

# Sea Scouts for Scoutmasters

or, what the heck is a “boatswain” and why do I need one?

This article is intended to de-mystify Sea Scouts for people in the rest of the BSA. Coming from Boy Scouts, Sea Scouts can appear intimidating and strange and alien, but really we are just Scouts with boats, along with some different terminology and darker uniforms. I’m here to help you bridge that gap and set sail!



Sea Scouts has been part of the Boy Scouts of America since 1912 - long before there was such a thing as an Eagle Scout. So, why doesn't anyone know about it? Part of that is because it remains a pretty small program - there aren't too many of us around, and it's quite possible for a youth or an adult to go through their entire BSA career without ever encountering a Sea Scout. But that's going to change, because over the last few years, Sea Scouts has reinvented itself into a program that is a lot more applicable no matter where in the country you are (no matter how far inland), and into something that's a lot better integrated with the rest of the Boy Scouts of America. Now is your chance to be a part of the Sea Scout Renaissance, or at least, to be aware of what it's all about!

My story might help. I discovered Sea Scouts over a decade ago. After a five year stint as Scoutmaster of a successful troop (21 Eagle Scouts during those 5 years although to be fair my predecessor had done a brilliant job and had set me up for success), my eldest son, who had done everything else there was to do in BSA decided he needed to try Sea Scouts. “We don't have that here” wasn't what he wanted to hear, so a few of us got together and started a Ship (unit). We weren't completely clueless, because some of us had taken Seabadge training (more on that later) so we sort of had the basic idea. And luckily one of us (not me) actually had some sailing experience. While we had a lot to learn, 10 years later the Ship we started is still going strong. I'm going to try to compress the essential things we learned into this brief document, to try to help you make that same transition more easily should you decide to undertake it.

## Adults Transitioning from Boy Scouts to Sea Scouts

Most Sea Scout leaders got there like I did - they had a son in Boy Scouts who got his Eagle and was looking for further adventure, so they came along with their son (or perhaps his sister) and either started a Ship or joined one. So how does that work?

If you've been a successful Boy Scout adult leader for a while, much of what you need, you already know. You know how BSA works, about chartered organizations, councils, districts, units and the chartering and advancement and outing related processes. You know Scouting values - the 12 points and all that. You're used to the idea of working with youth and with

empowering youth leadership. You understand about youth protection (especially now that all BSA shares the same youth protection training).

So what's left? It's mainly the technical side - sailing, paddling, SCUBA, etc. And we've got a lot of ways, both within Sea Scouts and with partners to teach you that. It has been our experience that it's actually a lot easier to teach Scouters to sail than to teach sailors to Scout! Yeah, we do have some Sea Scout specific program stuff but it's not that hard and we can help you pick that up as you go.

The true essence of Sea Scouts can be summed up in what we call the 4 S's: Scouting, Service, Seamanship and Social. Scouting and Service are the same across all branches of Scouting - the values of Scouting and the tradition of service to God, Country, Community and Scouting. Seamanship is that technical knowledge that makes us unique, and Social is the unifying characteristic of Sea Scout age youth - they enjoy doing things together and the social aspect is often more important to them than the adventure.

## A Brief History

Sea Scouts got its start on July 9, 1912. On that day, Arthur Astor Carey started taking older Scouts aboard his 86' Gloucester Schooner "Pioneer".

They sailed around the East Coast, had evening discussions about the Scout oath and law, and did Scout-like things afloat. Others followed suit and shortly afterward Sea Scouts was recognized as a formal part of BSA. In the early days, troops had Sea Scout patrols that were special, high adventure older boy patrols - you had to weigh 114 lbs and be a First Class Scout to participate (and by the way, that's why the First Class symbol is part of the Sea Scout logo still today, rather than just the regular Scout fleur-de-lis). Soon, it became possible to have Sea Scout units (which we call "Ships", similar to what Boy Scouts call "Troops"). The early uniforms looked much like Boy Scout uniforms of the time, but in the 30s, Thomas Keane, the National Director of Sea Scouts at the time, and a retired Navy officer, got permission for Sea Scouts to use Navy inspired uniforms. Sea Scouts grew rapidly in the 30s and 40s, but when World War II arose, and our nation was faced with the need to rapidly expand our Navy and Coast Guard, many whole units disbanded and went to war. The resulting membership loss has not yet been fully recovered.



When BSA's older Scout programs got renamed to Exploring, Sea Scouts became Sea Explorers and were called that until the Exploring program split into Venturing (the values based high adventure program) and Exploring (the vocational program that includes police and fire explorers). At that time, we became Sea Scouts again, but were organizationally a part of Venturing. Then, in February 2016, the National Board of the BSA elevated Sea Scouts to a top level program, like Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Venturing.

Along the way, the basic idea of Sea Scouts, including the advancement program, has remained pretty consistent - comparing a 1930s Sea Scout manual with today's edition would yield lots of similarity. However, recent years have brought some needed changes - including a step away from Navy-inspired uniforms and back toward Scouting, and expansion of the program to include all on-the-water activities including SCUBA and most recently paddlecraft.

## The Big Differences



Let's get this out the way way early on. This is a fully co-ed program and has been since 1971. So, we've got girls. Nationally, about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of youth Sea Scouts are girls. While BSA has announced a girl equivalent of the Boy Scout program, those won't be co-ed units, so this is a pretty big difference. It's possible (charter organization option) to have an all-girl or an all-boy Ship - but nearly all Ships accept both.

Here's the other one - these are older youth - Sea Scouts can join when they are 13 and finished the 8th grade, or when they turn 14, and can stay in until they turn 21. This is a huge difference, because it means that your average Sea Scout is 14-16 years old, while your average Boy Scout is 12-13 years old. There's a significant difference in the capability of the youth because of this. Despite our best efforts, it's sometimes

difficult for a Boy Scout troop to be truly youth-led - sometimes they just aren't mature enough yet.

In Sea Scouts, your chances of mature and capable youth are a lot greater simply because they're several years older. That means that the leadership style and techniques we use need to be updated. We have to learn to really and truly let them fail (not the sort of failure that results in injury or significant loss of property of course), and we have to have very high expectations. Our Sea Scout age youth are fully capable of adult-level competence in both leadership and seamanship, as long as we train them, and then let go and let them run with it. It will take some practice for you to get used to this, but as long as you recognize it and work toward it, you'll get there, and you'll be amazed at what these youth can do given the chance!

# Terminology

It's probably best to fill you in on some essential terminology, because that can get confusing quickly. I'll try to explain that in terms of Boy Scouts for you.



First, a Sea Scout unit is called a Ship just like a Boy Scout unit is called a Troop and a Cub Scout unit is called a Pack. A Ship is not to be confused with a Boat or a Yacht (“A yacht, they say, is a hole in the water surrounded by wood into which money is poured”)! Sea Scout Ships have a unit number just like any other BSA unit, but they can also choose to have a name. So, Ship 502 is also known as Sea Scout Ship

Invincible (or SSS Invincible). Ship 1836 is also known as SSS Texas Independence. The names are fun, and create great opportunities for Ship identity. Ships usually make a Ship patch with some sort of logo, the name, number, and home port (that is, city of origin), and those patches are used on our uniforms, right where a patrol patch would go on a Boy Scout uniform.

Our Unit Leader is called the Skipper, just like the unit leader of a Troop is the Scoutmaster. Additional adults on the program side, corresponding to Assistant Scoutmasters, are called Mates. To fill out the rest of the adult leaders, our Committee Chair is called a Committee Chair, Committee Members are called Committee Members and so on. The adult structure is pretty much the same as in a troop really and on the committee side it's pretty much identical.

Our senior youth leader is called the Boatswain (that corresponds to Senior Patrol Leader, and by the way, it's pronounced “bosun”). The Boatswain usually has two assistants - Boatswain's Mate for Program and Boatswain's Mate for Admin (corresponding to Assistant Senior Patrol Leaders). Ships that are large enough to subdivide into Crews (these correspond to Patrols) have Crew Leaders and Assistant Crew Leaders. Many Ships are fairly small and don't choose to subdivide that way.



Other youth leaders include the Purser (responsible for money, like a Treasurer), a Yeoman (like a Scribe), Storekeeper (sort of like Quartermaster in Boy Scout but watch out because Quartermaster means a completely different thing in Sea Scouts), a Media Specialist, and a Chaplain's Aide.

The combined youth leadership (corresponding to a Patrol Leaders' Council) is called the Quarterdeck.

Youth Positions		Adult Positions	
Troop	Ship	Troop	Ship
Senior Patrol Leader	Boatswain	Scoutmaster	Skipper
Assistant Senior Patrol Leader	Boatswain's Mate	Assistant Scoutmaster	Mate
Patrol Leader	Crew Leader	Committee Chair	Committee Chair
Scribe	Yeoman	Committee Member	Committee Member
Quartermaster	Storekeeper		
Webmaster	Media Specialist		

We have a Bridge of Review instead of a Board of Review, and instead of a Court of Honor we have a Bridge of Honor. Although the mechanics vary a bit, the purpose is the same.

At the council level and above, the chairman of the Sea Scout Committee is called the Commodore (from the Navy term for someone in command of more than one Ship). Committee members are called Vice Commodores and usually have assigned duties such as Membership, Advancement or Training. We have committees (and thus Commodores/Vice Commodores) at the Council, Area, Region, and National levels.

A Sea Scout Rendezvous is like a camporee for Boy Scouts - it's an event where multiple Ships get together and compete based on their Sea Scout skills. Most of these are set up to be very welcoming of new Ships, so don't be afraid to take your new Ship to a Rendezvous - you'll at least learn what it's all about, and you and your youth will meet and make friends from other Ships. In some parts of the country, these events are called "Regattas" but that word can also mean a sailing competition.

A Sea Scout Academy is usually a 3 day weekend event but it works somewhat like a summer camp in Boy Scouts - that is, your youth spend the event working on advancement. At most, they can sign up for a track that covers advancement requirements for whatever rank they are working on. The focus is often on requirements that can be difficult to achieve in your Ship, either because of equipment or specialized skills, so these can be a real accelerator for advancement in your Ship. By the way, most Sea Scout Academies don't allow instructors to "sign off" on anything, they will expect your Scouts to come home and convince their Skipper that they really did learn the skill.

By the way, “boarding manual” is what we call the set of instructions for participating in an event like a Rendezvous or Sea Scout Academy.

## Activities

Sea Scouts can do anything permitted by the Guide to Safe Scouting for older Scouts and that’s a very broad range of activities - Sea Scout crews have hiked Philmont, taken up shooting sports, gotten engaged in wilderness first aid, and done all kinds of things you might not expect. But mostly, the reason they joined Sea Scouts is because they had an interest in activities on the water, especially boating, and that’s what most Ships concentrate on.

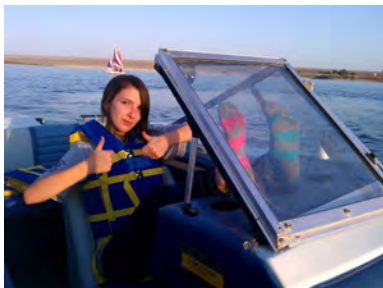
### Sailing

A lot of Sea Scout Ships focus on sailing, whether small boats like Sunfish or large keelboats. Sailing is fun, fits pretty well with a Scout budget (sailboat fuel is free!), and it’s something you can enjoy with only a little training, but you can sail for years and still have lots more to learn. Sailing a larger boat is also an ideal way to practice leadership and teamwork - a crew of youth collaborating to run a 25’ sailboat is an even more effective leadership development experience than a patrol trying to figure out how to cook pancakes.



Please note that it isn’t necessary for a Ship to own boats for any of this to work. There are an awful lot of people with big sailboats who can think of nothing better than sharing that experience with youth. They just don’t know how to find those youth or to make that happen (that’s where we come in!). And small sailboats are available all over the place for use or inexpensive rental, including at almost any Scout camp with a body of water bigger than a pond.

The Small Boat Sailing Merit Badge book is actually a very well written introduction to sailing and many Sea Scout Ships, if asked, will help neighboring Boy Scout troops with the merit badge. That merit badge might be helpful in getting your youth started in the right direction if you aspire to start or join a sailing Ship.



### Powerboats

Powerboats are a popular activity for Sea Scouts too - they can be any size but what works depends on your body of water and your budget. While it is expensive to operate them relative to sailboats, it is doable for most Ships and they are easy to borrow

or rent in most parts of the country, plus they enable activities like water skiing and wakeboarding that are rather popular with youth!

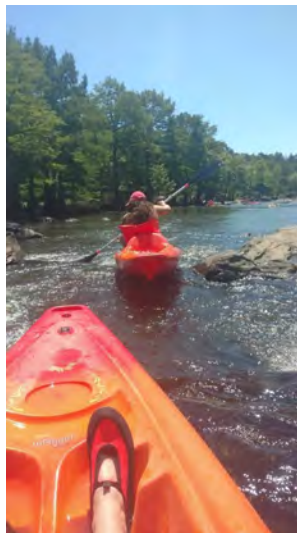
A few Sea Scout Ships, mainly on the West Coast, operate retired Navy or Coast Guard boats in the 100' range, but that's pretty rare - it requires some pretty serious fundraising ability as well as some professional qualifications on the part of the adults to use really large boats, so you probably don't want to start there.

## SCUBA

There are a number of Ships across the country that specialize in SCUBA activities. Sea Scouts BSA has recently entered into agreements with several of the dive equipment makers and training organizations to get some great discounts for Sea Scouts, so this is probably a less expensive and thus more viable option than you might think!



## Paddlecraft



Scouts have canoed since the beginning, but these days, paddlecraft is by far the fastest growing part of the boating industry and it is the fastest growing aspect of Sea Scouts too! In 2016, the Sea Scout advancement requirements were updated to include paddlecraft options for nearly everything, so it is now possible to have a paddlecraft Ship that fully supports Sea Scout advancement.

Paddlecraft are a viable option nearly everywhere in the country, and they tend to be fairly low cost compared to other boating options. Plus, nearly every Scout camp in the country has a trailer or two full of canoes that are available to Scout units for outings, and we have camps around the country like Swamp Base and St John's River Base that support extensive paddlecraft outings. And of course we have National High Adventure Base at Northern Tier for this too!

## Long Cruise

Long cruise has two meanings in Sea Scouts. First and foremost, it's our term for an annual 'superactivity' - that is, an extended outing that requires additional skills and planning. For a Scout troop, a summer camp or a high adventure trip would be the analog. The term "long cruise" also refers to the long cruise badge, which is an advancement requirement to do 14 days worth of overnight cruising. That could all come from one or two extended summer cruises, but it could also be seven two-day weekend cruises.

## Program

So, we've talked about all the activities Sea Scouts can do from sailing to shooting - so how do you turn that into a successful program? With a new Ship, it isn't a bad plan to sample a lot of things and to figure out what resonates with the youth, but realistically, the availability of resources (boats and people and bodies of water) will be a big factor. Trying lots of things is fun, but ultimately a lack of focus will be a turnoff for youth who usually want to sink their teeth into something and get good at it. A few Ships intentionally change focus every year or two (perhaps rotating between sailing, SCUBA, and paddlecraft) but most settle into something and make it a specialty.

Paddlecraft is a natural next step from a Boy Scout program - it's not too hard to get started, doesn't require extreme skills on the part of adults, works anywhere in the country, and can usually be done without buying boats (at least at first), and because of that we're seeing big growth in paddlecraft Ships recently.

On the other hand, if you've got access to adults either skilled in sailing or willing to commit to becoming skilled, sailing is a great option. There aren't many places in the country where you can't effectively sail small boats if not bigger boats, and it's pretty easy to find donation sailboats if you're willing to put some effort into them (hint: whatever kind of boats you use, adults willing and able to do fiberglass repair are worth their weight in gold).

Why does having a program focus matter? Because one of the most important things a youth can learn in this program is how to set long term goals (for skill acquisition, for advanced outings like a long cruise, and for consistently challenging outings), and without a program focus it is hard to do that. People, youth included, are more successful when operating in an environment where structure is provided. It is easier to provide structure through a developed competency than switching activities so quickly that no competence is achieved. Competence drives confidence and will provide an exciting environment that your youth will want to engage with.

## Advancement

Sea Scout advancement is actually pretty similar to Boy Scout advancement. There are four ranks, Apprentice, Ordinary, Able, and Quartermaster. The names are significant in maritime history.

Apprentice (like an Apprentice Seaman) is the entry level rank - a bit like Tenderfoot in Boy Scouts. It's got the basics of boater safety as well as a few knots and some other important stuff.

Ordinary (like, an Ordinary Seaman) is a really important rank. Think of it as equivalent to a First Class Scout. A First Class Scout is someone with broad basic competence in the outdoors, you can take them on a wide variety of outings and they can take care of themselves - they know to leave the poison ivy alone, how to cook, treat minor injuries, avoid getting lost, etc. An



Ordinary Sea Scout is someone with a good basic set of boating skills that you can safely take on most kinds of boating outings. That actually takes a lot of skill, so Ordinary is a pretty hard rank. Most of the Scouts think it's harder to get from Apprentice to Ordinary than it is to get from Life to Eagle.

Able (like, an Able Bodied Seaman or AB) is the third rank. In addition to lots more skills, it adds a requirement for 14 days of overnight cruising (that is, earn the **long cruise** badge - see below).



Quartermaster is the final and highest rank. You can think of it as sort of like Eagle - it is the highest rank in Sea Scouts - but it's way harder.

Quartermaster is so rare that in the entire US there are usually only around 30 of them per year. A much smaller percentage of Sea Scouts earn Quartermaster than the percentage of Boy Scouts earn Eagle. The name comes from the Navy where it means the enlisted member in charge of navigation and charts. It probably originated from "master of the quarterdeck" - the quarterdeck is a raised deck behind the main mast of a sailing ship. Traditionally it was where the captain commanded his vessel and where the ship's colours were kept. A Sea Scout Quartermaster has a broad range of nautical and leadership skills. One of the requirements is to do a service project just like an Eagle project. Another is a Quartermaster

cruise - taking command of a crew of Sea Scouts for an extended weekend cruise (could be a paddlecraft cruise).

The process of advancement is essentially the same as in Boy Scouts, but with a couple of key differences. Signoffs are by the Skipper but can be delegated (just as the Scoutmaster can delegate that responsibility within a troop). When all requirements for a rank are done, the next step is a Skipper's Conference (just like a Scoutmaster Conference), followed by a Bridge of Review - which is a lot like a Board of Review but with one key difference. A Bridge of Review is conducted by the Ship's Boatswain, and the board consists of both youth from the Quarterdeck and adults from the Ship Committee. The exception to this is a Quartermaster Bridge of Review, which has no youth members and is conducted by the Council Advancement Committee exactly like an Eagle Board of Review. Advancement reports are filed with the council and rank patches can be obtained at your scout shop or from [scoutstuff.org](http://scoutstuff.org).

If you'd like to learn more about Sea Scout rank requirements, you can check them out on [Advancement Central](#) or in the Guide to Advancement.

## Uniforms

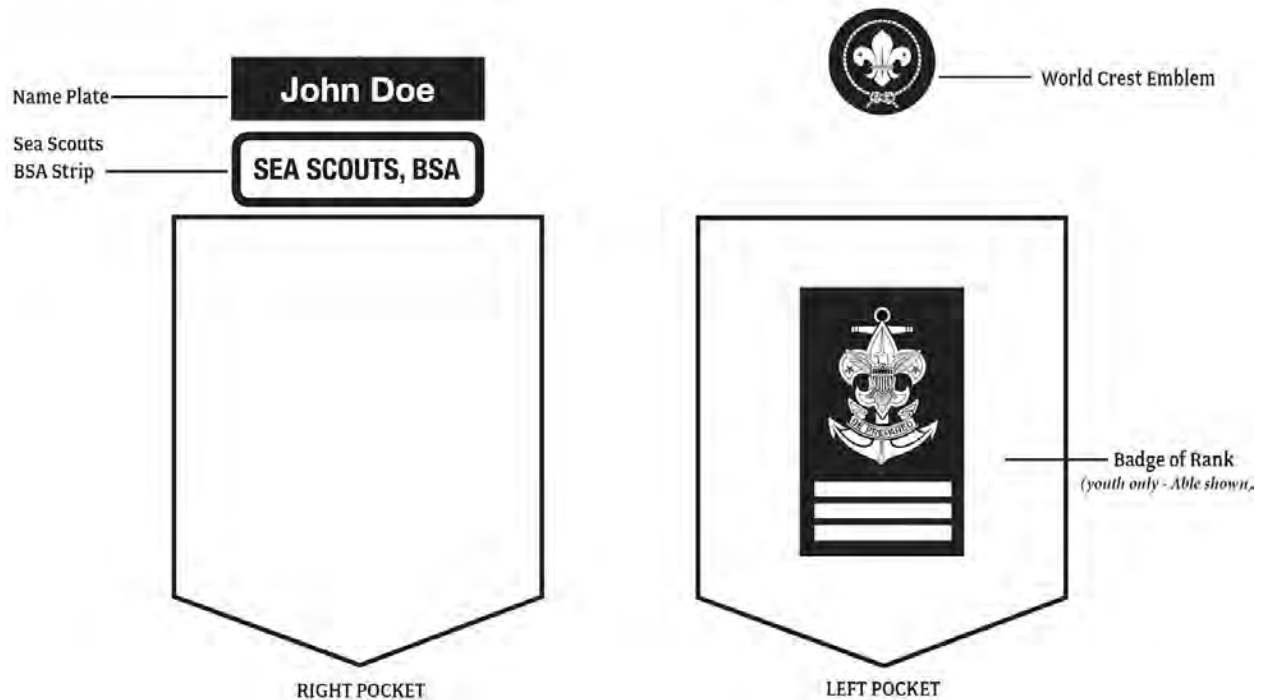
In the past, Sea Scout uniforms were really confusing for Boy Scouts (and everyone else), because they were complicated, hard to obtain, and derived from Navy uniforms with arcane insignia. With the Sea Scout centennial in 2012, a new uniform was adopted which greatly simplifies all this - that uniform is now The Official Sea Scout Uniform. While some long-standing Ships

continue to wear the “legacy” uniforms, many Ships have switched to the official uniform and nearly all Ships started in the past few years have adopted it. What I’ll describe here is The Official Sea Scout Uniform.



The big difference between our uniforms and other Boy Scout uniforms is that our program is small enough that it doesn’t make sense for National Supply to keep an inventory, so the actual garments have to come from elsewhere. While that’s a bit of a complication, a nice benefit is that our uniforms are a great deal cheaper than those for the rest of BSA.

The uniform consists of dark navy shirt and trousers. The easiest way to obtain them is to get Dickies work clothes from dickies.com or a Wal-Mart or similar store (make sure you get Dark Navy and not just Navy). These are available inexpensively nearly anywhere in the country. Alternatively, you can order a pre-assembled version (with patches already sewn on) from [SG Trading Post](http://SGTradingPost.com). Other options include more high adventure style garments from 5.11 or LA Police Gear - that’s legal as long as they are the same color and look more or less the same.



To make generic dark navy shirt and trousers into an Official Sea Scout Uniform you need just three additions - 'SEA SCOUTS BSA' over the right pocket (just sew on the strip from National Supply or better yet get it directly embroidered), a flag patch on the right shoulder, and the purple world crest above the left pocket. Add those, and you've got yourself an Official Sea Scout Uniform. To round it out, you'll need a black web belt with silver buckle. Cheapest way to get that is to hit any military surplus store. Add black shoes and a Sea Scout cap (the generic one from scoutstuff.org will be fine) and you're good to go.



Like the rest of BSA, the left sleeve has your council strip at the top, your unit numbers (white on black, get them from scoutstuff.org) below that, and your position patches below that. For the youth, rank patches go on the left pocket, just like in Boy Scouts. Your Ship patch (described earlier in this document), if you have one, goes under the flag on the right sleeve, or if you don't have one, a generic patch with the Sea Scout emblem goes there. The insignia is pretty easy to understand - works just like the rest of BSA. The first three rank patches (Apprentice, Ordinary, and Able) just have the Sea Scout emblem with one, two or three bars below them. The Quartermaster patch has a Ship's wheel.

Youth can optionally add a "tar flap" (sort of like a neckerchief that resembles the flap on the back of a Navy 'crackerjack' uniform) and a Navy "dixie cup" cap which makes the uniform look a lot more like a traditional Sea Scout dress uniform. Most units don't bother with this, but it's a nice addition if you do a lot of flag ceremonies and want to look extra sharp.

All of the insignia and accessories you'll need for this are available from your local Scout shop, or if they can't figure it out, you can order directly from scoutstuff.org.

## Customs and Courtesies

Sea Scouts has a lot of traditions lumped into something called "Customs and Courtesies" - these include things like using a boatswain's pipe, flag practices aboard Ships (the key

difference is that on a vessel the position of greatest honor is not the highest but instead the stern-most, and by the way, on a boat, our National Flag is called the National Ensign), boarding, etc. Most of those are pretty well covered in the Sea Scout Manual and there are some videos on seascout.org which will help too.

One thing to be aware of is what we call the “double salute”. It comes back to a central theme in Scouting - God and Country. Historically, on a Ship, God is represented by the mainmast (or the center of the Ship, if there’s no mast), and Country is represented by the National Ensign which would normally be at the stern (whether it is actually flying or not). So when you board a Ship, as you step aboard, you salute God (the mainmast) and then turn slightly and salute Country (the stern) before proceeding. When disembarking, just reverse it - salute Country, then God. Do we do this when boarding a Sunfish or a canoe? Of course not - just in ceremonial situations. Lots of Ships use it as part of their meeting opening ceremony, so you might encounter this while visiting Ships. By the way, our double salute differs from that used in the Navy - there, the two salutes are for the National Ensign and for the Officer of the Deck. There’s plenty more on this and the rest of the Customs and Courtesies in the Sea Scout manual.



## Training

So let’s talk about that training. In Boy Scouts, you took Scoutmaster and Assistant Scoutmaster Leader Specific Training (‘indoor training’ about program, advancement, etc.) and then Introduction to Outdoor Leadership Skills which gave you an introduction to the ‘technical’ skills like cooking, fire building, plant identification, etc. Those courses have exact counterparts in Sea Scouts. Sea Scout Adult Leader Basic Training is that indoor piece and is available either as classroom training or online (in the usual BSA learning center which you can access from my.scouting). The technical training is called Introduction to On-the-Water-Leadership Skills (“IOWLS”) and has just been introduced. It will be offered around the country and will focus on the types of boating available in the area. This combination will get you off to a good start.

We also have a set of MOUs (Memorandum of Understanding, basically a collaboration agreement) with a lot of boater training sources like the Coast Guard Auxiliary and the US Power Squadrons. In most of the country, there is a partner nearby who can help you with advanced boating skills.



The other course you should consider is Seabadge. This course is offered around the country several times per year. Seabadge is an adult leader training experience aimed at both current and prospective Sea

Scout leaders. The goal is to help them learn how to run a successful Sea Scout Ship. Part of the course is about how to help older youth accomplish planning, goal setting, communication and risk management. Part is about topics unique to Sea Scout Ships such as how to decide whether or not a boat donation will work for your Ship, how to most effectively work with the Coast Guard Auxiliary and the US Power Squadrons, how to deal with youth protection on boats, how landship ceremonies work, and how to plan a long cruise. The most important part is the fellowship - spending a long weekend with lots of creative people with great ideas about Sea Scouts. There is no requirement to be a Sea Scout leader to attend - we welcome attendees from other branches of Scouting. If you are thinking about starting or joining a Ship, this is a great place to come to learn more.

## Infrastructure

Your best source of information is probably a nearby Ship and most Ships would be delighted to help a new Ship get going so that they have friends to sail with. But what if there is no nearby Ship? Unfortunately we do still have some councils with no Ships at all, so that's not impossible, and it is really unlikely that your district will be of much help. When you can't find what you need in your council, the your Area is the next place to check.



All BSA areas have Area Commodores who act as the coordinator and focal point for Sea Scouts in their Area. And if for some reason that doesn't work out, I can guarantee you that your Regional Commodore would be happy to help you get in touch with the right people.

Each state has at least one designated mentor whose role is to help people get new Ships started, and your Area or

Regional Commodore can help you connect with a mentor who will help you in starting a Ship. If you aren't sure what Area or Region you are in, the maps on [this page](#) will help. Please don't be shy about contacting your Council, Area or Regional Commodore. Their most important volunteer job is to help you!

## Myths About Sea Scouts

Many people think you have to be near the Sea to be a Sea Scout. Nope. Any water that can float a boat will work. Some of the most successful Ships are hundreds of miles inland.

Another myth is about charter organizations - you don't need a yacht club. About 75% of the Sea Scout Ships nationwide are chartered to typical BSA charter organizations like churches or VFW posts.

Some Scoutmasters fear that as soon as a boy joins Sea Scouts he'll immediately drop out of Boy Scouts and they will never see him again. While that can happen, it's actually not that common unless the boy was going to drop out anyway. Most stay engaged with their troop until they age

out and even start using Sea Scout resources to help their troop put on paddling and small boat sailing events. A relationship with a Sea Scout Ship can be a huge help for a Boy Scout troop in many ways. For example, since lifeguard certification is a Sea Scout advancement requirement, Ships often have several certified lifeguards who can help troops conduct swim tests and outings.

## Communications and Conduct

Communications within the Ship are essential and are a challenge, mainly because in today's world what works for the youth won't work for the adults and vice versa. In a properly functioning Ship the main communications channel will be run completely by the youth - in my experience, that's rare in troops; usually there's an adult involved as the communication nexus. Things that work well for the youth are usually technology based involving some variation on text messages.

This brings me to the next point. Adults constantly want to take away cell phones from teens. There is no surer way to turn them off and get them to leave. What does make sense is to do two key things. First, teach them about situations requiring them to be present and fully engaged, like fulfilling a crew role on a boat that is under way. When a phone is creating personal isolation in a situation like this, using it to occupy eyes or ears isn't appropriate. Second, teach them about appropriate use of their devices.

Examples of appropriate use of technology include: keeping a copy of the Sea Scout manual with them in PDF form for quick reference; using it as a camera to record the adventure to share later with others (and there's no better recruiting tool than a youth sharing cool things they did with other youth); using one of the several excellent marine navigation apps to practice navigation; using other apps to learn code flags, rules of the road, etc. In short, find a way to make the phone an appropriate part of the experience instead of a distraction, and embrace it as a communication tool that can bring your Ship closer together.

How do you do accomplish changes in behavior, like appropriate use of a phone? The key is a Code of Conduct, developed by the youth, and enforced by them. It is a powerful mechanism to get your youth to take ownership of their behavior and to decide on what is and isn't acceptable. It is a tool not often used in Boy Scouts (usually, if there is a code of conduct there, it is adult developed) but very pervasive and significant in Sea Scouts. It needs to cover things that actually matter, like expectations for behavior including appropriate use of technology, public display of affection (remember, we have girls), etc. The youth of a new Ship, sitting down together to agree on these expectations, can really set the tone for a Ship to be truly youth led. Hint: google up some examples for them to look at - the results will be a lot more useful than if you just give them a blank sheet of paper without guidance.

## Now What?

I know I didn't tell you everything you need to know about this new adventure, but hopefully I got you started in the right direction and maybe de-mystified some parts that might have been scary. And really, anyone willing to give it a good effort can succeed at this. Including you!

The next step, if you haven't already done so, would be to take Sea Scout Adult Leader Basic Training. I'd rather you took the in person version, just so you will have someone to ask questions of, but really, the online version available at [my.scouting](http://my.scouting) is quite good if a bit too concise for my tastes. Start there, and also visit [seascout.org](http://seascout.org), start with the "New Leaders" section under "Resources". It is a great collection of stuff you will need to know. If you are starting a Ship rather than joining an existing one, use the "New Unit Organization Kit" that you'll find in that section. By the way, you can also download a PDF copy of the Sea Scout Manual from that "Resources" section - I keep a copy on my phone, so I can remind myself of the details of requirements etc.

So go get that Ship started! I hope to see you out on the water sometime soon.

Fair winds,

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Last update: 16 February 2018