



# The Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling

**Expiration Date**  
This presentation is not to be used after May 31, 2015.  
Obtain an updated version at [www.scouting.org/advancement](http://www.scouting.org/advancement)



## This Training Will Cover

- ✦ Scouting overview: mission, aims, and methods
- ✦ Merit badge program role and benefits
- ✦ Merit badge counselor qualifications
- ✦ How to become a counselor
- ✦ The merit badge counseling process
- ✦ Merit badge requirements: fulfill as written
- ✦ Effective counseling
- ✦ Group instruction and camp settings



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# **Boy Scouts of America Mission Statement**

The mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Scout Law.



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# Aims of the Scouting Program

- ✦ Character development
- ✦ Citizenship training
- ✦ Mental and physical fitness

Every activity in Scouting should support one or more of these aims.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 2.0.0.3



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# Methods of Scouting

- ✦ Scouting ideals
- ✦ Patrol method
- ✦ Advancement
- ✦ Association with adults
- ✦ Outdoors
- ✦ Leadership development
- ✦ Uniform
- ✦ Personal growth

*Guide to Advancement* topic 2.0.0.4



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# Four Steps in Boy Scout Advancement

1. The Scout **learns**.
2. The Scout is **tested**.
3. The Scout is **reviewed**.
4. The Scout is **recognized**.



Merit badge counselors  
are directly involved in the first two steps.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 4.2.1.0



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## Merit Badges: Their Role in Advancement

- ♣ Merit badges are integral to advancement.
- ♣ Any Scout may earn them at any time, including qualified Venturers and Sea Scouts.
- ♣ Merit badges are required for Star, Life, and Eagle.
- ♣ A total of 21 must be earned for the Eagle rank.
- ♣ Some merit badges are “elective;” some “required.”
- ♣ Thirteen specific badges are required for Eagle.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.0.1



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# Broad Range of Subjects

More than 130 merit badges in 14 subject areas:

Agribusiness

Arts and crafts

Business and industry

Communications

Conservation

Hobbies

Natural science

Personal development

Physical science

Professions

Public service

Sports

Trades

Transportation



*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.0.1



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# Benefits of Merit Badges

- ♣ Contribution to the aims of Scouting: citizenship, character, and fitness
- ♣ Development of confidence, self-reliance, and social skills
- ♣ Physical fitness and healthy lifestyles
- ♣ Career and hobby choices may result
- ♣ Exposure to positive role models: **You!**



Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.0.1



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# Qualifications to Become a Merit Badge Counselor

- ✦ At least 18 years of age
- ✦ Good character
- ✦ Recognized as having skills and education in the subject area
- ✦ Good rapport with leaders and Scout-age youth



*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.1.1



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# Special Certifications and Trainings

Specific training is required for some BSA activities, including merit badges.



A counselor *must* hold the specific certification or work with someone who does.

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.1.1



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# Registering as a Merit Badge Counselor

- ✦ Even if already registered, every counselor must submit a BSA adult application for the position of merit badge counselor (code 42). There are no exceptions.
- ✦ Merit badge counselors who are re-registering need not complete a new application.
- ✦ “Merit badge counselor” is a council or district position.
- ✦ Approval of merit badge counselors is the responsibility of the council advancement committee, not the unit.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.1.5



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# Complete Youth Protection Training



The screenshot shows the MyScouting.org website interface. At the top left is the Boy Scouts of America logo and the text "BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA". Below this is a blue header bar. The main content area is divided into two columns: "Sign in to MyScouting" and "New to MyScouting?". The "Sign in" section includes fields for "User Name:" and "Password:", a "Forgot your [username or password]?" link, and a "Sign in" button. The "New to MyScouting?" section includes a "Create an account to:" heading, a list of benefits (take Youth Protection and other BSA training, access unit, district, and council tools, register for events, keep in touch with members and alumni), a note that some tools require a Member ID, and a "Create an account" button. At the bottom, there is a disclaimer: "This page is not intended for users under 13 years of age. Ambrose youth registration must be completed by a parent or guardian from the parent or guardian's MyScouting account. For a detailed privacy policy, click the Privacy Policy link below. For best performance, use Internet Explorer 7.0 & above or Firefox 3.0 & above." The footer contains copyright information and links for "Home", "Help", "Privacy Policy", and "Terms of Use".

[www.myscouting.org](http://www.myscouting.org)



Good for  
**2**  
YEARS

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.1.1



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## Approval by Local Council

- ✦ Local councils establish procedures for registration, re-registration, and approval, and for reviewing:
  - Background checks
  - Youth Protection training
  - Any council-required certifications
- ✦ Approval is for specific merit badges.
- ✦ Counselors may work with just one unit, but registration and council advancement committee approval are still required.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.1.4



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## The Process of Counseling

- ♣ A Scout indicates his interest and discusses the badge with his unit leader.
- ♣ The unit leader signs a blue card and provides at least one counselor.
- ♣ The Scout contacts a counselor.
- ♣ The Scout and counselor meet—often several times.
- ♣ The requirements are fulfilled.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.3.0



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## The Process of Counseling

- ✿ The counselor approves completion and signs the blue card.
- ✿ The Scout returns the signed blue card to his unit leader for signature.
- ✿ The unit leader gives the Scout the applicant record section.
- ✿ The unit reports the merit badge as advancement.
- ✿ The merit badge is presented.

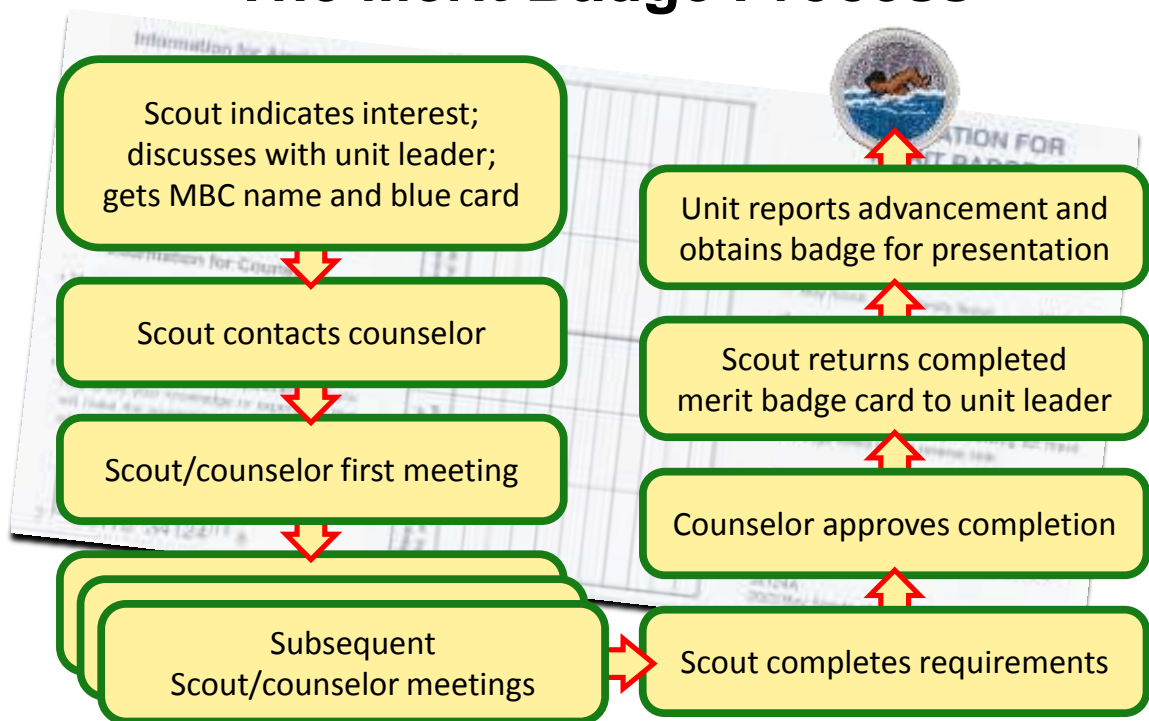
*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.3.0



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# The Merit Badge Process



# Application for Merit Badge

## *The Blue Card*

### The unit leader signature:

- ✦ Required for Scouts to work with counselors
- ✦ Does not indicate unit leader “approval”
- ✦ Evidence of discussion between unit leader and Scout
- ✦ Indicates registered counselor has been recommended
- ✦ Not required for Scout to get started on requirements

“I have discussed this merit badge with this Scout and recommended at least one merit badge counselor.”

APPLICATION FOR MERIT BADGE

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
Is a registered:  Boy Scout  Merit Scout  Member  
of \_\_\_\_\_ No. \_\_\_\_\_  
District \_\_\_\_\_  
Council \_\_\_\_\_  
I have discussed this merit badge with the Scout and recommended at least one merit badge counselor.  
Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of unit leader \_\_\_\_\_  
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34-124

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.0.2



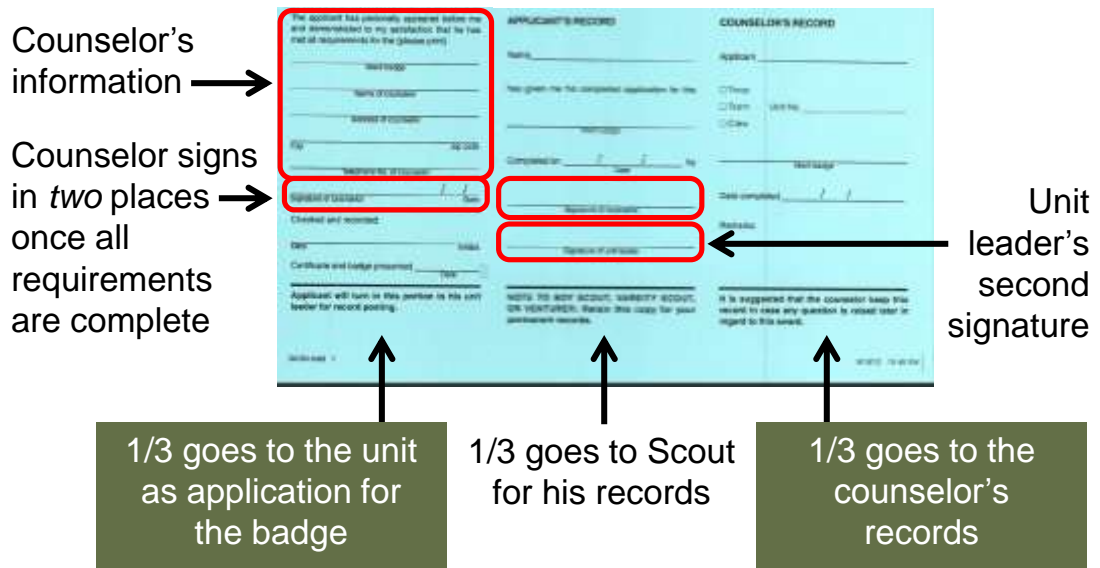
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# Application for Merit Badge

## *The Blue Card – Reverse Side*



Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.0.2

# Role of a Merit Badge Counselor

Interview the Scout (with a buddy present) to determine:

- ♣ His preparedness
- ♣ His current knowledge
- ♣ His interest

In subsequent meetings:

- ♣ Evaluate progress
- ♣ Review completed work



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# Role of a Merit Badge Counselor

## *Coaching:*

- ♣ Teach required skills.
- ♣ Provide opportunities to practice.
- ♣ Provide encouragement, and also praise when appropriate.
- ♣ Encourage goal setting and provide help and support in reaching goals.
- ♣ Evaluate progress and respond accordingly.



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# Role of a Merit Badge Counselor

## *Mentoring:*

- ♣ Establish a relationship, taking a genuine interest in the Scout's projects.
- ♣ Spark curiosity.
- ♣ Go for the deeper dive.
- ♣ Encourage long term goal-setting.



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# Merit Badge Requirements

## Finding current requirements for a merit badge

- ♣ *Boy Scout Requirements* (current edition)
- ♣ Merit badge pamphlet (latest printing)
- ♣ [www.scouting.org](http://www.scouting.org)

## Are the requirements flexible?

- ♣ No; they must be fulfilled as written.
- ♣ Wording matters!
- ♣ “Show,” “demonstrate,” “describe,” “make,” “list,” etc., are to be taken literally.



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## Meeting More Than One Requirement At a Time

*A single activity may fulfill more than one requirement if...*

- ✦ Requirements match and have the same intent.
- ✦ It is not specifically disallowed.
- ✦ The Scout remembers safety content.
- ✦ Common sense suggests that meeting the requirement more than once is unnecessary.

**More work will be needed if requirements are only *similar*.**

Guide to Advancement topic 4.2.3.6



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## ***Policy on Unauthorized Changes to Advancement Program***

No council, committee, district, unit, or individual has the authority to add to, or subtract from, advancement requirements.

There are limited exceptions relating only to youth members with disabilities. For details see section 10, “Advancement for Members With Special Needs.”

–*The Guide to Advancement*, No. 33088



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## Scouts with Special Needs

- ♣ Merit badge requirements must not be waived or changed for any Scout.
- ♣ Scouts with disabilities—either permanent, or expected to last at least two years or beyond age 18—still may advance.
- ♣ The “Application for Alternative Eagle Scout Rank Merit Badges” may be found at:  
[www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-730.pdf](http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-730.pdf)



*Guide to Advancement* section 10



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# Buddy System

A Scout *must* have a buddy with him at every meeting with a merit badge counselor.

A buddy could include:

- ♣ Another Scout
- ♣ A parent or guardian
- ♣ A brother or sister
- ♣ A relative or friend



Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.3.1



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# Tips for Counseling

Make Scouts feel  
welcome  
and relaxed.



- ♣ First impressions matter.
- ♣ Ask a few simple questions.
- ♣ Show them something related to the subject.
- ♣ Invite them to demonstrate a simple skill.
- ♣ Remember: This is Scouting. Have fun.



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# Tips for Counseling

Use the EDGE method.

- ♣ **E**xplain
- ♣ **D**emonstrate
- ♣ **G**uide
- ♣ **E**nable



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# Group Instruction

## Benefits

- ✦ Guest experts
- ✦ Interactive learning
- ✦ Slide shows, skits, demonstrations, and other dynamic approaches



## The Challenge

*Every Scout must actually and personally fulfill every requirement as written.*

*Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.3.2*



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# Group Instruction

## Ensuring Quality

- ✦ Limit group instruction to cases where the benefits are compelling.
- ✦ See that all counselors are registered and approved.
- ✦ Establish processes where counselors confirm prerequisites have been completed.
- ✦ Report any issues to the council advancement committee.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.3.2



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## Camp Settings

- ✦ No exemption from merit badge counselor qualifications.
- ✦ Staff members under 18 may assist, but must work with qualified counselors.
- ✦ Instruction must be done in accordance with the “group instruction” procedures found in the *Guide to Advancement*.



*Guide to Advancement* topics 5.0.1.3 and 7.0.3.2



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# Merit Badge Events

- ♣ Merit badge fairs may provide an overview or introduction to multiple badges.
- ♣ It should be rare that Scouts begin and finish badges at one- or two-day events.
- ♣ Prerequisites should be made known early.
- ♣ Scouts must actually and personally fulfill all requirements.



*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.3.2



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# Merit Badge Events

- ✦ Only minimal fees should be charged for events.
- ✦ Events staged as fundraisers are discouraged.
- ✦ Non-Scouting organizations or businesses are not allowed to use protected BSA trade names, images, logos, or artwork without national BSA permission.
- ✦ Non-Scouting organizations must have local council approval to present classes that are for the sole purpose of earning merit badges.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.4.9 and 7.0.4.10



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## Worksheets and Learning Aids

- ✦ Merit badge “worksheets” from the Web or other sources are unofficial, but may aid in learning.
- ✦ These tools must relate to current BSA requirements, which still must be fulfilled as written.
- ✦ Worksheets may be used to meet “in writing” requirements.
- ✦ Worksheets are not a substitute for “telling,” “showing,” or “demonstrating,” etc.
- ✦ Scouts must not be required to use them.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.4.8



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## Completing the “Partial” Blue Card

- ✦ The merit badge counselor records and initials the front of the card in the middle section as each requirement is completed.
- ✦ The back of the card is not signed in either place until **all** requirements are fulfilled.
- ✦ Partials do not expire as long as the Scout is a registered youth member.
- ✦ Accepting a “partial” is at the follow-up counselor’s discretion.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.3.3



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## ***Once It's Earned, It's Earned***

A Scout who has earned a merit badge from a registered and approved counselor by actually and personally fulfilling the requirements as written, will have met the purpose of the merit badge program and the contributions to the aims of Scouting. The badge is his to keep and count.



Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.4.6



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## A Second Counselor Review May Be Warranted If...

- ✦ A Scout, to whom it has been made clear that only registered and approved counselors are to be used, chooses to ignore this mandated procedure.
- ✦ It becomes plainly evident that it could not have been possible for a Scout to actually and personally fulfill requirements as written. In this case a limited recourse is available, according to the details outlined in topic 7.0.4.7.

*Guide to Advancement topics 7.0.4.6 & 7.0.4.7*



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## Addressing Merit Badge Myths

1. At what age or rank may Boy Scouts work on merit badges?
2. What is the maximum number of merit badges a Scout may work on at the same time?
3. Is a Scout allowed to begin work on a merit badge without his unit leader's approval?
4. If a Scout has too many unfinished merit badges, may the Scoutmaster limit how many others he may begin?



## Addressing Merit Badge Myths

5. Is it appropriate to tell a Scout he must earn all or most of his Eagle-required badges before he earns any others?
6. Is the Scoutmaster permitted to serve as a troop merit badge counselor for some merit badges like Camping or Hiking?
7. What is the maximum number of badges a youth may earn from one counselor?
8. How many badges may one counselor be approved to counsel?



## Addressing Merit Badge Myths

9. May you counsel your own son?
10. May you counsel in other units, districts, or councils?
11. Due to tight schedules, is a camp staff member allowed to make minor adjustments so requirements can be finished at camp?
12. Once you are registered and approved as a counselor, at what point must you re-register and become re-approved?
13. When does a “partial” expire?



## Merit Badge Myths – Review

1. At what age or rank may Boy Scouts work on merit badges?

There is no limit if registered as a Scout.

2. What is the maximum number of merit badges a Scout may work on at the same time?

There is no limit.

3. Is a Scout allowed to begin work on a merit badge without his unit leader's approval?

Approval is no longer required; a discussion is now held.



## Merit Badge Myths – Review

4. If a Scout has too many unfinished merit badges, may the Scoutmaster limit how many others he may begin?

During the discussion of a new merit badge, the Scoutmaster should provide counseling on what to do.

5. Is it appropriate to tell a Scout he must earn all or most of his Eagle-required badges before he earns any others?

A Scoutmaster could only suggest this.



## Merit Badge Myths – Review

6. Is the Scoutmaster permitted to serve as a troop merit badge counselor for some merit badges like Camping or Hiking?

This is permitted *only* if the unit leader is registered and approved as a counselor.

7. What is the maximum number of badges a youth may earn from one counselor?

There is no BSA limit. A unit leader may set a limit, but it must apply to all Scouts in the unit.



## Merit Badge Myths – Review

8. How many badges may one counselor be approved to counsel?

National places no limit on this. Councils may do so, within reason.

9. May you counsel your own son?

Yes, but generally it is better for Scouts to learn from a variety of adults.

10. May you counsel in other units, districts, or councils?

Yes.



## Merit Badge Myths – Review

11. Due to tight schedules, is a camp staff member allowed to make minor adjustments so requirements can be finished at camp?

**Absolutely not.**

12. Once you are registered and approved as a counselor, at what point must you re-register and become re-approved?

**Annually.**

13. When does a “partial” expire?

**When the youth is no longer eligible to register as a Boy Scout.**





# Merit Badge Counselors

- ♣ Share passion
- ♣ Teach skills
- ♣ Touch lives



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## For More Information

Other advancement presentations available at:  
[www.scouting.org/advancement](http://www.scouting.org/advancement)

### Resources

- *Guide to Advancement*, No. 33088
- BSA's *Guide to Safe Scouting*, No. 34416
- Merit badge pamphlets
- *Boy Scout Requirements*, No. 616334
- Application for Merit Badge, No. 34124
- *A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling*, No. 34532
- *Boy Scout Handbook*, No. 34554
- Merit Badge Counselor Information, No. 34405
- BSA Adult Application, No. 524-501



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