

SCOUTMASTER CONFERENCE GUIDELINES

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INTRODUCTION

Recognize that each Scoutmaster is different, and each Scout is unique. Yet a Scoutmaster Conference should cover a common set of minimum subjects with a boy as he progresses through ranks, or if he just needs a periodic discussion with a Scoutmaster. The objective of this packet is to provide guidelines to have some consistency between Conferences, and to enhance your counseling skills. You probably use written or mental notes already; the guidelines put them into a standard set of resource notes for you to refer to prior to or during a Conference.

In the Conferences for each rank, you Scoutmasters ascertain if the boy is ready for a Board of Review by covering items the actual Board may review with him. It is not necessarily a dry run, but a re-examination of basics he should know. If the Conference does its job, the Board of Review should run more smoothly.

During these and other discussions, you are often looking for the intangible "Scout Spirit" in a boy, that can convince you he can move up or come to grips with his problems. The guidelines provide methods to help you form your opinion, and to help the boy through a problem.

However, the guidelines are intended to be a living document, to be modified or fine-tuned as their use indicates. Further comments and suggestions for improvements are eagerly welcomed!

I hope they will be of use to you in Scouting.

--- Ed Schuman
Grand Canyon Council
Advancement Committee
May 2003

SCOUTMASTER CONFERENCES

The real purpose of a Scoutmaster Conference is to develop understanding and trust between the Scoutmaster and the Scout as the boy grows and matures in Scouting.

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

In the first case, you are discussing a particular situation, or perhaps uncovering reasons for attitude, attendance, or behavior problems. Here, you may do as much talking as listening, especially if discipline or immediate corrective action is required.

In the second case, progress toward ranks, you are assessing whether he is ready for a Board of Review to advance him in rank, or perhaps just reviewing his status. Advancement Conference should not be held until you have verified that all other requirements for the next rank have been met. A periodic review of his progress and interest can occur whenever you feel such a discussion may be helpful to the boy. A full Class A uniform is not necessary for any Conference, but it is required for a Board of Review.

The enclosed sheets cover suggestions for each level of Conference with an individual boy. They are meant to be guidelines and discussion aids, not rigorous requirements. You may use some or all of them. You will probably tailor your discussion to the particular boy, and add specific issues to address, yet be sure to cover enough to form your opinion.

Try to avoid long lectures and preaching, even with a problem in discipline. Don't come on too strong, unless you're dealing with a dangerous situation, which demands authoritative action. Discipline and danger often require fast and immediate intervention without time to be "nice and easy".

Finish the conference praising his good points, and say you recommend him for a Board of Review, or tell him what he needs to work on and set a date for another meeting. Always try to end on a positive note. Very few boys actually fail a Board of Review. Most pass the first time, and the rest may need more than one session. The more encouragement and improvement you can provide in the Scoutmaster Conference, the less apprehensive he will feel about the formal Board of Review.

And, as always, have another Scoutmaster with you when you have the Conference, or, if outdoors, be in sight of the rest of the Troop. You and the other Scoutmaster can compare reactions to have a more meaningful review.

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 boy must be corrected. You may do more talking than listening. Also, what you end up with may not be where you started. Keep notes if you wish, but respect confidentiality. Be careful, however, not to counsel above your abilities--- maybe another Scoutmaster is better qualified to deal with this situation.

Remember you are doing "first-aid" counseling to surface and discuss the basic problem, not necessarily to provide the treatment. For example, a serious problem such as drugs or family difficulties should be referred to professionals if it appears necessary.

Always start with something positive; something the boy is doing well, even if you are about to discuss a bad situation. Then ease into the problem as you see it, or need to discuss it. There are no pat solutions; you may be feeling your way along. Work through the steps below toward an answer the boy develops from your conversation. Some suggestions to follow as you pursue the problem:

1. Listen carefully. Hear what he is saying about the situation you have described. Then listen some more.
2. Even if you have a good rapport with the particular boy, frequently ask yourself if you understand what he is trying to say; is there something else going on?
3. Keep him talking with words of sympathy such as "uh-huh" or "really?" Younger boys especially may be short on words in long talks. Repeat and summarize what he says to make sure you understand, and to keep the conversation on track.
4. Maybe he just needs more information or communication; if so supply it instead of advice.
5. Don't solve the problem for him unless the danger in the situation requires immediate action.
6. Explore alternative solutions with him--- at least two so he has a choice. If he comes up with the solution or makes the choice, then it is his answer, not yours!

Maybe the choice or solution is not made, or is not apparent after the discussion. Sometimes in life the answer is not immediate. At least you have aired the issues. If this happens, set a date to talk again. Time is a good distiller of problems and alternatives.

How long should this type of Conference take? As long as it needs--- you'll sense when to end it. Here, too, end on some positive note about what has been discussed.

If you can guide the boy to his own solution, you have done two things: first, you have proven true leadership; and second, you have just helped a boy grow as a person.

SUGGESTED PROCEDURE

Use a copy of the sheet for the rank to be discussed, or get an extra from the Advancement Chair. If notes are available from a previous Conference, you may want to review them, especially if you did not conduct it. Use the sheet also for a periodic review of his goals and progress toward his next rank.

Begin with easy, friendly questions, to get him relaxed. Avoid simple yes or no questions--- use statements like:

"Tell me about..."

"What do you like best about..."

"Suppose this happened... what would you do about it?"

Remember, you want to get him to open up and talk to you. You also want to understand what he is thinking.

Cover his advancement by intermixing questions with the checklist. What are his likes and dislikes about the Troop? Are there some things he doesn't understand? Refer to the Checklist Sheet if there are some things you don't understand or remember.

Check off the items you cover--- use a (✓) if he answers okay. Use an asterisk (*) to highlight areas he needs to correct, with a note on what should be fixed. Don't use (x)--- we have no failures here. If you sense that a boy's answers indicate that he has studied a bit, so much the better, for he has demonstrated the Scout Motto.

List any other questions you ask, or comments you have on the sheet as appropriate, especially for follow-up. Use your own imagination and style. Mark in the margins or on the back as you wish for your notes; neatness doesn't count!

Fill out the CONCLUSION section and sign it.

Return the sheet to the Advancement Chair, who will retain it in the boy's file for future reference or a follow-up conference, and who will schedule a Board of Review.

BOY SCOUT CANDIDATE _____ DATE _____

This conference can be short, and no Board of Review is required. A Webelo who earned his Arrow of Light should pretty well know the checklist, and is sometimes brought into the Troop as a Boy Scout. Even if the boy's answers are far from perfect, he can be passed, with comments to review and know specific items better for Tenderfoot. Boy Scout is a joining level, not a rank, and thus should not take much time.

Use the Checklist Sheet to guide answers, or train the items.

CHECKLIST

1. Scout Sign Can he demonstrate these? Does he know
2. Scout Salute what all three mean?
3. Scout Handclasp
4. Tie a square knot--- it is a symbol of joining.
5. Scout Oath--- does he know and understand most of it?
6. Scout Laws--- does he know and understand most of them?
7. Scout Badge--- explain it to him, if he doesn't know it
8. Does he have a book--- it should be with him.

Why did he join the Troop?

What does he want to do in Scouting? Probably have fun!

He and his parents should have reviewed and signed the Child and Drug Abuse Pamphlet in the front of his book.

Does he have any other questions about the Troop? He should have received an Information Packet or other discussion with his application prior to joining.

Review the Tenderfoot Requirements briefly, but don't dwell on them. Ease any fears by stating that most of these can be met with regular participation in meetings, campouts, and other Troop activities.

CONCLUSION

OKAY FOR BOY SCOUT _____

NEEDS MORE WORK ON ITEMS WITH (*), RE-DO CONFERENCE _____ WHEN? _____

SCOUTMASTERS _____

TENDERFOOT CANDIDATE _____ DATE _____

Congratulate him on completing the requirements. How does he feel about Scouts so far? What does he enjoy the most and why? Ten minutes are probably sufficient for the Conference unless there are other problems to discuss.

CHECKLIST

1. What campout(s) did he go on, what gear did he pack, what's his reaction to it?
2. Tie 2 half hitches or a taut-line hitch--- have some rope with you.
3. What do you do if you get lost on a hike?
4. Scout Oath
5. Scout Laws He should know most of these from memory,
6. Scout Motto but you can explain what he missed.
7. Scout Slogan
8. Describe the Scout Badge
9. What is the buddy system?
10. Talk about your Patrol and Patrol Leader
11. How did you improve your scores in fitness?
12. What is a local poisonous plant? How do you treat it?
13. What do you do for a burn?

OTHER SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

1. What problems is he having with other boys in his Patrol, or with Leadership?
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Hopefully, there are no problems to discuss at this level. If he has completed the requirements and fairly well knows the Checklist items, even if not perfect, he'll usually make Tenderfoot.

End with how he is doing toward Second Class. Review the Requirements. Talk about starting work on some Merit Badges. Then discuss goals and a target date for achieving Second Class Requirements.

List of Goals _____ Completion Date _____

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

CONCLUSION

OKAY FOR A BOARD OF REVIEW _____ PERIODIC PROGRESS ONLY _____
NEEDS TO CORRECT ITEMS WITH (*), RE-DO CONFERENCE _____ WHEN? _____

SCOUTMASTERS _____

SECOND CLASS CANDIDATE _____

DATE _____

Congratulate him for his good work on nearing Second Class. How's his Patrol, what does he think about his Leadership? Ten minutes are probably enough time for the Conference unless there are other issues to discuss.

CHECKLIST

1. Orient a map; how does a compass generally work?
2. What 5-mile hike did he do?
3. Show how to open, close, give a knife to another person.
4. How do you make and light a fire?
5. Describe a service project you worked on? What did you think of it? Does he like to work?
6. Pick a first aid topic; such as tell the difference between heat exhaustion and heat stroke, or how to stop bleeding.
7. Explain the buddy system and a safe swim approach.
8. What does he think about drugs and alcohol?
9. Pick one of the following. He should only miss a word or two
Scout Law Outdoor Code
Scout Oath Scout Badge
10. What is Scout Spirit?

OTHER QUESTIONS

1. What is his favorite activity in Scouting?
2. What is the chain of command in the Troop?
3. Does he have any Leadership ideas?
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

A candidate for Second Class should be reasonably used to the Troop and camping. But if he appears to have misgivings about Scouts or the Troop, try to get him to discuss them with you and work out alternatives or solutions. Unless he really stumbles, or has other problems to work out, he should be ready for Second Class.

End by reviewing what he has left for First Class, and his progress on any Merit Badges. Discuss goals and set target dates for achieving First Class Requirements, or any longer goals he may have in Scouting.

<u>List of Goals</u>	<u>Completion Date</u>
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- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

CONCLUSION

OKAY FOR A BOARD OF REVIEW _____ PERIODIC PROGRESS ONLY _____

NEEDS TO CORRECT ITEMS WITH (*), RE-DO CONFERENCE _____ WHEN? _____

SCOUTMASTERS _____

FIRST CLASS CANDIDATE _____

DATE _____

Tell him what a good job he has done on the requirements. Plan on fifteen minutes, or longer with other issues. If he knows his stuff, it should go rapidly.

CHECKLIST

1. What has your patrol cooked? How did you help?
2. Tie a timber hitch or a clove hitch--- what is it used for?
3. Tie a bowline--- what is it used for?
4. What camp gadget did you make?
5. Explain a first aid example such as CPR or heart attack.
6. Review the list--- he should know it cold by now.
 - Scout Oath Scout Badge
 - Scout Law Scout Motto
 - Outdoor Code Scout Slogan

OTHER QUESTIONS

1. How do you like the Troop? What would you change?
2. What have you learned about camping?
3. What Merit Badges have you earned? Discuss the Best or worst and why.
4. What Leadership positions would you like to hold?
5. What outing did you like best and why?
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

Most Scouts are ready for First Class after about a year in the Troop, some earlier, some later. By this time, they should be turned on to Scouts with their enthusiasm showing. You should build on this enthusiasm to keep him going. His leadership qualities should also start to emerge by now--- is he a candidate for Junior Leadership Training? Discuss your expectations that he find and serve in a Leadership position he is comfortable with.

The First Class Board of Review will be more stringent than previous ranks, but again, if he proves his knowledge to you, he'll do well in the Board.

End by discussing any goals he may have in Scouting. Find out what he is thinking. Then set target dates to achieve them as well as Star Requirements

<u>List of Goals</u>	<u>Completion Date</u>
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- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

CONCLUSION

OKAY FOR A BOARD OF REVIEW _____ PERIODIC PROGRESS ONLY _____

NEEDS TO CORRECT ITEMS WITH (*), RE-DO CONFERENCE _____ WHEN? _____

SCOUTMASTERS _____

STAR CANDIDATE _____ DATE _____

Congratulate him on making good progress. Plan on a 15-minute Conference.

Review what Merit Badges he has done: typically, First Aid, Swimming, Indian Lore, Basketry, maybe Safety or one of the Citizenship series. Pick one-ask him what he learned. Which did he like least? Who signed them? Was it a class or did he initiate the meeting with the Merit Badge Counselor?

How does he think he performed in his Leadership role? What would he like to do next? Discuss your evaluation of his Leadership. What could he have done better?

What services has he performed? What did he think about it?

What does he like best or least about camping?

How does he think a Star Scout differs from First Class?

Who is a good role model in our Troop? Why?

Commend his good points. Does he have any areas he needs to improve upon? Such as attitude, attendance, leadership?

OTHER QUESTIONS

1. What thoughts does he have about an Eagle Project?
2. Discuss being on staff at Camp Geronimo--- any interest?
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Above First Class, your evaluations obviously get more subjective. Often there is no solid pattern of progress, but the Scouting interest is still there. Consequently, it becomes more important to find out what he's thinking, and how he feels. What kind of person is he? If you can draw him out, you may find some well-considered opinions, which will change your previous perception of him.

Discuss his Scouting goals and set a target date for achieving them, including Life Rank.

List of Goals _____ Completion Date

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Then judge if he is ready for the Board of Review.

CONCLUSION

OKAY FOR A BOARD OF REVIEW _____ PERIODIC PROGRESS ONLY _____
NEEDS TO CORRECT ITEMS WITH (*), RE-DO CONFERENCE _____ WHEN? _____

SCOUTMASTERS _____

LIFE CANDIDATE _____

DATE _____

Tell him what great progress he has made to almost reach Life rank. Plan on 15 minutes for the Conference. A boy reaching this level usually has his act together. Review what he has done to date in Merit Badges--- what is his favorite?

How did he think he did in Leadership? What could he have done better? Discuss your evaluation of his Leadership.

How can the Troop be a better Troop? What would he do?

Does he remember the Outdoor Code? Try him on the Scout Law and ask him to explain what one of the points means.

What difference does he see in a Life Scout from a Star?

What does he think he needs to improve upon before a Board of Review?

Does he have any ideas yet for an Eagle Project? Remind him of the guidelines:

1. Must be service to community, or other organization, but not directly with Boy Scouts.
2. Must demonstrate organizational and leadership abilities.
3. Must be major in scope and take about 120 man-hours.

OTHER QUESTIONS

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Set goals and dates for achieving Eagle Requirements.

List of Goals _____ Completion Date

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Judge his attitude and maturity. He may have completed all the necessary requirements, but is he ready for Life rank? There is less of a checklist to be used here, but with your past relationship, you should be able to form a considered opinion of the boy as a rounded individual. Life Rank is a pivotal level--- a boy who achieves this has really done well, even if he does not make Eagle.

Again, if he needs improvement, suggest where and how, then set a timetable for another review. If all looks good, tell him he's ready for a Board of Review.

CONCLUSION

OKAY FOR A BOARD OF REVIEW _____ PERIODIC PROGRESS ONLY _____

NEEDS TO CORRECT ITEMS WITH (*), RE-DO CONFERENCE _____ WHEN? _____

SCOUTMASTERS _____

EAGLE CANDIDATE _____

DATE _____

Congratulate him on everything he has done so far. This Conference should have no set time limit. Review his project and report. Spend some time on this. Are there any areas he should fix in the report:

1. How was his planning?
2. How was his development portion? Did he have to change it?
3. Why did he think it was a good one? What was hardest?
4. How did the receiving organization like it?
5. What would he do differently now?

How does he feel about Scouts now? What's he plan after Eagle? Discuss the Palms--- is he interested? How active has he been lately?

What are his thoughts on the world environment? Current affairs?

What would he do differently in his Scouting career if he had to do it all over again?

What suggestions does he have on improving the Troop program, the Troop adult Leadership, or Scout Councils (JLT, Geronimo, etc.)?

Where does he think he needs to improve before a Board of Review? Attitude, Leadership?

Beware of the cocky attitude, which implies that "I've done all the requirements, now give me my Eagle." If you sense this, a discussion of Scout Spirit is needed.

OTHER QUESTIONS

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

As with Life rank, you have to judge whether he has the attitude and maturity to become an Eagle Scout. Compare him in your mind with the other Eagle Scouts in the Troop, or others you may know. The Eagle rank should not be given lightly or automatically in any Troop. This rank is the toughest call for both a Scoutmaster and a Board of Review. An Eagle Scout not only represents himself, but the Troop, and Scouting in general. And he may soon be gone from the Troop--- will he stuff it away in a drawer, or wear it proudly? Do you sense a fine young man developing into an equally fine young adult? More than any other rank, you are looking for the individual inside who will uphold what you feel are the ideals of Scouting. You may even find yourself examining your Scouting goals again! Point out what he needs to correct, if anything. But if you get a comfortable feeling with him, then he's probably ready for Eagle.

CONCLUSION

OKAY FOR A BOARD OF REVIEW _____ PERIODIC PROGRESS ONLY _____
NEEDS TO CORRECT ITEMS WITH (*), RE-DO CONFERENCE _____ WHEN? _____

SCOUTMASTERS _____

EAGLE PALMS CANDIDATE_____

DATE_____

BRONZE REQUIREMENTS:

Earn 5 Merit Badges beyond the 21 earned for Eagle, plus a minimum of 3 months active time after his Eagle Board of Review.

GOLD REQUIREMENTS:

Earn 5 Merit Badges with 3 months of active time beyond the Bronze Palm.

SILVER REQUIREMENTS:

Earn 5 Merit Badges with 3 months of active time beyond the Gold Palm.

A boy can continue to earn Palms in the same way after these three, as long as he wants until he reaches 18 years.

A Conference for Palms is mostly a "check-in" discussion. Review how he is doing. What are his plans now? Make notes on any items he needs to correct.

To earn a Palm, a boy should remain reasonably active--- although "reasonable" may be a matter of individual definition to a 17 year old busy with school, social life, or college preparations. Use your judgment, but err on the side of the boy. Remember, he's already an Eagle Scout!

CONCLUSION

OKAY FOR A BOARD OF REVIEW FOR BRONZE PALM_____

GOLD PALM_____

SILVER PALM_____

PERIODIC REVIEW ONLY_____

NEEDS TO CORRECT ITEMS LISTED, RE-DO CONFERENCE_____ WHEN? _____

SCOUTMASTERS_____

CONVERSATIONS WITH PARENTS

Trust and understanding in a Scoutmaster Conference usually call for a certain amount of confidentiality. Obviously, another Scout should not be told what was discussed in one boy's Conference. You cannot totally prevent a boy from blabbing to others what he talked about, but you should remind the boy that the discussion is completely between you and him.

Notes on the Conferences will be kept in confidence by you and the Advancement Chair.

Yet there is nothing that we should keep from parents if they ask about their son. Parents can review their boy's records at any time, and that includes any notes on Scoutmaster Conferences.

As a general rule, we don't regularly discuss a boy's progress with his parents, unless the situation is appropriate, or they ask how he is doing. If a boy has basic items to correct, that is the boy's responsibility, not the parents. If he doesn't know the Scout Laws, his parents can't say them for him. They cannot help him succeed in a Scoutmaster Conference or pass a Board of Review.

You will have to judge how and what you discuss with parents and when. Perhaps he needs another piece for a full uniform. Maybe he does need their help to complete a requirement for a rank. For example, if he needs one more campout, and that weekend he is going somewhere with his parents, a conversation might result in a compromise. It can be done after the Troop meeting, when you return from a campout, or by telephone.

If a parent is active in the Troop in some capacity, he or she will be more aware of what is going on. Nonetheless, any discussion should be held in the same manner.

However, if there is a serious problem of behavior or substance abuse uncovered, the parents should be contacted and made aware of what you have observed or been told by the boy. They should also know what actions you took or worked out with the boy. Your job in this case is only to inform them of the situation and the facts as you see them. They may not agree with you; be prepared for that! But if the boy's problems present danger to him, or are affecting the Troop's operation, the parents must be told. In many of these cases, it is the parents who must initiate the corrective actions, not the Scoutmasters.

Scouts and Scoutmasters can work on fixing Scouting situations, and parental involvement is usually welcomed, but serious problems demand discussions with parents and their help in solving them.

BASIC CHECKLIST SHEET

SCOUT OATH:

On my honor, I will do my best
To do my duty to God and my country,
and to obey the Scout Law;
To help other people at all times;
To keep myself physically strong,
mentally awake, and morally straight.

SCOUT LAW:

A Scout is--- Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful,
Friendly, Courteous, Kind, Obedient, Cheerful,
Thrifty, Brave, Clean, Reverent.

SCOUT MOTTO: Be Prepared!

SCOUT SLOGAN: Do a good turn daily!

OUTDOOR CODE:

As an American, I will do my best to---
Be clean in my outdoor manners,
Be careful with fire,
Be considerate in the outdoors, and
Be conservation minded.

SCOUT SIGN: Raise your right hand, palm
forward, with the three middle fingers
upward, and your thumb on the nail of your
little finger. Hold your upper arm straight
out to the side with your forearm straight up.

SCOUT SALUTE: Place the fingers of your right hand in position for the Scout sign. Bring the hand smartly up to your head until your forefinger touches the edge of your hat or your forehead above the right eye.

SCOUT HANDCLASP: Extend your left hand, nearest your heart, with the thumb separated from the other four fingers, and firmly grasp your friend's left hand.

SCOUT BADGE:

Fleur-de-lis or
Trefoil points Scout
to right way in life; 3
points stand for 3
parts of Scout Oath

Eagle means freedom

Shield--- readiness to
defend freedom

Scroll--- Scout smile as
he does good turn daily

Knot reminds Scout to do
a good turn daily

Stars--- Truth and Knowledge



Uniform Check: Use the Insignia Guide, Uniform Inspection Sheet, or the Boy Scout Handbook