



Pottery

Scouts BSA · Arts

Name

Started

Completed

Pottery is shaping clay into useful and beautiful things, a craft people have done for thousands of years. You'll learn about clay, tools, and kilns, then make your own pieces. It's messy, creative, and a lot of fun.

Requirements

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

- ☐ **1** Explain to your counselor the precautions for safely using a potter's tools, equipment, and materials

Tip: Learn how to use tools and kilns safely, and keep dust down by cleaning with a damp sponge.

2 Clay and wheels

Tips for this section: Feel different kinds of clay and watch someone use a potter's wheel.

Example for this section: Compare clay for sculpture and clay for the wheel: sculpture clay often has grog to make it strong and keep it from cracking as it dries, while throwing clay is smoother so it stretches without tearing. Then explain how a kick wheel, a treadle wheel, and an electric wheel each spin.

2a A good clay body

- ☐ **2a1** Explain what makes a good clay body for hand-built sculpture: its properties and what goes into it

- ☐ **2a2** Explain what makes a good clay body for throwing on the wheel: its properties and what goes into it

- ☐ **2b** Tell how three kinds of potter's wheels each work

- ☐ **3** Draw two pottery forms, each on its own 8½-by-11-inch sheet: one in a historical style and one of your own design

Tip: Look at pottery from a museum or book for ideas, then sketch your own design.

Example: Sketch an ancient Greek amphora or a Pueblo water jar and explain what it was used for. Next to it, draw your own design, like a mug with a thumb rest or a bowl shaped to stack, and note its size and glaze.

- ☐ **4** Explain these pottery terms: glaze, pyrometric cone, porcelain, stoneware, earthenware, score, slip, grog, terra-cotta, bisque, greenware, bone dry, leather hard, throwing, wedging, and bat

Tip: Make flash cards of terms and quiz yourself while you work.

Example: Make a word list with a quick example for each: greenware (dried, unfired clay), bisque (first firing), glaze, slip, wedging, leather-hard, and kiln. Point to a piece in each stage if you can.

5 Make and fire pottery

Tips for this section: Start with hand-building, like pinch pots or coils, before trying the wheel. Expect a few wobbly first tries.

Example for this section: Plan your set: a pinch pot, a coil pot, and a slab box for hand-building, a small animal figurine, and a cylinder or bowl on the wheel. Decorate each yourself with carving, slip, or glaze, then help an experienced adult load and fire the kiln.

- ☐ **5a** Make a pinch pot, a coil pot, and a slab pot, and paint, glaze, or otherwise decorate each yourself

- ☐ **5b** Make a figurine of a person or animal, or a decorative sculpture, and decorate it yourself

- ☐ **5c** Throw a useful form on a potter's wheel and decorate it yourself

- ☐ **5d** Help an experienced adult load a kiln and fire it, or give a detailed description of loading and firing one

- ☐ **6** Explain how big the ceramic industry is in the United States, and name some things it makes besides craft pottery

Tip: Look around your home for ceramic items, from dishes to tiles, and think about the industry that makes them.

7 Visit or research: Choose 1 of 3

Tips for this section: Visit a local art studio or gallery, or read about how pottery shaped a culture in history.

Example for this section: Visit a local pottery studio's open house with a parent and ask a potter how they mix glazes and load the kiln. Or research a pottery tradition, like Pueblo water jars or Japanese tea bowls, and share what it shows about the people who made it.

- ☐ **7a** With permission from a parent or guardian and your counselor's approval, visit the kiln yard at a nearby college or craft school and learn how different kilns work: low-fire electric, high-fire gas or propane, wood or salt/soda, and raku

- ☐ **7b** With permission from a parent or guardian and your counselor's approval, visit a museum, art exhibit, gallery, artists' co-op, or studio that features pottery, then share what you learned with your counselor

- ☐ **7c** With permission from a parent or guardian and your counselor's approval, use the library, magazines, the internet (with permission), and other sources to learn why pottery matters in history and culture. Share what you found with your counselor

- ☐ **8** Learn about careers in pottery. Pick one, find out the education, training, and experience it takes, and discuss it with your counselor, including why it might interest you

Tip: Ask a potter or art teacher how they got started.