



Collections Merit Badge

The ISCA Getting Started Collecting Series

If you are a Scout with a collection, the Collections Merit Badge is a fun one to earn. There are three collecting merit badges: one for coin collecting, one for stamp collecting, and the Collections Merit Badge, which is for all other types of collections. You can get the requirements from the Merit Badge Book or from the Boy Scout Requirements book. The requirements for all merit badges are on the web at <http://www.meritbadge.com>, and the requirements for the Collections badge are at <http://www.meritbadge.com/mb/128.htm>. Collections Merit Badge requires you to write about your collection; understand safe handling, cleaning, storage, and displaying; know about events, investing, speculation, purchases, sales, terminology, valuation, condition, grading, associations, and careers. If you are well prepared in advance, this merit badge can usually be earned in a single session with your merit badge counselor. This report and other resources on the web can help you prepare, particularly if you have a collection of Scout patches or other Scouting memorabilia.

If you collect Scouting items, or even if you are only interested in Scouting items, you should join ISCA, the International Scouting Collectors Association, as an emember or electronic member. To become a free emember, go to <http://www.scouttrader.org> and click on the [eMembership](http://www.scouttrader.org/emembers.shtml) link (<http://www.scouttrader.org/emembers.shtml>). This site provides free information on collecting Scouting memorabilia that can be helpful in earning the Collections Merit Badge. All ISCA members must subscribe to the ISCA code of ethics: http://www.scouttrader.org/Code_of_Ethics.shtml.

Before starting on any merit badge, you need permission from your Scoutmaster or other designated leader. Get a signed merit badge card from your leader and the name of a counselor. Remember the buddy system. You must have another Scout or someone else with you when you meet with your counselor. Remember that with all merit badges, you are expected to meet the requirements exactly as stated. If a requirement says show or write, then telling is not enough.

Requirements 1 and 2 require you to both write about and tell about your collection. The resources in the ISCA emember site can help you learn more about many types of Scout collections. Go to <http://isca.oaimages.com/emembers/>. In particular, see the [Types of Collections](#) article. At the ISCA emember site, you can find articles about many types of collections including OA and Council Shoulder Patches, which are probably the two most popular types of Scout collections.

Requirement 3 requires you to demonstrate your knowledge of preserving and displaying your collection. The articles on [Storing Your Collection](#) and [Displaying Your Collection](#) at <http://isca.oaimages.com/emembers/> can help. For information on events for Scout collectors see: [Places to Trade and Mail Trading](#). Lists of Trade-O-Rees, which are shows where Scouts get together to buy, sell, and trade patches, can be found at the main ISCA site <http://www.scouttrader.org> and at a number of dealer sites. Trading is popular at many Scouting events such as Jamborees, National OA Conferences, conclaves, and local OA and council events. Many Trade-O-Rees, conclaves, and other OA events offer seminars on trading. You can find information about Scouting museums by searching the web. For example, these sites list a number of Scouting museums: <http://www.usscouts.org/usscouts/scoutmuseums.asp> and <http://www.scoutbase.org.uk/direct/museums/index-pr.htm>. Some Trade-O-Rees have contests and offer prizes for the best displays.

Requirement 4 requires you to demonstrate your knowledge of collecting and investing. The article [Investing, Speculation, Valuation](#) from <http://isca.oaimages.com/emembers/> can help you.

Requirement 5a requires you to know collecting terms. See [Collecting Terms](#) from <http://isca.oaimages.com/emembers/>.

Requirement 5b requires you to display your collection or photographs of your collection to your counselor.

Requirement 5c involves valuation. The *Blue Book*, published by the American Scouting Historical Association provides a price guides for OA patches on a CD. See <http://www.bluebook-cd.com/>. The *Internet Guide to Order of the Arrow Insignia* (<http://www.oaimages.com/>) provides values on the web. The reference book, *An Aid to Collecting Selected Council Shoulder Patches with Valuation Guide*, provides prices for CSPs. Note that all price guides are just that; they are guides. In particular, values in the CSP guide are often much higher than true market price. Many factors affect value. Values can vary considerably depending on the condition of the item. Some items that are particularly sought after tend to go up in value quickly. Others may go down in value if more of them become available and supply exceeds demand. Some items, such as popular Jamboree shoulder patches, may go up in value at the Jamboree, then immediately go down in value after the jamboree when the excitement dies down. It may take many years for them to return to their peak value, and some patches never return to their peak value. You can get an idea of the value of many items by following the Scouting items on eBay. One way to get the BSA items on eBay is to go to <http://www.ebay.com/>, search for “Boy

Scouts”, click on an item, then click on the “Boy Scouts” link in the list of links that looks like this “Collectibles > Historical Memorabilia > Fraternal Groups > Boy Scouts > ...” near the top of the page.

Requirement 5d asks you to explain how your collection is graded for value, physical defects, size and age. Patches that have been sewn, worn, or washed are typically less valuable than mint patches. Similarly, patches that show signs of handling or have been stained or glued are also worth less. Patches that have been torn, burned or otherwise mutilated are usually worth even less. In contrast, patches that are wonderfully pristine, that look like they just came off the loom, may be worth even more than mint patches that are not quite so pristine. Patches that are stiff are typically worth more than patches that are limp. Some patches are so rare that people are happy to get them in any condition. For more common patches, you should usually try to collect mint issues. The *Blue Book* guide to condition describes patches as: Mint – they look just the way they did the day they were issued, Near Mint – they look almost but not quite mint, Used – they look used or worn, and Poor – they have big problems and must be listed with qualification.

Older patches tend to be more valuable than newer patches, but there is usually a period when newer patches are in great demand because no one has them yet. At National Jamborees and National OA Conferences, the new Jamboree Shoulder Patches and NOAC flaps are typically more in demand than older items. Like any other collectible, value depends on supply and demand. An item may be extremely rare, but if hardly anyone wants it, it won't have much of a value. Other items that people want may be more valuable even if they are more common. Some items are produced in such great quantity that they will never be particularly valuable.

Requirement 5e requires you to list the national, state, or local associations for collectors in your field. ISCA is the most prominent international organization, although most of its members are based in the US. Patch-L is a group of traders who subscribe to an email list server and get daily trade offers and information about what is happening in the hobby. See [Patch-L](http://isca.oaimages.com/emembers/) at <http://isca.oaimages.com/emembers/> and <http://www.gilwell.com/patchl/> for more information on Patch-L. If you are interested in patches, are at least 13, and are willing to comply with the Patch-L rules and ethics, you should join Patch-L. There are other internet patch groups and local trading groups as well.

Requirement 6 involves identification marks. In lodge and council patches, this refers to the lodge name and number and the council name. Typically, you need a book for further identification. Patches are usually identified by name, number, size, shape, design,

lettering, border type (rolled or cut edge), border color, background type (twill or solidly embroidered), background color, lettering color, and other design element colors. The [Collecting Terms](#) article has more details. For some OA patches, you can identify the manufacturer by the patch's distinctive shape. See [Collecting OA Patches](#) at <http://isca.oaimages.com/emembers/> for more information.

Requirement 7 asks you to discuss with your counselor how you got interested in this type of collection and the plans you have to continue with the collection in the future.

Requirement 8 involves discussing career opportunities. For most collectors, patch collecting is a hobby not a business. However, there are a few people who buy, sell, and trade professionally. They buy collections as a group and then sell the pieces individually at a profit. They may also sell items on consignment, which means they keep a percentage of the sales price. Others may have a regular job, but they supplement their income by selling on the side. Patches are sold on eBay, on other web sites, at Trade-O-Rees and other shows, and through mail and email lists. Typically, buying and selling is not permitted at Scouting events.

Patch trading is a fun hobby, and a great way to make life-long friends. It also gives you a great way to meet new people at Scouting events. Keep your collection clean, well protected, safe, and organized, and it will increase in value. Keep good records of what you have, and take copies of those records with you when you go trading so you will know what you need. Many of the patch reference books provide check lists. Good luck with your merit badge, good trading, and have fun! Having a collection can be a fun and sometimes profitable life-long hobby.

-- Warren F. Kuhfeld