

PERMANENT ADVANCEMENT RECORDS

INSTRUCTIONS ON “PAR” METHOD OF TRACKING BOY SCOUT ADVANCEMENT



1. Introduction.

Advancement in Scouting recognizes a Scout's accomplishments and encourages him to continue his participation and efforts in Scouting. Advancement leads to respected, effective, and skilled junior leadership. Advancement flows naturally from a well-planned and well-run program true to Scouting mainstream principles.

Tracking advancement and knowing the advancement status of each Scout in the troop is primarily the job of the Scoutmaster despite the inference otherwise suggested by the job title of the troop committee "Advancement Chairman". While there are resources available to assist the Scoutmaster in this essential task, for example, BSA's "First Class Tracking Sheet" (No. 34105), as a Scoutmaster I found these kinds of resources inadequate to satisfy my own needs. So in about 1990 I developed what I believe to be a sure method for the Scoutmaster to track each Scout's advancement in order to implement this very important aspect of Scouting. In keeping with the modern rage of employing acronyms, I call it the "P—A—R", which stands for Permanent Advancement Record. (Befittingly, the word "par" means "an accepted standard" like the score for each hole in golf.) The PAR method has proved itself invaluable in over a decade of use and has distinct advantages to it which will become apparent to those who employ it.

I sincerely encourage every Scoutmaster to try this advancement tracking method. My goal in sharing it with you is to make your job easier and to ensure advancement in the troop for each Scout. Although this syllabus is written using the terms "[Boy] Scout", "Scoutmaster", and "troop", it applies with equal force to the substituted terms of "Venturer", "Venturing Advisor", and "venturing crew" (for young men under age 18).

2. Synopsis.

- For each Scout print the three pages of the PAR form on colored cardstock and place them in a binder to keep track of advancement in the unit
- Scoutmaster has charge of the binder and thus can administer and monitor advancement (the binder can also contain other troop records, *e.g.*, membership data, attendance, program schedule, budget, progress of junior leader training, *etc.*)
- The PAR becomes the official troop advancement record from which to fill out other forms, advancement posters, enter data for automated records, *etc.* and which the Scoutmaster, successor Scoutmasters, and the troop can rely on as an accurate record

- Advantage of PAR form is that the actual text of the requirements for the Scouting ranks up to Eagle is concisely shown “at a glance” on only two 8½ x 11" sheets
- Copying the PARs of all active Scouts every 6 months provides a static view of the troop’s advancement status for purposes of determining quality unit at recharter time, and for historical purposes; photocopying the PAR occasionally for the Scout and his parents reminds of and encourages progress; Scouts and junior leadership can review the PAR during meetings
- PAR sheets can be removed and presented at a board of review as a reliable and informative record of the Scout’s advancement; additional notes and goals can be inscribed on the face or backside of the form; Scout returning the form to the Scoutmaster to place back in the binder accounts for the result of the board of review
- The PAR method works!

3. PAR Method of Tracking Advancement.

a. Three-Page Rank Advancement Tracking Form.

The best way to describe the PAR method is to refer you to the three pages of the form: PAR Page 1—containing all of the text of the requirements and initial/date fields for the first three ranks (Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class); PAR Page 2—containing requirements for the next three ranks (Star, Life, and Eagle); and PAR Page 3—containing requirements for three Eagle Palms (Bronze, Gold, and Silver) and a non-exhaustive summary of special awards and recognition which an individual Scout is eligible to receive.

In examining the PAR form, notice that the steps for rank advancement through the Eagle rank are concisely contained on only two sheets of letter-size paper. Because any of the first three rank requirements can be met non-sequentially (*i.e.*, requirements for First Class can be met while still a Scout, Tenderfoot, or Second Class Scout) it helps conceptually to have all three ranks’ requirements listed on one page. Finishing Page 1 is an important step in a Scout’s advancement progress because it means the Scout has reached First Class. Because merit badges can be earned at any time to qualify for the second three ranks, this is likewise a non-serial record keeping process. Having these three higher ranks shown on one single page aids considerably in assessing the Scout’s earned merit badge progress.

b. Print Forms on Colored Cardstock and Assemble in an Indexed Binder.

For each of the three pages select and obtain a different color of 8½ x 11" *cardstock* paper with a smooth surface for use with most commercial copiers and most newer-model laser and inkjet printers (suggested 65 to 90 lb. weight depending on your preference). An example of my favorite colors: Page 1—beige or light yellow; Page 2—light blue; and Page 3—light gray. Download the PDF format (Adobe® Acrobat Reader) form of each page. Using preferably a laser jet printer, print as many of each of the three pages onto the chosen colored cardstock as there are Scouts in the troop and a few extra for incoming Scouts. Three-hole punch the left edge of the cardstock. Leave the back of the cardstock blank

or else create your own formatted form for additional information to print on the back like which outdoor activities the Scout has participated in. Then assemble a set of the three different PAR pages for each Scout, write his name (and number) on the top of the page, fill out the “Date of Birth”, “Date Became a Scout”, and “Telephone Number” personal data fields on the first two pages, and sort and place them into a locking D-Ring style 2” or 3” view binder (with a non-glare clear overlay on the front of the binder which allows insertion of an identifying cover sheet on the outside). Separate each set with index tab dividers for easy access. If using a number system (assigning each Scout a unique sequential number as he enters the troop) use number tabs (small enough tab size to allow 1 to 25 visible along the outside edge; 26 to 50; etc.); if using an alphabetic system (sorted by surname/first name) use letter tabs A-Z.

c. Scoutmaster in Charge of PAR Binder.

The binder should be stored, maintained, and “jealously guarded” by the Scoutmaster at all times. If you let it out of your hands even for an instant you may never see it back. Boy Scout publications mention how advancement records are kept by the local council, the troop advancement chairman, and the individual Boy Scout. Why records seem to be tailored to inform everyone else beside the principal adult leader responsible for advancement in the troop (the Scoutmaster) presents a conspicuous paradox to me. Given that it is not the job of the Scoutmaster to sit on boards of review, and given that the Handbook in the possession of a Scout is the Scout’s personal record, the Scoutmaster usually does not have direct access to advancement records available to these persons, which are not designed to be used to track advancement on the troop level in an organized format anyway. The Scoutmaster needs his/her own reliable set of advancement records. The PAR fills this need. Since the Scoutmaster has the primary charge of the binder at all times, making the PAR the troop’s permanent advancement record for every Scout in the unit means that the Scoutmaster knows exactly the status of each boy’s advancement progress at any given time and vests control over advancement in the person who in the main is supposed to administer and monitor it.

d. Filling Out and Initialing the PAR Forms.

As a Scout meets a requirement, blacken the interior of the box or circle beside the requirement number, and initial and enter the date in the “Initials / Date” shaded field beside that requirement. Where called for, fill in additional information on the form, like indicating the leadership position held, describing the service project completed, or filling in the merit badge earned and the name of the counselor who signed the blue card (“Application for Merit Badge” No. 34124). On the PAR form Page 2, where applicable, remember to also blacken the circle beside each category of required merit badges for Eagle, to signify that the Scout has satisfied that category when it comes time to make that assessment under requirement number 3 for the Eagle rank.

The circled “R” symbol found beside some of the merit badge numbers on page 2 of the PAR form—“®” signifies that the merit badge written in *must* be one of those from the required list for Eagle. Unless a merit badge is from the required list, it should not be written on the form where a “®” appears. The *exception* to this is where the “®” symbol is shown enclosed in brackets—“[®]” beside merit badge numbers (17), (18), and (19) in the list of merit badges needed to qualify for Eagle. These merit badges *may or may not* be a required merit badge (usually will not be), depending on whether a Scout elected to

use more than one required merit badge from within a particular category showing multiple badges, to earn his Star or Life rank. For example, if a Scout uses Emergency Preparedness, Lifesaving, Swimming, Hiking, *and* Cycling to qualify for Star and Life (permitted because “any” required merit badge can be used), then he will need to earn three *additional* required merit badges to qualify for the Eagle rank because one merit badge from each of the required merit badge *categories* must be earned. Three (3) is the most that would be needed and none (0) is the least that would be needed, so that is why three of the “®” symbols appear in brackets on the form. Where a bracketed symbol appears (*i.e.*, “[®]”), if the merit badge listed is not a required merit badge because it need not be, then the brackets and circled “R” symbol should be stricken. If, by reason of the record as it builds, the Scoutmaster knows that eventually a Scout will need to earn more than twelve required merit badges in order to qualify for Eagle since he must earn at least one from each category, then the brackets alone could be stricken at merit badge numbers (17), (18), or (19) as the case may be, as a way of forecasting and preparing for that eventual necessity.

Only authorized adult leaders should be allowed to initial (sign-off) on the PAR form. Boy Scouting is different than Cub Scouting where parents/guardians (*aka* “Akela”) are permitted to sign the Cub Scout’s book. Junior leaders or other adults can report in writing or orally that a Scout has met certain requirements subject to verification, but an authorized Scouter should be the one to initial the PAR form—the Scoutmaster usually, or an Assistant Scoutmaster, or the Advancement or Committee Chairman. Initials in the Scout Handbook belonging to a particular Scout as his personal record or even signed scraps of paper can be transferred to the PAR as appropriate. While initialing and dating may be duplicative of the same act done in the Scout’s Handbook or elsewhere, the convergence of these various records onto one “official” form for the troop assures consistency and accuracy, and more importantly places this crucial information directly in the hands of the Scoutmaster.

e. Make the PAR Available to Scouts, Scouters, and Interested Persons.

The PAR binder should be taken to every meeting and can even go on outings if feasible (backpacking or waterskiing with it might be impractical) to be able to record advancement achievement as and when it is accomplished by the Scout. Making the binder available during regular meetings encourages Scouts to look at their PAR which informs them of their progress and reminds them of goals already set. Because three ranks are on a single page, in looking at the form one can see “at a glance” what requirements are unfulfilled by noting the “open” (unblackened) boxes. Making the binder available during meetings also allows the troop scribe and other junior leadership to check on the status of advancement. The PAR should be made freely available to the junior leadership of the troop who share in the responsibility to see that advancement is taking place. A patrol leader can look up his patrol members’ PAR and ascertain that a particular requirement needs to be met by some or all. The troop scribe can use the PAR information to update an advancement poster on a regular basis for the troop, for instance.

f. PAR Only “Official” Troop Record and Source of Essential Advancement Data.

When a Scoutmaster receives a signed blue card for a completed merit badge, it should be immediately recorded on the PAR by the Scoutmaster which provides a “backup” record in the process. Using the form by making special marks on it can also provide a convenient “checklist” of upcoming recognition for handing out badges and for the next court of honor. The Scoutmaster can use the PAR

to determine who needs or is close to needing a leadership position in the troop to meet leadership requirements for the higher ranks. Because everyone recognizes that it is the sole “official” troop advancement record, those inspecting the PAR can have confidence that it is up-to-date and the “final word” on the advancement status of a given Scout. Automated record keeping using specialized software or simply entering data on a computer using a standard word processing or spreadsheet program can be done based on information in the PAR, but automation should not and cannot effectively take the place of the PAR given computer automation’s own peculiar logistic constraints.

When the Scoutmaster conducts a Scoutmaster conference, the PAR (which is really the *Scoutmaster’s* troop advancement record) helps in facilitating a good conference. And the Scout need not ever be embarrassed or inhibited because he doesn’t have or can’t find his Handbook. (It is admittedly a good thing to try to teach responsibility to Scouts to retain and keep track of their Handbook as their own personal advancement record, but the practical reality is that many do not bring their own individual book to Scout meetings, or if they do, chances are that some may leave it behind for the Scoutmaster to pick up in any event. From my experienced perspective, it is debatable whether all Scouts should have to bring their individual Handbook to every single meeting and outing.)

When the Scout is ready for a board of review, whether prepared for rank advancement or as a “check-up” review, physically remove the durable PAR card(s) from the binder and hand it to the Scout or person conducting the board of review just prior to its commencement. This gives the board the history of the advancement and other pertinent information easily and manageably at hand. The person conducting the board of review can make written comments or enumerate discussed goals, right on the PAR form (front or back, space allowing). Then, if the Scout qualifies, the board (consisting of at least three adults per BSA standards) initials the PAR form, thus signifying that advancement has taken place as far as the troop records are concerned. At the conclusion of the board of review, the Scout returns the card(s) to the Scoutmaster who places it back in the binder and by this process of accountability the Scoutmaster knows the outcome of the board of review as it affects that Scout and can give instant praise and recognition or else take immediate steps to correct any problems.

g. PAR Form Not Intended to Supplant Other Necessary Forms.

Using the PAR form does not and is not intended to excuse compliance with standard BSA procedures. For example, the “Advancement Report” (BSA Form No. 34403) must be completed and submitted to the council to complete the formal process of rank advancement. Members of the board of review need to fill out and sign this form as well as initialing the PAR. Another poignant example is the use of blue cards. The PAR is not a replacement for a blue card. A Scoutmaster cannot sign in the stead of another merit badge counselor for the badge earned (*i.e.*, for which the Scoutmaster was not in fact the counselor). Despite that these kinds of documents may exist, including the Scout’s own Handbook as a record of advancement, the troop should establish a steadfast policy that the PAR be the only “official” *troop* record evidencing completion of the requirements for rank advancement to occur. (Where do all those Advancement Reports given to the local council really go to anyway?)

h. PAR a Reliable Record and Facilitates Smooth Transitions.

If “disaster” strikes because the Scout misplaces his Handbook and/or signed blue cards, the PAR

stands as a safety net to reproduce/reconstruct essential advancement records (especially because the PAR calls for entering the name of the merit badge counselor whereas other summary records may not). There is nothing more discouraging to a Scout than not receiving credit for requirements honestly met. When the Scoutmaster position changes, as it probably will during a boy's Scouting tenure, the new Scoutmaster will not have to hear from a Scout, "I did that already," to which the new Scoutmaster has to respond, "Well, do it again because I have no record of it." When a Scout transfers from another troop, a blank PAR can be sent to the former Scoutmaster with a request to fill it out and return it. Similarly, a copy or the original of the PAR can be sent to the new unit leader or given to the Scout if that Scout transfers to another unit. The transition from Scoutmaster to Scoutmaster goes very smoothly by the simple act of the ceremonial passing of the PAR binder. In terms of successive adult leaders, from one Scoutmaster to the next, the PAR remains a constant, accurate, and reliable method of assuring continued progress of each Scout toward the Eagle rank and beyond, notwithstanding any turnover in adult leadership. By using the PAR method, the permanent record remains so, despite changes in the adult or youth membership of the troop.

A photocopy of a Scout's PAR can be periodically (say every 6 months) be made and given to the Scout and his parents (or mailed) to inform the Scout of his progress and remind him and his parents of his goals. The advantage to the PAR is that the Scout and his parents and others can read the actual requirements rather than be required to look it up based on simply a reference number shown. This is one of the frustrating shortfalls of BSA's "Individual Scout Record" form (No. 6518A) and other such forms. Also, a composite set of copies of all PARs in the binder can be made at recharter time annually in order to obtain a static "picture" of the advancement status of the Scouts in the troop with which to compare the subsequent year's advancement picture in order to determine whether the unit meets one of the optional requirements to be designated as a "Quality Unit". Doing so also gives a detailed historical perspective of the progress of the troop and its participants. Because the Scoutmaster has a PAR for each Scout, when a Scout fails to attend meetings and outings regularly, the Scoutmaster is more apt to be able to identify a non-participating, and hence non-rank-advancing, Scout in the troop to then give attention to rectifying the matter if possible.

i. Assigning Sequential Numbers to Scouts re PAR.

I found that there are advantages to assigning a fixed sequential number to each Scout as he enters the troop which remains his uniquely and permanently assigned PAR number. This means that in lieu of remembering the PAR number for a particular Scout or flipping through the binder tab-by-tab, there will have to be a written roster key in the binder sorted by last name which indicates the Scout's PAR number. The disadvantage of having to generate and update such a key is worth the advantages gained by the unique number system, in my estimation. A Scoutmaster can know by reference to numbers, how many boys have been affected and recruited during his/her tenure for instance. Also, if assigned a number, each PAR set for a given Scout can be set apart by a separate numbered index tab. Having a number system tends to focus the Scoutmaster's attention on those who have been in the troop the longest because PARs are normally situate in the PAR binder in an ordered sequence from lowest to highest numbers. In other words, flipping through the records in the PAR binder sequentially allows the Scoutmaster to see whether the first in order are making satisfactory progress toward the Eagle rank. (As a Scout leaves the troop his PAR can be placed in an archive PAR binder or file thus leaving only the "active" record to be hauled around.) Historical and statistical data flow from a numbering system as well.

4. Conclusion.

The PAR method has successfully worked in our troop for over 10 years and has proven its effectiveness. Good luck delivering the promise with this additional tool.

—CJB