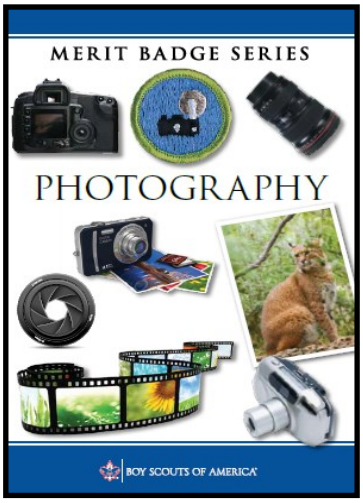
Merit Badges: Enhancing Our Youth's Competitive Edge

Photography Merit Badge: New Focus for an Old Favorite



While the Photography merit badge is not a new addition to the BSA merit badge library, the technological world of digital cameras, pixels, online printers, and photo software has made an old subject new again. The field of photography has undergone major changes in this age of computer technology. Today's processes go beyond simply capturing family memories, Scouting activities, vacation experiences, or other special events. New technologies offer new chances to be creative. As a result, requirements for the Photography merit badge are being revised to keep up with this new world of technology.

The "upgraded" merit badge requirements and supporting pamphlet still contain lessons about composition, how to choose a subject, the proper use of lighting, and depth of field, but also encourage a Scout's creativity by introducing stop action and blur motion techniques and the understanding of color as ways to help the Scout make his photographs into more than snapshots. The Scout will learn how to tell a story through pictures, while being led into the fun and discovery aspects of photography.

Scouts will find new images in the merit badge pamphlet, as well as new art work throughout the text of the publication. There also is a balanced discussion of the ethical side of photography relevant to the new social media world in which our youth live. Although the "phone" camera is mentioned because most of our Scouts own one, its use is not the essence of the skills being taught in the merit badge. There is a real difference between a thoughtful photograph and a grab shot, especially a "selfie."

Appropriately, the new Photography merit badge pamphlet will be available in a digital version, which will contain all the content of the print version, as well as videos and "how to" resources that cannot be included in a print version. Both the printed and digital versions of the Photography merit badge pamphlet are slated for release in the first quarter of 2016.

Can a Scout who has previously earned the Photography merit badge earn it again?

While he could choose to work through the requirements for fun and to experience a new dimension of photography, completion would not count as an additional merit badge.