



Canoeing

Scouts BSA · Aquatics

Name

Started

Completed

Gliding across a quiet lake in a canoe is one of the best parts of being outdoors. This badge teaches you to paddle with skill, stay safe on the water, and help others if something goes wrong. Most scouts earn it at summer camp or with an experienced aquatics instructor.

Requirements

Every official requirement, in plain language. Check the official wording when you sign off (scouting.org/merit-badges/canoeing/). Tips and examples are ideas, not extra requirements.

1 Safety, first aid, and Safety Afloat

Tips for this section: Learn Safety Afloat and go over common water hazards and first aid with your instructor before you get in the canoe.

- ☐ **1a** Go over with your counselor the hazards you're most likely to meet while canoeing and how to anticipate, prevent, reduce, and respond to them

- ☐ **1b** Review how to prevent, recognize, and give first aid for canoeing injuries and illnesses: sunburn, blisters, sprains, strains, dehydration, heat-related illness, and cold-water shock and hypothermia

- ☐ **1c** Discuss Scouting America's Safety Afloat policy and how it applies to canoeing

- ☐ **2** Pass the Scouting America swimmer test (described in the Swimming merit badge pamphlet) before doing the rest of the requirements

Tip: Practice your swimming before the test. Ask your camp's aquatics staff when and where tests are given.

3 Canoe parts and design

Tips for this section: Look at different canoes side by side and notice how length, width, and shape change how they handle.

Example for this section: Compare two canoes side by side: a long, narrow one tracks straight and moves fast across a lake, while a shorter one with more rocker (curve from bow to stern) turns quickly in a twisting river. Point to the keel line, gunwales, thwarts, and seats.

- ☐ **3a** Name and point out the main parts of a canoe

- ☐ **3b** Describe how a canoe's length and shape change how it performs

4 Paddles

Tips for this section: Have an instructor help you check your paddle size, once sitting in the canoe and once kneeling.

Example for this section: Check paddle size the way you'll paddle: sit on the canoe seat with the blade just under the water, and the grip should reach about your nose. Kneeling puts you lower in the boat, so ask your instructor to check the fit that way too. Then name the grip, shaft, throat, blade, and tip.

- ☐ **4a** Identify a paddle's parts and show where each one is

- ☐ **4b** Show how to pick the right paddle size for someone sitting and for someone kneeling

5 Life jackets and safety gear

Tips for this section: Always wear a properly fitted life jacket. Check it fits snugly and doesn't ride up when pulled at the shoulders.

- ☐ **5a** Go over with your counselor which life jacket features suit canoeing best, and tell why you must always wear one while paddling

- ☐ **5b** Show how to choose a life jacket in the right size and fit it correctly

- ☐ **5c** Review why safety and rescue gear matters, such as ropes, a throw bag, a rescue sling, a bailer, a sponge, a bilge pump, a spare paddle, and a sound signal

- ☐ **6** Go over with your counselor how to care for and maintain canoes, paddles, and other canoeing gear

Tip: Help clean and store canoes and paddles after each outing. Look for damage before putting them away.

7 Launching, landing, and moving with a partner

Tips for this section: Practice in calm, shallow water first. Keep your weight low and centered when you move around.

Example for this section: Practice launching parallel to a dock: hold both gunwales, step into the center line, and stay low. To switch positions on the water, the stern paddler holds the canoe steady while the bow paddler moves low and slow toward the middle.

- ☐ **7a** In a properly equipped canoe with a partner, carry and launch the canoe safely from a dock or shore (both if you can)

- ☐ **7b** Land the canoe safely at a dock or shore (both if you can) and put it back where it's stored

- ☐ **7c** Show kneeling and sitting positions in the canoe and explain when to use each

- ☐ **7d** Trade places with your partner while afloat

8 Capsizes and rescues with a partner

Tips for this section: Practice capsizes and rescues only with qualified aquatics staff and a buddy. It's easier and more fun than it sounds.

Example for this section: With aquatics staff watching in chest-deep water, tip the canoe on purpose, stay with it, and hand-paddle the swamped canoe to shore. Then practice a canoe-over-canoe rescue with another crew so you know how to empty a swamped boat on open water.

- ☐ **8a** In a properly equipped canoe with a partner, get out in deep water while keeping hold of the canoe, then climb back in with your partner's help without tipping it

- ☐ **8b** Tip the canoe over on purpose in a controlled way and show how holding onto the capsized canoe keeps both paddlers afloat

- ☐ **8c** Swim, tow, or push a swamped canoe for 50 feet until you reach shallow water, then empty it there and climb back in

- ☐ **8d** In deep water, help a swamped canoe and its crew: make sure the paddlers don't need urgent help, empty their canoe, and help them back in without tipping it

- ☐ **8e** Use a canoe to rescue a conscious swimmer

- ☐ **8f** From shore, toss a rescue (throw) bag to a conscious swimmer 30 feet out so the line lands within 3 feet of them, then show how to repack it

- ☐ **9** With a partner in a properly equipped canoe, paddle together on opposite sides without switching sides to show the maneuvers below; each of you must do them in the bow and the stern and on both sides, keeping the canoe trimmed and balanced

Tip: Practice each maneuver from both bow and stern. Switch positions with your partner so you both improve.

Example: As stern paddler, use a J-stroke to keep the canoe straight while the bow paddler does forward strokes. Then practice pivots and sideslips using draws and pushaways, and switch seats so you can do every maneuver from both bow and stern.

- ☐ **9a** From a stop, pivot the canoe 180° to the right, stop, then pivot back left to where you began, using draws and pushaways or forward and reverse sweeps and keeping within 2 boat lengths of the start

- ☐ **9b** Using draw and pushaway strokes, move the canoe sideways 10 feet in one direction and then back to where you started

- ☐ **9c** While moving forward, stop the canoe within 2 boat lengths with the backstroke

- ☐ **9d** Paddling stern with no help from the bow, go straight for 15-20 boat lengths with a steering stroke like the J-stroke or thumb-down rudder, with or without a stern pry

- ☐ **9e** Paddle straight for 15-20 boat lengths together: bow uses forward, draw, or forward sweep strokes as needed; stern uses a steering stroke like the J-stroke or thumb-down rudder, with or without a stern pry

- ☐ **9f** While moving forward, turn 90° right in an arc within 5-10 boat lengths (bow uses draw or forward sweep as needed, stern uses only forward strokes), then repeat turning 90° left

- ☐ **9g** Paddle backward in a straight line for 3-4 boat lengths, using back strokes, reverse sweeps, or draws from bow or stern as needed

- ☐ **9h** Paddle a figure-8 around markers set 3-4 boat lengths apart using suitable strokes, including draws and forward and reverse sweeps