

EXPLANATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Background

In August 2025, our local Scouting America council hosted a virtual camp. While there was no physical gathering, Scouts were encouraged to spend some time outdoors. There were some shared activities for all of the participants, such as shared campfires and spirit events. This was a time to focus on earning merit badges. Scouts could sign up for up to five merit badges. I served as a merit badge counselor for Stamp Collecting.

The structure of the event meant that there was little direct interaction between the Scouts and the merit badge counselors. There was an introductory video call on Sunday afternoon and a check-up video call on Wednesday evening. Beyond that, Scouts did the merit badge work independently.

The chosen platform was Google Classroom. We divided the merit badge requirements into lessons. Within each lesson, we placed materials such as slides or documents for the Scouts to review.

Depending on the requirement, the Scouts could “discuss” or “explain” in a Google Document or Slides or could “demonstrate” by submitting a short video or series of photos. Scouts were also able to ask questions of the counselors.

I have posted several documents on the LASO site. Some are direct instructional material, others are documents I used to organize the session. Feel free to use any of them and to modify them fit your own circumstances and preferences.

Supplies

Whether we are working with Scouts on the Stamp Collecting merit badge virtually or in person, we should assume that the Scouts do not have stamps, supplies, or tools to work with. I sent kits to each Scout who signed up for the Stamp Collecting merit badge. Each kit included:

- Stamp Tongs
- Perforation Gauge
- Stamp Mounts (two strips of the 25 mm size)
- A few stamps to fit these mounts
- Hinges (about 125 each)
- First Day Cover
- Postal Stationery (postal card, stamped envelope, or aerogramme)
- Example of a postage meter

- Overprint
- Surcharge
- Air Mail
- Semi-Postal
- Mint stamps
- Used stamps
- Perforated stamps
- Imperforate stamps
- 100 stamps from one country
- Stamps still on paper

Some Amazon sellers had bundles of 8 or 10 tongs. They are not the top quality we can get from Lighthouse or Showgard, but they will do. Scouts can always upgrade if they decide to continue with collecting.

Showgard makes a perforation gauge that sells for less than \$2.00. I bought multiples from a couple of eBay sellers.

Requirement 3 directs the Scouts to identify different types of stamps. For that, I put the following into a glassine labeled “REQUIREMENT #3”:

- Example of a postage meter
- Overprint
- Surcharge
- Air Mail
- Semi-Postal
- Mint stamps
- Used stamps
- Perforated stamps
- Imperforate stamps

The same requirement also directs them to identify a First Day cover and an example of postal stationery. These items were too large to fit in the same glassine, so I left them loose in the kits.

Requirement #5 directs the scouts to demonstrate the use of three stamp collecting tools. In addition to the tongs and perforation gauge, I also put a few stamps still on paper in a glassine labeled “TO SOAK” and another few stamps in another glassine labeled “STAMPS TO FIT MOUNTS”.

Requirement #8 directs the Scouts to assemble a collection. It gives several options to do that, but I thought that the easiest option for our environment was “100 stamps from one country”. I put them in a glassine labeled “100 FROM A COUNTRY” and actually included 125 stamps (to account for overlooked duplication or damage or to use with other requirements).

I got stamps and supplies from several sources:

- I bought some items myself.
- I asked for donation from my local clubs. When asking for donations, be specific. Feel free to use the “Donation Letter”.
- I used duplicates from my own collection as well as items that didn’t fit with my collecting interests. Even though the virtual camp is over, I am already starting to assemble kits for next time. When I work on my collection, I set aside items that don’t fit and that I can use for the kits.

I used spreadsheet “Merit Badge Kits” to track my progress in assembling the kits. I recommend double-checking the kits once they are assembled. Even with the sheet, I found a few mistakes I had made. I put the kits in 6” X 9” manila envelopes. With the camp, they sent out “swag bags” with t-shirts, patches, and such. All Scouts who signed up for the stamp collecting merit badge also got one of my kits.

Order of Presenting the Requirements

We didn’t put the requirements in numerical order. Instead, we presented the requirements that might take longer or need more planning. We presented in the following order:

1. Requirement 7 (Design/Visit/Review/Research)
2. Requirement 5 (Stamp Hobby Tools)
3. Requirement 8 (Mount and Show)
4. Requirement 3 (Stamp Collecting Terminology)
5. Requirement 4 (Stamp Catalog/Values)
6. Requirement 6 (Stamps Albums and Storage)
7. Requirement 1 (Discover the World/History of USPS)
8. Requirement 2 (Types of Stamp Collecting)

Delivery

As I mentioned, there was little direct interaction between the merit badge counselors and the Scouts. So, generally, there was material for the Scouts to review and then some way for them to respond. There are basically four verbs in the requirements that indicate how the Scout is to meet the requirement:

- “Explain” – for the on line environment, this would be a written document.
- “Discuss” – this means to have an exchange with the counselor. For our environment, the Scout would initially respond with a written document and I would ask a follow-on question. Once the Scout responds correctly, I can mark that requirement as complete.
- “Show” – is literally that, to show something. In our case, that would be a photo. For example, part of one requirement is to show an imperforate stamp. The Scout would send me a photo of an imperforate stamp with some indication that it is an imperforate stamp.
- “Demonstrate” – perform some action. In the on line environment, that can take the form of a series of photos or a short video that proves that the Scout is able to do what is asked, such as remove a stamp from a glassine using tongs.

I received some slides from Brian Jones of the San Jose (CA) Stamp Club. I tweaked them a bit and added worksheets and other material to put into a Google Classroom that the Scouts would use to work on the Stamp Collecting merit badge.

Requirement 1 (Discover the World/History of USPS):

Read “Requirement 1” slides

Answer questions on the “Discovering the World” document

Requirement 2 (Types of Stamp Collecting)

Read “Requirement 2” slides

Answer Questions on the “Types of Stamp Collecting” document

Requirement 3 (Stamp Collecting Terminology)

Read “Requirement 3” slides

Scouts are to show (by submitting photos or a short video) an item from each category.

Requirement 4 (Stamp Catalog/Values):

Read “Requirement 4a” slides

Refer to the “Catalog” document. Part 1 is an excerpt from the Scott catalog. Scouts are to answer the question in Part 2 and leave Part 3 blank for now.

Read “Requirement 4b” slides.

Answer the questions in Part 3 of the “Catalog” document

Requirement 5 (Stamp Hobby Tools)

Read “Requirement 5” slides

Scouts are to demonstrate (by submitting a series of photos or a brief video) the use of at least three of the stamp collecting tools.

Requirement 6 (Stamp Albums and Storage)

Read “Requirement 6” slides

Scouts are to send scans or photos of at least one album page (purchased, downloaded, or home made) with stamps properly mounted

Complete the “Preserving Stamps, Covers, and Albums” documents

Requirement 7 (Design/Visit/Review/Research)

Read the “Requirement 7” slides

Here, Scouts choose two out of six options. Depending on the option, their response could be a document, a slide, or a brief video.

Requirement 8 (Mount and Show)

Read the “Requirement 8” slides

Scouts are to submit photos, scans, or a video of their collection.

Tracking Progress

I used the “Requirements” sheet to track the Scouts’ progress. Scouts’ names go across the top. I used a color code:

- Green: The Scout has fully met this requirement.
- Yellow: The Scout has partially met this requirement (I would also add a brief note in the cell as to what more is needed)
- Black: For requirements that have options, a cell filled with black indicates that the Scout did not select that option.

Some Points of Emphasis

Whether on line or in person (or a hybrid approach), a Scout needs approval from his or her Scoutmaster to begin work on a merit badge. For our virtual camp, we would accept the following as proof of Scoutmaster approval:

- A screenshot of the approval recorded in Scoutbook
- A scan of an email from the Scoutmaster
- A photo of the front and back of the physical “blue card”

Use some caution in selecting stamps to send to the Scouts. Having a little bit of understanding how teenagers can be, there were certain things I avoided:

- Stamps reproducing nude paintings or statues. Most adults see them as art. Teens may not. And there may be some parents who would object.
- Stamps depicting notorious individuals, such as Hitler. Most experienced collectors see such stamps as historical artifacts. Teens, as well as some non-collecting parents, may not have the same understanding.
- Stamps from countries with names that teens might make fun of, such as Turkey or Hungary.

A collection is not a random placement of items. A collection implies some sort of order.

Some requirements ask the Scouts to “discuss” something. That means an exchange with the counselor. In the on line environment, I would ask a question as a follow-up to the Scout’s original written submission. If the Scout correctly answered that question, I would consider that a discussion.

Results

Out of the 30 Scouts who signed up for the Stamp Collecting merit badge, two completed all the requirements that week. Seven completed it later. The rest either did some of the work or none at all (two).

Offering the Stamp Collecting merit badge on line is feasible. It is not the ideal way to introduce Scouts to stamp collecting, but I think the same thing can be said of all the merit badges. Especially for Scouts who have a hard time finding a Stamp Collecting merit badge counselor in their local areas, doing it on line is better than not doing it at all.