

Courts of Honor

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE AND TIPS FOR ENGAGING ONES

Time Available

10 minutes.

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Explain the four steps of Advancement and the role of the Court of Honor.
- Discuss tips to enhance attendance and enthusiasm at Courts of Honor.

Suggested Presenter(s)

The presenters should be the District Advancement Chair or a leader of a unit that routinely has a high percentage of Scouts at their Courts of Honor.

Presentation Method

- Begin with a review of the steps of advancement per the Guide to Advancement.
- Discuss the intended purpose of the Court of Honor, per the Guide to Advancement.
- Discuss tips to enhance attendance and enthusiasm at Courts of Honor.

BSA Reference Materials

- 2017 Guide to Advancement, *no. 33088*
- [Guide to Advancement](#)
- [Communication Merit Badge Requirements](#)
- [Program Resources: Courts of Honor](#)
- [Program Resources: Ceremonies](#)

Presentation Content

Review the four steps to advancement from the 2017 Guide to Advancement (GTA), Section 4.2.1.0 – 4.2.1.4, pages 22-23:

- The Scout learns by doing, and so learns skills.
- The Scout is tested to see if he has learned the necessary skills, or for merit badges the counselor ensures he has met the requirements.
- The Scout is reviewed at a board of review.
- The Scout is recognized. This interest topic will focus on this step: recognition.

When and how to recognize a Scout's achievements.

- Section 4.2.1.4 of the GTA, page 23, describes in very general terms, how the Scout is recognized:
- “When a boy has earned the Scout rank or when a board of review has approved his advancement, the Scout deserves recognition **as soon as possible. This**

should be done at a ceremony at the next unit meeting. His achievement may be recognized again later, during a formal court of honor.”

- Note that Section 4.2.1.4 says to recognize the Scout as soon as possible, but doesn't elaborate on how that should be done.
- Section 3.0.0.3.4, page 14, provides guidance on how it should be done: It is best to obtain and present ranks and awards as soon as possible after they are earned. They can then be re-presented in more formal settings.
- Note that both sections of the GTA refer to near immediate recognition and presentation of ranks, merit badges, etc., with a second, later, recognition at a formal setting, e.g., the Court of Honor.

Why present a rank award at the next meeting?

- Scouts work hard to earn ranks and it is reasonable for them to expect to wear the badge for their newly earned rank as soon as possible and not have to wait months to receive it.
- Scout through First Class present excellent examples.
- Once a Scout earns Scout rank, he should have the badge of rank right away to fill that empty left pocket and really feel like a Scouts BSA.
- A Scout is able to work on Tenderfoot, Second Class and First Class at the same time. It is certainly possible for a Scout to complete two or more within the same month.
- If the troop holds both ranks until the next Court of Honor, which could be months away, then the Scout will never wear the badge for the lower of the two ranks. He'll sew the higher of the two on his uniform when he gets both at the Court of Honor and just put the lower on aside.
- When that happens, the Scout does not have the true recognition of the work he put into the lower rank, because he never got to wear it.
- A somewhat extreme example shows the problem. A Scout completes Second Class right after summer camp (days or weeks after the end of camp Court of Honor), and completes first class in early September, but the next Court of Honor isn't until December. That First Class Scout will be forced to wear a Tenderfoot rank badge between September and December. It's bad enough that he would never wear his Second Class badge, but he is deprived of the outward manifestation of his accomplishment of First Class for 3 months or more.

Eagle Scout as a second example.

- In many troops, Eagle Scout Courts of Honor are held separately from the other ranks, as a way of focusing on the great accomplishment of the new Eagle Scout.

They take time to plan and schedule a location.

- Usually the National Council approves the Eagle application a couple weeks after the local Council sends the paperwork to National following the board of review, and alerts the Scout and Scoutmaster that they can get the Eagle medal, patch and pins from the Scout Shop at any time.
- Once the Scoutmaster, or better yet, the Scout's family have the Eagle presentation, kit, why should the Scout be denied the honor of wearing that Eagle badge he worked so hard to earn for even one week after it is in-hand?
- If the Council has a practice of taking photos of new Eagle Scouts for their Scout Office lobby or newsletter, it is appropriate to have the Scout wearing the Eagle badge at the time of the photo, even if he has not yet had his Eagle Court of Honor.

Ask attendees whether any of their troops award ranks, merit badges, etc., before the Court of Honor as suggested by the GTA. Then ask them what their troop does to ensure a high level of attendance at the Court of Honor.

- Be sure to leave time to go over the following ideas if they have not already been mentioned by unit leaders.

Pay attention to Scouts' other activities.

- Avoid scheduling a Court of Honor in conflict with a sports game or evening practice that several Scouts must attend.

How do we get Scouts to the Court of Honor if they already have their awards?

- The programresources.org website has many resources for engaging ceremonies that Scouts and their families will want to attend.
- The Court of Honor should be organized so that every Scout has a role to play, so he will need to be there to fulfill his role, even if he hasn't earned any ranks or merit badges since the last Court of Honor.
- Every Court of Honor needs one or more masters of ceremony. Being the MC is one way to complete requirement #8 of the Communication merit badge. Any Scout who is capable of being the MC and has not yet completed requirement #8 should be given a chance to do so. That may be a Scout who isn't being recognized for anything at the Court of Honor.
- Each patrol can be given an assignment at the Court of Honor, thus ensuring all or most of the patrol is present.
- One patrol sets up the room, and another puts everything away or puts chairs and tables in their usual place afterward. Thus two patrols have jobs to do and reason to attend.
- One patrol can assist in setting out any refreshments to be served at the end of the Court of Honor, and a second patrol can be assigned to help them clean up afterward.

- A patrol can be assigned the opening flag ceremony. Those Scouts not carrying the flags are the escort and the entire patrol stands in front of the room together during the opening flag ceremony. The patrol leader could give the flag ceremony commands rather than the MC. At the end of the Court of Honor, another patrol can perform the closing flag ceremony.

Other ways to involve Scouts in the ceremony.

- During the Court of Honor, each Scout being recognized for earning a rank can be announced and called to the front of the room by a Scout who holds that rank. As many as seven Scouts can be involved in this simple way, if all seven ranks will be recognized.
- The Scoutmaster or SPL should be prepared to say something personal about each Scout as he is being recognized, such as something special he did while earning his rank, merit badge, or other award. Or, better yet, the Scout himself could be asked to share one memorable experience he had while earning the award or something new he learned. That makes the event more meaningful to each Scout than simply receiving a card or applause as part of a group.
- After each rank is presented, but before the Scouts return to their seats, every Scout of that rank can be asked to stand and be recognized as well, much as every Eagle Scout is asked to stand at many Eagle Courts of Honor.
- In short, actively involving all the Scouts will go a long way toward ensuring that the Court of Honor is well attended, even though the Scouts are already wearing the awards for which they are being recognized.

Special awards not worn on uniforms can be awarded at the Court of Honor.

- Aquatics awards worn only on swim trunks can be awarded at the Court of Honor, with the Scouts recounting the fun they had earning them.
- The same can be done with the 50 Miler and Historic Trails Awards that are not worn on the uniform.

Other recognitions.

- Call all youth leaders to the front and thank them for leading their fellow Scouts.
- Adult leaders who received square knots can be recognized for their work for the unit, district, etc. Especially mention those who were awarded the District Award of Merit, Silver Beaver or a Medal of Merit or Honor Medal.