appropriately dressed for the weather and water conditions, perform the following skills in moving water in a properly equipped whitewater craft of your choice (tandem canoe, solo canoe, or solo kayak). If a tandem canoe is used, the skills must be demonstrated from both the bow and stern positions.

Scouting America resources: Kayaking Tips—Cold Water and Winter Paddling (Wear, Gear and Risks) (video)
How To Choose a Life Jacket for Kayaking and Canoeing (video)

Date _____ River _____ Craft I used _____

(a) Launch and land.

Scouting America resources: How To Launch and Land Your Kayak (video)
How To Launch and Land a Canoe Smoothly and Safely (video)

Date _____ Positions (bow, stern, or solo) _____

(b) Paddle forward in a straight line at least 10 boat lengths.

Scouting America resources: Whitewater Kayaking for Beginners: The Forward Stroke (video)
Forward Paddling for Canoes: Generating the Power (video)

Date _____ Positions (bow, stern, or solo) _____

(c) Backpaddle in a straight line at least five boat lengths.

Scouting America resources: The Back / Reverse Stroke—Sea Kayak Technique (video) · Canoeing: Paddling Backwards (video)

Date _____ Positions (bow, stern, or solo) _____

(d) Ferry upstream from both sides of the river.

Scouting America resources: How To Ferry Your Kayak in Current (video) · How To Do a Back Ferry While Kayaking (video) Tandem Front Ferry (video)

Date _____ Positions (bow, stern, or solo) _____

☐ From river left
☐ From river right

(e) Ferry downstream from both sides of the river.

Date _____ Positions (bow, stern, or solo) _____

☐ From river left
☐ From river right

(f) Eddy turn from both sides of an eddy.

Scouting America resources: How To Do a Carving Eddy Turn (video) · Tandem Canoe Eddy Turns—Carving Using MITH (video)

Date _____ Positions (bow, stern, or solo) _____

☐ One side of the eddy
☐ Other side of the eddy

(g) Peel out from both sides of an eddy.

Scouting America resources: How To Catch and Peel Out of an Eddy (video) · Eddy Exits Using SHARC (video)

Date _____ Positions (bow, stern, or solo) _____

☐ One side of the eddy
☐ Other side of the eddy

Requirement 10 completed on _____ counselor initials _____

11. Explain and demonstrate the following to your counselor:

(a) Self-rescue and procedures when capsized in moving water, including a wet exit if necessary

Scouting America resources: How To Self Rescue in a Whitewater Kayak (video) · Canoe Self-Rescue Method: Re-Entry (video) How To Use a Swim Line to Self Rescue a Canoe (video)

Date _____

My self-rescue steps when capsized

(b) Proper use of a throw rope to rescue a swimmer in whitewater

Scouting America resources: Throw Bag Techniques (video) · White Water Swims and Throw Bag Rescues (video) How To Perform a Throwbag Rescue (video)

Date _____

How to throw a rope to a swimmer

(c) Proper technique for receiving a throw rope as a swimmer

Scouting America resources: Throw Bag Techniques (video) · White Water Swims and Throw Bag Rescues (video)

Date

How to receive a throw rope as a swimmer

(d) Portaging—where portaging would be appropriate, and when and how to do it

Scouting America resources: How To Portage a Canoe (video)
How To Portage for Beginners—Footwear, Gear, Tips and Techniques (video)

Date

Where, when, and how to portage

(e) The whitewater buddy system using at least three persons and three craft

Scouting America resources: Learning How To Safely Paddle as a Group (video)

Date

How the whitewater buddy system works

Requirement 11 completed on counselor initials

12. Participate in one or more whitewater trips using either a canoe or kayak on a Class I and/or Class II river. The trip(s) must involve at least six hours of paddling time. For each trip:

My whitewater trips

Date	River	Class	Put-in and takeout	Paddling hours

(a) Help to prepare a written plan, specifying the route (put-ins and takeouts), schedule, equipment, safety precautions, and emergency procedures.

Scouting America resources: Planning Your Kayak Trip Safely (video)

Our written plan

Part of the plan	What our plan says
Route (put-ins and takeouts)	
Schedule	
Equipment	
Safety precautions	
Emergency procedures	

(b) Determine local rules and obtain permission from landowners and land managers in advance.

Local rule or permission	Who I asked	Date

(c) Explain what steps have been taken to comply with Scouting America Safety Afloat and the American Whitewater safety guidelines.

Steps taken to comply with Safety Afloat and American Whitewater guidelines

(d) Show how to protect personal and group equipment from water and how to load and secure the containers in boats to be used in the trip. Execute the plans with other paddlers.

Scouting America resources: How To Pack for a Multi-Day Whitewater Trip (video)
3 Minutes With a Maine Guide: Packing a Canoe (video)

Date _____ Paddlers with me _____

How we kept gear dry and loaded and secured it

(e) Explain to your counselor how well your plans worked for each trip taken.

How well our plans worked on each trip

Requirement 12 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: Whitewater merit badge page (requirements and resources) · Whitewater merit badge pamphlet (free PDF)
All merit badges

Made by Cole at ScoutSmarts.com, an Eagle Scout who loves helping Scouts.
Spot an error or a requirement change? Tell me at scoutsmarts.com/contact.
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