

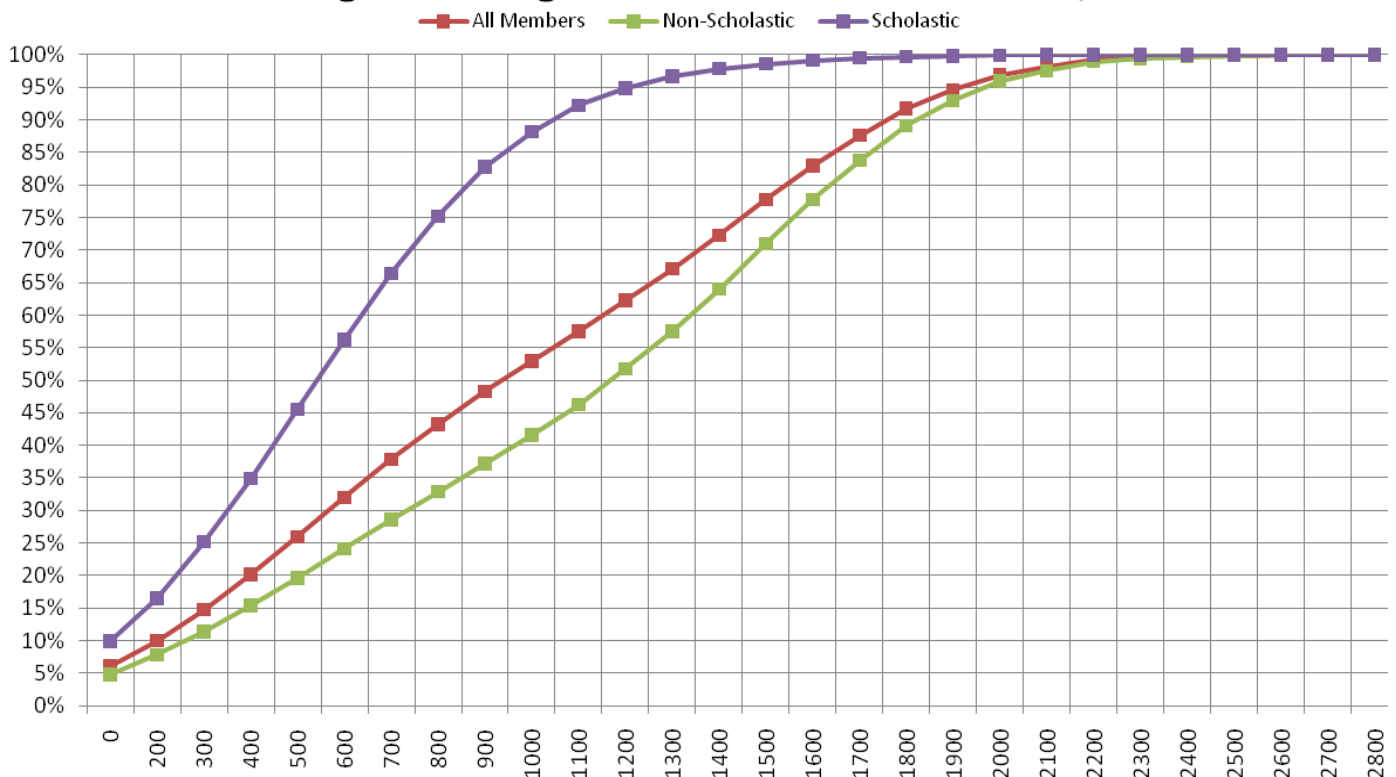
Recommendations for Chess Merit Badge Counselors

1. How should we select Chess merit badge counselors?

If you (the merit badge counselor) are likely to be beaten in Chess by 10 percent of the scouts (scholastic players), why not let a better player teach?

Review your USCF chess rating vs. the *Cumulative Percentiles by USCF Chess Ratings* chart.

USCF Regular Rating Percentile Chart as of Nov. 1, 2004



Districts and councils should consider chess knowledge in deciding who is approved as a Chess merit badge counselor. A chess player with a USCF rating of 1050 would likely win a game of chess against 90% of youth who play in scholastic tournaments. This USCF rating is below the 50th percentile for adult (non-scholastic) tournament players. Unrated chess players are generally below this standard and are likely to have gaps in their knowledge of chess that would affect how they answer questions and teach the merit badge class. USCF chess ratings can be verified at www.uschess.org, by searching under "Players & Ratings."

Ability to teach an interesting class is another important consideration in selecting merit badge counselors. The *Trainer's EDGE* class taught by BSA is useful to assure the counselor knows how to teach, and that they understand the EDGE method. More information on the Trainer's EDGE is available at <http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/26-242.pdf>. Check with your local BSA council for when The Trainer's EDGE class is offered in your area.

The "EDGE" in The Trainer's EDGE stands for Explain, Demonstrate, Guide, and Enable.

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The US Chess Federation offers a Certified Chess Coach program that can verify the chess ability of potential Chess merit badge counselors. The purpose of the Certified Chess Coach program is to provide a level of testing to make sure that school districts know that chess coaches they hire have reached a certain level of competency in chess as certified by the United States Chess Federation. Information on the Certified Chess Coach program, and a list of all the currently certified chess coaches is available at <http://www.uschess.org> under the link to “Scholastic / College”.

The requirements for a 2 year renewable certificate as a Local Chess Coach are:

- 1) Must be a current USCF member, if USCF membership lapses for more than three months then this certification will be revoked.
- 2) One letter of endorsement from an USCF-recognized organization (school, affiliate, foundation, etc) or individual (National or Professional Level Coach or Senior Level or higher level Tournament Director or tournament player rated 2000 or above).
- 3) Proof of knowledge of Local Chess content: Passing with 80% score Local test. This test is over the Guide to Scholastic Chess, which is available free on the USCF website at <http://main.uschess.org/content/view/7574/131/>.

The cost for certification as a chess coach is \$25 for the first time, and there is a \$10 renewal fee for each two year certification.

2. What is the maximum size recommended for a Chess merit badge class?

The requirements of the Chess merit badge involve a lot of interaction with the merit badge counselor to demonstrate the scout’s knowledge of chess. This limits the number of scouts who can be supported by a single merit badge counselor.

A class of four (4) plus a trainee is ideal, and ten (10) scouts can be supported by a single counselor.

Larger classes (up to 20) will need adults who know how to play chess to assist the merit badge counselor, and must have a very structured class for a one-day merit badge clinic. A multi-day class at scout camp can be larger (up to 30) and more flexible on when requirements are completed, and may not need to have any prerequisites.

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3. Are there prerequisites for the Chess merit badge?

Making it a prerequisite for scouts to record three (3) games of chess using algebraic notation before the class starts can reduce the time required to complete **Requirements 4.a & 6.a**, and allow time for larger merit badge classes.

Note that the three (3) recorded games of chess must be an actual game played by the scout. If two scouts agree to trade wins with Fool's mate on two games, and agree to a draw after only a few moves in the third game, these are not actual games of chess. They are an outcome agreed to in advance to minimize the work needed to satisfy a merit badge requirement, and should be rejected by the merit badge counselor.

The first part of **Requirement 3** (to verify that each scout in the class knows the name of each piece, how to set up the board, and how each piece moves), must be completed with discussion between the scout and merit badge counselor before that scout tries to teach this to another scout who does not know how to play chess. In a merit badge clinic setting, it is helpful to have some trainee scout(s) who do not know how to play chess in order to complete Requirement 3.

If the second part of **Requirement 3** (to teach another scout the pieces and moves using the EDGE training method) is not completed during the class, then it is more difficult to finish the merit badge, more difficult to verify that the scout trained did not know how to play chess before the training, and difficult to verify that the scout trained with the EDGE method actually knows what is supposed to be taught to complete the requirement.

If the number of scouts who do not know the chess pieces, how to set up a board, and how the pieces is limited, then some scouts in the merit badge class will need to share the available trainee(s). Each scout completing the requirement should perform all aspects of the EDGE method (explain, demonstrate, guide and enable) for the aspect they teach to a trainee.

It is possible for a scout to be trained on the pieces and their moves during a merit badge class and to complete the Chess merit badge requirements in the same full day class. However, it requires a minimum of two scouts willing to be trained, careful coordination of the training exercises, and extra assistance for scouts who will need to learn a lot in a short time.

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4. What online resources can help teach Chess merit badge classes?

It is recommended that any online resource be downloaded for use offline during class. Otherwise, your Internet connection that may not work or may cause long delays.

Scouting.org and Meritbadge.org

A set of 10 PowerPoint files and other files was developed by Joseph L. Bell from the USCF committee that prepared the Chess merit badge book manuscript, and includes a lot of information not found in the Chess merit badge booklet. The Chess merit badge manuscript was developed by Joseph L. Bell, Ralph E. Bowman, Robert F. Boland, Stan Kern, Chris Kim, Dr. John McCrary & Jerry Nash.

The presentation topics include: Chess Benefits and Etiquette, Chess History, Chess Setup and Basic Rules, Algebraic Notation, Quick Checkmates, Strategy and Tactics, Chess Openings, Chess Endgames, Chess Problems, and Chess Tournaments.

Other files include: "On the Morals of Chess" (an essay by Benjamin Franklin), and Chess score sheets (in Excel spreadsheet and pdf formats). The score sheet (as a spreadsheet) has multiple sheets with 60 moves per page, which can be used to record games with up to 240 moves – with the correct move numbers. (Most people use multiple score sheet of the first 60 moves.)

A non-exclusive license for reuse of these PowerPoint files and other supporting files is granted for non-commercial use and for any BSA activity, but attribution is required.

YouTube

A search of YouTube.com for terms like "chess openings", "chess strategy", and "chess endgames" will bring up many useful videos that can provide a break for the teacher.

Some web sites allow you to download these videos. A google search for "youtube download" can identify several sites that will download a YouTube video. Copy and paste the URL (web site address) for the video into a field on the download site. The <http://www.savevid.com/> download site will allow you to choose the format and quality of the video that is downloaded.

Some recommended YouTube videos are:

For the Chess Openings presentation

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvNIZXn3TeQ> (Opening Principles - Morphy vs. Consultants)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtBMFWuww1E> (Chess Openings - London System)

For the Chess Endgames presentation (Endgame – Vol. 1 through Vol. 5, by GM Karsten Müller)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-YG1M7Er3c>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=5iQdeOISonI>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pa0mg0alvU>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=qAAatfg6Jhel>

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ET2HshchInM>

HTTrack.com

The HTTrack program allows you to copy an entire web site for offline browsing, including any Java applets. This application is free, open source, and has versions for Windows and various versions of the Linux operating system.

You will find this utility program very useful to capture the web sites listed below for use offline during classes or when an Internet connection is not available. Depending on an Internet connection during class is very risky. The HTTrack program can be downloaded from <http://www.httrack.com/>

ChessProblems.com

This web site has a large number of chess problems, organized by the level of difficulty. Avoid the "Difficult" and "Fiendish" problems when assigning direct mate problems. However, the solutions for difficult problems can be interesting to discuss. Solutions to fiendish problems tend to have peculiar features that make them less applicable to playing chess over the board.

Visit and copy the web site at <http://www.chessproblems.com/>

PGNMentor.com

PGN is an ASCII format that looks like algebraic notation, and allows computer programs to play chess games and problem positions (using Forsyth-Edwards Notation, or FEN notation). The PGN Files section of this web site has a huge number of games by significant chess masters, thousands of games organized by chess opening, and all the games from most of the major chess events played from 1851 to the present. Each of the games will play on your computer, with a line showing the last move. The only drawback is that the display uses "long algebraic", instead of algebraic notation.

This is an amazing free resource on chess, and takes about 500 MB storage to download.

Visit and copy the web site at <http://www.pgnmentor.com/files.html>

World Chess Links

World Chess Links has a lot of current news about chess events and leading chess players around the world. There is also an extensive set of links to resources on chess theory, history

Visit and copy the web site at <http://www.worldchesslinks.net/index.html>

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5. How can I add more chess diagrams, or change the style of chess diagrams?

Editing Chess Diagrams

If you want to add your own diagrams to the presentations, there are various free programs available to edit chess diagrams.

The diagrams in the PowerPoint files on Scouting.org and MeritBadge.org were edited using DiagTransfer, a free Windows program that is available at <http://www.enpassant.dk/chess/diaeng.htm> , or <http://alain.blaisot.free.fr/DiagTransfer/English/home.htm>

The font used in the DiagTransfer program to create the diagrams for the PowerPoint files (and to create the Knight on the Chess merit badge patch) is “Chess Alpha”, which is available at <http://www.enpassant.dk/chess/fonteng.htm>

The “Chess Alpha 2” font is recommended if you need to print “figurine algebraic notation”, because it has characters that will line up with the baseline of other fonts (in a line of text).

After you install the Chess Alpha font (using the Control Panel in Windows), change the font used in DiagTransfer to Chess Alpha. Select “View”, then “Chess Fonts” to change the selected font in DiagTransfer.

Completed DiagTransfer diagrams should be saved from a screen capture (Alt-PrintScreen copies the monitor screen to the clipboard) and edited in a graphic editing program, because the current version of DiagTransfer (version 3.0.1) clips the bottom off of the letter “g” on each diagram if it is saved as a graphics image directly from DiagTransfer. Use a high-resolution monitor, and make the image viewed in DiagTransfer as large as possible for better image resolution in your diagrams.

The screen capture image can be pasted (press “Control-V”) into various graphic editing programs, including Paint and PhotoShop. The image will need to be cropped and saved with a file name that will help you identify which chess position is shown in the diagram.

Editing Chess Fonts

If you want to change the look of a font, and are not intimidated with editing vector graphics for every affected character in the font, it is possible to edit fonts. Editing fonts is not required and not recommended, because Chess Alpha, Chess Alpha 2 or another existing chess font is adequate for most non-commercial applications.

“Type Light” is a free program that can be used to edit chess fonts, or any other True Type font (TTF) or postscript (OTF) font. It is available for download at <http://cr8.netfirms.com/typelight.html> , or by searching for “type light” or “font editor” at

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<http://download.cnet.com> . If your font editing is significant, or if you are using it for a commercial purpose, the full commercial version of Type may be required.

pgn4web

A better approach to change the shading for squares (from diagonal lines to a solid background) than editing fonts to create diagrams with solid shaded squares is to use a script like Pgn4web (see <http://code.google.com/p/pgn4web/>). Chess positions can be entered as FEN text strings using pgn4web in web pages instead of editing in DiagTransfer, then a screen capture image of the diagram can be cropped in a graphics editor. Some HTML programming is required to add letters and numbers around the displayed chess board, by adding a table within the element with id "GameBoard". Variables specified in HTML control the size and color of light and dark squares, the chess font used for pieces, and other features.

The primary use of pgn4web is to add interactive chess games to a web site or a blog.

Joseph L. Bell, PE, PMP
Marietta, GA
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