

The objective of this packet is to provide guidelines to have some consistency between scoutmaster conferences, and to help the scout (and his parents) understand exactly what is expected during the conference. We recognize that each Scoutmaster and Scout are unique. Yet, a Scoutmaster Conference should cover a common set of minimum subjects with a scout as he progresses through ranks or if he just needs a periodic discussion with a Scoutmaster.

The real purpose of a scoutmaster conference is to develop understanding and trust between the Scoutmaster and the scout as the scout grows and matures in scouting. According to the BSA *Guide to Advancement (2013)*, the conference, "is not a retest of the requirements upon which a Scout has been signed off. It is a forum for discussing topics such as ambitions and life purpose, goals for future achievement, and also for obtaining feedback on the unit's program."

"Scout" means the youth, not the parent. Parents can not ask for SM conferences on behalf of the scout. Parents may not ask for leadership roles for their scouts. One way scouts mature and show leadership and initiative is by asking for scoutmaster conferences and leadership responsibilities. Parents asking on behalf of the scout may actually slow down the advancement process. (Of course, if a parent has a concern, then I am always open and available to talk!)

There are two types of conferences: One, when it is needed to discuss a problem; and two, when it is a necessary step in the advancement process. In either case, it is also a counseling session to guide the Scout to set his own goals and to take action on his own problems.

In the first case, the scoutmaster is discussing a particular situation, or perhaps uncovering reasons for attitude, attendance, or behavior problems. In the second case (progress toward ranks) the scoutmaster is assessing whether the scout is ready for a Board of Review to advance him in rank, or perhaps just reviewing his status.

Problem Counseling

Often this is the hardest type of Conference. Maybe "problem" is not the right word; perhaps "need" is. The need may arise from troubled behavior, lack of advancement, misunderstanding, or when a situation with a scout must be corrected. These are handled on an as-needed basis and are usually initiated by the scoutmaster. These types of scoutmaster conferences are not always formal. A scoutmaster may call a scout aside and re-direct the scout energies in a more scout-like direction at anytime.

Advancement Conferences

Although not required, most of the time the advancement conference is not held until all other requirements for the next rank have been met. According to the BSA's *Guide to Advancement 2013*,

The conference is not a retest of the requirements upon which a Scout has been signed off. It is a forum for discussing topics such as ambitions and life purpose, goals for future achievement, and also for obtaining feedback on the unit's program. In some cases, work left to be completed—and perhaps why it has not been completed—may be

discussed just as easily as that which is finished. Ultimately, conference timing is up to the unit. (Para 4.2.3.5)

As a general rule in Troop 36, the scoutmaster performing the conference will sign off the “Scout Spirit” requirement as a part of the scoutmaster conference (again, not a requirement). Of course, a periodic review of a scout’s progress and interest can occur whenever the scout or the scoutmaster feels such a discussion may be helpful and this may be counted toward the scoutmaster conference requirement according to the *Guide to Advancement 2013*.

Although the conference is not a test, what I am looking for in the following pages are representative items that I will look at to see if the scout is truly ready for his Board of Review. The goal is to develop leadership through responsibility and a major part of leadership is *credibility*. A First Class scout cannot effectively teach a Tenderfoot Scout a bowline knot, for example, unless he knows how to tie the bowline knot. The skills presented in each rank below are not a test to “pass” the scoutmaster conference, but are indicators that the scout may or may not be ready for his Board of Review and serve as discussion points to help the scout understand where his weaknesses may lie.

The Scoutmaster Conference is NOT an obstacle to advancement that must be overcome. Rather, it is an opportunity to help the scout see areas where he is deficient so that he can get ready for the board of review. We use this time to discuss goals as well as leadership and responsibility. We may review and re-teach some skills as well. The goal is to help the scout progress and develop as a responsible leader!

Following a Scoutmaster Conference in which the scoutmaster recommends the scout for advancement, the scout must contact the Troop Advancement Chair to schedule a Board of Review. *Please be patient!* Depending on the troop activity schedule and the availability of the Advancement Chair and/or members of the committee, it may take several weeks in order to get the Board of Review scheduled.

A full Class-A uniform is necessary for any advancement conference and for a Board of Review.

Tenderfoot to First Class Conferences

For the most part, advancement conferences from Tenderfoot to First Class are objective – meaning that they concentrate on certain tasks or mastering certain skills as discussion points to emphasize leadership and responsibility. *This is an important point:* Failing to perform a specific skill will not necessarily cause a scoutmaster to not recommend a scout for a board of review. What we are looking for in each rank up to First Class is the mastering of a skill for the purposes of teaching leadership and responsibility – not simply fulfilling a requirement or “checking a box.” These skills are not show-once-and-be-done events.

In other words, it is not sufficient (for example) to tie a bowline knot once. We are looking for the scout to have MASTERED the bowline knot. There is a difference! And remember, once a rank is passed, all of those requirements are still in effect for the next rank. For example, you must still be able to tie a taut line hitch properly during a First Class advancement conference, even though the taut line hitch is a Tenderfoot knot.

Star to Eagle Conferences

Scoutmaster Conferences above First Class are much more subjective in nature. In the first three ranks the scout was required to demonstrate mastery of some simple tasks, and the requirement was fulfilled. But now things have changed dramatically. From here on out, we are looking for LEADERSHIP, INITIATIVE, and EXAMPLE for the purposes of teaching and demonstrating **RESPONSIBILITY**. (Attention scouts: Don't get me wrong, I still expect you to be able to demonstrate those basic scout skills, so stay sharp and practice!).

Each rank has the same basic requirement (although the time served changes). It is to “actively in your unit for [a time period] in one or more of the following positions of **responsibility** (or carry out a Scoutmaster-assigned leadership project to help the unit)... [emphasis mine]”

Why the word responsibility and not leadership? According to the Guide to Advancement 2013, “Taking and accepting responsibility... is a key foundation for leadership. One cannot lead effectively without it.” (Para 4.2.3.4.6)

So I expect the Scout to demonstrate RESPONSIBILITY while in the office. I don't have set parameters or tasks for each position: Each Scout should strive to do his best to take responsibility for his office. Although there *are* specific responsibilities for each position, there is no clear objective standard for measurement of success. This process,

...recognizes the different personalities, talents, and skill sets in all of us. Some seem destined to be “the leader of the group.” Others provide quality support and strong examples behind the scenes. Without the latter, the leaders in charge have little chance for success. Thus, the work of the supporters becomes part of the overall leadership effort. (Guide to Advancement 2013, Para 4.2.3.4.6)

The scout and the scoutmaster, together, will determine what is expected and when the scout has been successful.

In other words, the scout will be measured against himself. This is meant to be a shared responsibility between the scout and the scoutmaster where the performance in the office is merely the *means to the end*, not the end in itself. In other words, he holds an office in order to learn responsibility, not to simply wear a patch for a set period of time. This is a true “leadership lab” where mistakes are expected and discussed—not punished. We allow the scouts to make mistakes to facilitate the learning process.

It is also important to note that not every scout needs to be “Senior Patrol Leader” to be successful! There are different situations, personalities, skills, and leadership styles (which is why there are so many different roles for a scout to fulfill). There is no one-size-fits-all leadership model. I expect each scout to do his best in the role where he is with his God-given abilities. Nothing more, nothing less.

So what are we looking for in each position? It really varies depending on the scout's abilities, age, and position. I expect a whole lot more from a 17 year old Quartermaster than from a 13 year old Scribe. But generally, I am looking for initiative and follow-through.

Here are some examples (certainly NOT a comprehensive list!):

- How did the scout demonstrate responsibility as a quartermaster?
- What did he do to take care of our equipment and make the troop better while in office?
- How did the SPL do in delegating tasks, following up with the PLC, and planning meetings and outings?

- How did the Patrol Leader take responsibility for his patrol and encourage rank advancement or attendance?
- What did he do as Historian to preserve the history and tradition of the troop?
- How did the scout demonstrate responsibility as a Chaplain Aide to encourage and help scouts achieve their religious awards?
- What did the Scribe do to enhance the administrative parts of the troop and the PLC?
- How did the Librarian do to organize, track, update, and care for our troop advancement resources?

Get the idea?

If all a scout did was wear the patch for a few months then he probably will not have a good result in a scoutmaster conference. Of course, if he needs help or direction on finding ways to demonstrate leadership in his position, then he should talk to the SPL and/or schedule a Scoutmaster Conference so we can talk – understanding that you need help and guidance (and asking for that help) is a sign of maturity and responsibility. We are here to help and would love to help him figure out what you need to do. *We want the scouts to be successful and learn!*

Here is the process that we have established for an advancement conference:

1. The Scout will sign up for a conference time slot *and confirm the appointment with the Scoutmaster.*
2. The Scout will show up to the conference in full Class-A uniform (including neckerchief!).
3. If the Scoutmaster recommends the scout to proceed to the Board of Review, the scout will contact the troop Advancement Chair to schedule a Board of Review.
4. If the Scoutmaster does not approve the Scout for advancement, the Scoutmaster will give the Scout feedback and together they will establish goals in order to be successful.
5. When those goals are met, the scout may ask for another conference.

BOY SCOUT CANDIDATE _____ DATE _____

This conference is usually short, and no Board of Review is required. A Webelo who earned his Arrow of Light should pretty well know the checklist. Even if the boy's answers are far from perfect, you can be passed. Scout is a joining level, not a rank, and thus should not take much time. This is usually the first time the Scoutmaster has had a chance to meet the scout and get to know him as a person. Here is what we are looking for:

Use the Checklist study for your conference and Board of Review!

CHECKLIST

- Scout Sign, Scout Salute, and Scout Handclasp - Can you demonstrate these? Do you know what all three mean?
- Tie a square knot--- it is a symbol of joining.
- Scout Oath - Do you know and understand most of it?
- Scout Laws - Do you know and understand most of them?
- Do you agree to live by the Scout Oath and Law?
- Scout Badge – Do you know it? (If not, the Scoutmaster will explain it).
- Do you have a book?--- it should be with you!

TENDERFOOT CANDIDATE _____ DATE _____

Ten minutes are probably sufficient for the Conference unless there are other problems to discuss.

CHECKLIST

- What campout(s) did you go on, what gear did you pack, what's your reaction to it?
- Tie 2 half hitches or a taut-line hitch--- have some rope with you.
- What do you do if you get lost on a hike?
- Scout Law, Scout Oath, Scout Motto, Scout Slogan. You should know these from memory.
- Describe the Scout Badge
- What is the buddy system?
- Talk about your Patrol and Patrol Leader. Do you know your patrol flag and yell?
- How did you improve your scores in fitness?
- What is a local poisonous plant? How do you treat it?
- What do you do for a burn?

SECOND CLASS CANDIDATE _____ DATE _____

Ten minutes are probably enough time for the Conference unless there are other issues to discuss.

In addition to all Tenderfoot requirements, look at the following:

CHECKLIST

- Orient a map; how does a compass generally work?
- What 5-mile hike did you do?
- Show how to open, close, and give a knife to another person.
- How do you make and light a fire?
- Describe a service project you worked on? What did you think of it? Do you like to work?
- Tell the difference between heat exhaustion and heat stroke
- How do you stop bleeding?
- Explain the buddy system and a safe swim approach.
- What do you think about drugs and alcohol?
- Scout Law, Outdoor Code, Scout Oath, Scout Badge
- What is Scout Spirit?

FIRST CLASS CANDIDATE _____ DATE _____

Plan on fifteen minutes, or longer with other issues. If you know your stuff, it should go rapidly.

In addition to all of the Tenderfoot and Second Class requirements, look at the following:

CHECKLIST

- What has your patrol cooked? How did you help?
- Tie a timber hitch or a clove hitch--- what is it used for?
- Tie a bowline--- what is it used for?
- What camp gadget did you make?
- Explain a first aid for a heart attack.
- Review the list--- you should know it cold by now.

- Scout Oath Scout Badge
- Scout Law Scout Motto
- Outdoor Code Scout Slogan

Plan on a 20-minute Conference.

All Scoutmaster Conferences above First Class are more subjective. In the first three ranks you were simply required to demonstrate some tasks and you were complete. This is a different story! From here on out, I am looking for LEADERSHIP and EXAMPLE. (Now, don't get me wrong, I still expect you to be able to demonstrate those basic Scout skills, so stay sharp and practice!)

CHECKLIST:

- How do you think you performed in your Leadership role?
- What would you like to do next?
- What could you have done better?
- What services have you performed? What did you think about it?
- What do you like best or least about camping?
- How do you think a Star Scout differs from First Class?
- Who is a good role model in our Troop? Why?
- Do you have any areas you need to improve upon? Such as attitude, attendance, leadership?
- What thoughts do you have about an Eagle Project?
- Discuss being on staff at Summer Camp --- any interest?

LIFE CANDIDATE _____ DATE _____

Plan on 25 minutes for the Conference.

Just like Star, I am not looking for someone who simply occupied an office. It needs to be MUCH MORE than that. Life Rank is a pivotal level--- a scout who achieves this has really done well, even if he does not make Eagle. I am looking for ATTITUDE, MATURITY, and INITIATIVE.

CHECKLIST

- What was your favorite merit badge? Why?
- How did you think you did in Leadership?
- What could you have done better?
- How can the Troop be a better Troop?
- What is Scout Spirit?
- What would you do?
- Do you remember the Outdoor Code?
- Explain the Scout Law. What do each of the points mean?
- What difference do you see in a Life Scout from a Star?
- What do you think you need to improve upon before a Board of Review?
- Do you have any ideas yet for an Eagle Project?

This Conference has no set time limit.

Review the project and report. Spend some time on this. Are there any areas you should fix in the report?

- How was the planning?
- How was his development portion? Did you have to change it?
- Why did you think it was a good one? What was hardest?
- How did the receiving organization like it?
- What would you do differently now?
- How do you feel about Scouts now? What's you plan after Eagle?
- Discuss the Palms--- are you interested?
- How active have you been lately?
- What are your thoughts on the world environment? Current affairs?
- What would you do differently in his Scouting career if you had to do it all over again?
- What suggestions do you have on improving the Troop program, the Troop adult Leadership, or Scout Councils (JLT, NYLT, etc.)?
- Where do you think you needs to improve before a Board of Review?
- Attitude, Leadership?
- Scout Oath, Law, Motto, Badge, Slogan. Know them COLD and be able to explain them ALL!