Otter Badges

The badges that the kids earn are the four main “paws” (helping, activity, handicraft, and nature) plus the safety, service, and camping badges. Scouts who earn all four paws plus their safety and camping badge are able to earn the swimming otter badge to display on their Timberwolf uniform once they swim up.

The meeting suggestions below are just that: suggestions. You can accomplish these requirements over whatever timeline works for your group. It's also good to track the kids' badge requirements over time and have some flexibility in meetings to help the kids meet their goals. Many of the meetings will cover multiple requirements or even multiple badges and you will repeat activities over time, which helps ensure the kids will be able to earn their badges, even if they miss a meeting or two. If you are looking for a meeting agenda that meets a specific requirement, you can search all meeting ideas by badge requirement on the Meeting Agendas page.

A note about inclusivity: all badge requirements may be adapted and modified to fit the abilities of your scouts. The goal is to keep the scouts engaged and having fun.

Investiture Badge



The first badge your scouts will earn is the Otter Investiture Badge. This should only take one or two meetings. If you have a scout coming in mid-year, the requirements can be fit in around other meeting themes. Although the Otters are asked to learn the promise and law, there is not a requirement for memorization. Depending on the age and temperament of the guide, they may be able to say them on their own or they may do it as part of a group.

It's good to come back to the basics and refresh every once in a while. You can incorporate the motto, law, and promise into your opening ceremony, for example.

All of the requirements can be met using the following meeting agenda:

- Welcome to Scouting

Requirements

Learn a little about otters

This can be done through a discussion, but there are also some great picture books that work well for teaching kids this age about otters. Some favorites:

- *Pup the Sea Otter* by Jonathan London
- *Otto the Otter* by Linda Hansen
- *Oopsie Otter: A Tale of Playful Otters* by Suzanne Tate

Know a little about the Jones family from Friends of the Forest

Friends of the Forest is a story that is found at the end of the Otter Field Guide. Using this as the story during your Otter story & snack time over the course of a few meetings (or just periodically) is a great way to introduce some scouting ideas to your otters and will fill this requirement. Motivated guides may also want to read it at home with their parents.

Learn a little about the history of scouting

For this one, the kids should know a few basics, like who Robert Baden-Powell was (the man who started the scouting and guiding movement) and when and where it started (a hundred years ago in England). You can cover how there are other groups that are our siblings in scouting. It's also a good idea to talk about the main ideas of scouting: doing your best, helping your community, etc.

If you have a scout that joins throughout the year, it's a great opportunity to have a refresher discussion and allow the more senior scouts to share what they know.

Say the Otter Law

An Otter is always busy and bright
and helps other people
by doing a good turn every day.

Show the Otter Salute and Sign



OTTER SIGN

Make the sign with your right hand, holding up the 1st (pointer) and 2nd fingers together.

OTTER SALUTE

Bring your Otter sign to the corner of the right eyebrow (or right corner of the hat) with elbow straight out.



Say the Otter Promise

I promise to do my best
to listen to my leaders and parents
and to be a good otter.

Participate in an opening and closing ceremony

This is easily accomplished by attending a meeting or two. Every group may have a slightly different opening and closing ceremony, but as long as the new Otter is participating, that counts!

Safety Badge

The safety badge is a good one to come back to regularly, rather than just checking it off. There are a lot of requirements, and some will take longer than others. This is also a badge where kids will have to practice some of the requirements at home (learning their address and phone number for example). Combining some of the skills with an ambulance or fire station visit is a great way to connect it with the

service badge.

Excepting the requirements for memorization, you should be able to complete the badge in the following four meetings, which can be done in any order. There are two opportunities for service badge field trips in combination with these meetings, one in the child safety meeting and one in the emergency preparedness meeting. If you elect not to do that, you can substitute a different activity, or combine those two meetings into one.

- Safety Stations & Obstacle Course
- Child Safety & Tricky People
- Emergency Preparedness
- Health & Hygiene

Requirements

Know your full name and address

Some kids will pick this one up faster than others. Suggesting a song or other mnemonic can be helpful as well.

Meeting agendas including learning your address:

- Child Safety & Tricky People

Know your phone number

For kids who have a tablet at home, one suggestion for parents is to make the pass code their phone number. It's amazing how quickly kids will pick it up.

Meeting agendas including safety with strangers:

- Child Safety & Tricky People

Make a child identification kit for yourself

Child ID Kits are available from Ready.gov

Meeting agendas including making a child id kit:

- Child Safety & Tricky People

Learn the full names of your parent(s) or guardian(s)

This is tied in with the phone number and address memorization above. We like to talk about what happens if you get lost and how you would get reunited with your family.

Meeting agendas including learning parent/guardian names:

- Child Safety & Tricky People

Learn about safety with strangers

Meeting agendas including safety with strangers:

- Child Safety & Tricky People

Show how to get help in an emergency

The Prepare with Pedro program from FEMA and the Red Cross has a lot of good, age appropriate resources for teaching kids about emergency preparedness. You can also send the kids home with a family emergency plan checklist.

Meeting agendas including emergency preparedness:

- Emergency Preparedness

Learn about safety around the home

Meeting agendas including safety at home:

- Emergency Preparedness
- Safety Stations & Obstacle Course

Learn about safety around the camp and while hiking

Hug-A-Tree and Survive and Otter 10 Essentials are great options for learning about hiking safety. Using Kim's Game (from the Red Paw) to teach the 10 Essentials is a good way to accomplish two requirements at once.

It's also a good idea to always do a safety refresher at the beginning of every hike and campout.

Meeting agendas including camp and hiking safety:

- Hiking Safety
- Otter Campout
- Safety Stations & Obstacle Course

Cross the road safely

Meeting agendas including road safety:

- Safety Stations & Obstacle Course

Discuss how to prevent accidents on the road, around stoves/fires, near the pool, and at the playground

Meeting agendas including accident prevention:

- Safety Stations & Obstacle Course

Learn the basic rules of health and hygiene

Meeting agendas including health & hygiene:

- Health & Hygiene

Clean and cover a cut or scratch

Meeting agendas including cleaning and covering a cut:

- Safety Stations & Obstacle Course

Tie your shoes

Meeting agendas including tying your shoes:

- Safety Stations & Obstacle Course

Adaptations

The biggest challenges that kids face with the safety badge are issues with memorization and being able to tie their shoes. If the issue is likely to resolve over time (a 7 year old may be able to do things that a 5 year old can't), you may wish to give the child time to practice and master the skill. However, if it is a developmental or motor delay that is likely to persist, you may want to adjust the requirements. For example, if a kid has motor delays and struggles with tying shoes, but can reliably put on their own velcro shoes and resecure them as necessary, that can meet the requirement. If a child struggles with memorization but can come up with another way that they could contact their adult in an emergency, that could substitute.

Helping Badge (Red Paw)

The helping paw is all about getting scouts in the mindset of doing good turns for others and being kind, as well as introducing some traditional scout activities like Kim's Game and the Message Game.

Red Paw Badge Guide from Guides4Guides

You can accomplish all the requirements for the Red Paw with the following meetings:

- Caring for your Things
- Making a Difference with the service project option
- Otter Games
- Otter Campout

Requirements

Show how to be nice and help others to feel happy

Books are a great discussion starter for this topic–some favorites include Do Unto Otters, Change Sings, A Good Deed Can Grow, and The Invisible Boy. You can also bring in the idea of “doing a good turn” and how being kind to others makes the world a better place.

Meeting agendas including how to be kind:

- Making a Difference
- Otter Pen Pals

Learn about caring for your clothes and belongings

Using the kids' scout packs is a great way to illustrate being responsible for their own things. One idea is to come with a poorly packed backpack and have the kids help repack it. This is also a good opportunity to reinforce the idea of the ten essentials. You can also teach them how to fold a t-shirt. This also combines well with having the kids brainstorm ways to be helpful at home.

You can also do this as part of a hiking meeting where you emphasize everyone being responsible for their own packs.

Meeting agendas including caring for your things:

- Caring for your Things

Find three ways to help at home

This is a good brainstorming session to combine with learning how to care for your clothes and belongings. You can read a book about chores and point out some things the kids in the book or doing, then ask the kids what some ways they help their families are.

Meeting agendas including helping at home:

- Caring for your Things

Find three ways to help at camp

This is a good one to talk about at the start of a camp out.

Meeting agendas including helping at camp:

- Otter Campout

Be helpful around your home or camp

Teaching Otters to chop vegetables and help clean up after meal prep is a great opportunity for Otters to help on a campout. They can also help their families set up and pack up, although kids this age do tend to be easily swayed into going to play with their friends in the woods. If you can get more than one otter to work on a project together, sometimes that is more successful. They also do well with simple tasks like carrying something to a specified location.

Meeting agendas including helping at camp:

- Otter Campout

Help set up or clean up a Scout meeting

One option for this is to hold an “Otters Run The Meeting” meeting. Doing a game day where all the kids bring a game or activity to share works well for this because they each get a turn to teach an activity.

Meeting agendas including setting up/cleaning up a meeting:

- Otter Games

Play Kim's Game

You can tie this in with the safety badge using the Otter 10 Essentials to teach the kids about hiking safety.

Meeting agendas including Kim's game:

- Hiking Safety
- Otter Games

Play the Message Game

This is a variant of telephone with some distance built in. Come up with a message and whisper it to an otter. They have to run across a distance (or do a task) then pass it along to another otter, who has to run across the distance then pass it along to another otter, and so on until the last otter says the message out loud. If you have younger otters, keep the distance short and the phrase simple. For older

otters, they may be able to remember more complicated phrases or do more complicated tasks before repeating the phrase. Also, the sillier phrases are often easier to remember.

Some ideas for phrases:

- Section Motto, Law, or Promise
- Nursery Rhymes
- “Spy” Phrases
- Nature Trivia

Meeting agendas including the message game:

- Caring for your Things
- Otter Games

Do a good turn for a friend, relative, or a neighbor

Many of our kids have done pet sitting for a neighbor to satisfy this requirement, but it can be anything that demonstrates being helpful.

Meeting agendas including doing a good turn:

- Making a Difference

Take part in a Raft good turn

You can do this in combination with some of the service projects built into other badges. For example, collecting or making something to donate from the handicraft badge, or tree planting or trail clean up for the nature badge. Doing service projects a couple of times a year is a great way to reinforce the importance of community.

Meeting agendas including participating in a raft good turn:

- Leave No Trace & Trail Clean Up
- Making a Difference

Adaptations

The helping badge is pretty flexible and shouldn't require much adapting. A number of the items are self-reported (doing a good turn for a friend or neighbor and helping around the house), and the parents/guardians can help to decide on an activity that is appropriate for their scout to meet the requirement. Remember to meet the scouts where they are and celebrate their wins.

Activity Badge (Blue Paw)

The Activity Paw is so much fun! Many of the activities in this paw relate to badge work for other paws as well, so you will likely end up doing some of these activities as you work on other paws. They are also great to come back to again and again.

Blue Paw Badge Guide from Guides4Guides

Some of the blue paw requirements are more time intensive (day hikes, for example, can be a whole meeting in and of themselves!). If you have covered one day hike through one of the meetings for another badge (such as the hiking safety or orienteering meetings or at a campout), then you should be able to meet the rest of the requirements through the following meetings:

- Otter Pen Pals
- Otter Olympics
- Hiking Songs
- Games with Seniors
- Night Hike or Otter Campout

Requirements

Practice being a good winner and a good loser

This is a good one to practice anytime you are playing a game, and for many Otters it takes a lot of reinforcement.

Meeting agendas including practicing being a good winner and loser:

- Otter Games
- Otter Olympics

Learn the names of every Otter in your Den

This requirement tends to come naturally over time, but you can also do some name games in to help all the kids learn names as part of the opening.

Meeting agendas including learning the names of every Otter in your Den:

- Games with Seniors
- Otter Pen Pals
- Welcome to Scouting

Participate in sport games

A sport game can make a great meeting all on its own, and you can think outside the box when it comes to which sports you can play: rock climbing and archery are good options that Otters tend to like, or you could try a sport from another culture.

Meeting agendas including participation in a sport game:

- Otter Olympics

Participate in physical fitness

You can pair this up as part of the health and hygiene meeting that is part of the safety badge or do it on its own. One option that is a great group meeting across multiple age groups is doing a biking meeting. You can also do a physical fitness themed obstacle course and knock out two requirements with one activity.

Meeting agendas including participation in physical fitness:

- Health & Hygiene
- Otter Olympics

Participate in board/card games

Otters love games! This can be a great activity for a rainy day or at a campout. There are some game suggestions on the Otter Games page, or you can invite scouts to share their favorites.

Meeting agendas including participation in board/card games:

- Games with Seniors
- Otter Games

Participate in an obstacle course

Obstacle courses are such a versatile teaching tool! You can use them to learn safety skills, do some physical fitness, or just have fun. They can be as simple or elaborate as you like. One idea is to use playground equipment at a park and have the kids come up with their own obstacle courses, then challenge each other to complete them.

Meeting agendas including participation in obstacle courses:

- Otter Olympics
- Safety Stations & Obstacle Course

Go on two day hikes

A hike can be a meeting or campout activity all on its own, or you can combine it with teaching other

skills. Otters like to play along the trail, so thinking of things to keep them engaged while you're walking is helpful. One idea is to play a game like “I Spy” or do a Nature Scavenger Hunt. You could also sing songs or tell stories, or even just point out cool things as you walk.

Meeting ideas involving day hikes:

- Hiking Safety
- Hiking Songs
- Maps, Compasses, and Orienteering
- Trail Signs

Go on a night hike

Night hikes can be a little scary for some Otters, so it's important to make the dark not something to be feared. Campouts are the perfect opportunity to do a night hike, or they make a great winter meeting when it gets dark early in the evening.

Meeting ideas involving night hikes:

- Night Hike
- Otter Campout

Sing three songs

If you do Otters on a Cedar Log at your opening, then sing a song like Scout Vespers or Make New Friends at your closing, you only have to fit one more song in the middle to complete this requirement! Campfires are another great opportunity to get all the kids involved with singing repeat after me songs.

Meeting ideas involving singing three songs:

- Hiking Songs
- Otter Campout

Connect with another Otter Raft and make a pen pal

Otters can have a wide variety of interest and ability when it comes to writing. Make sure to have some extra adults around to help the kids with this activity. You can also offer options based off of writing ability: drawing a picture, filling out an Otter Pen Pal Worksheet, or writing a full letter.

Meeting ideas involving pen pals:

- Otter Pen Pals

Discuss ways to welcome everyone into your Otter games

Like being a good winner and loser, talking about inclusivity is one that is important to come back to whenever you're playing a game.

Meeting agendas including welcoming everyone into your Otter games:

- Games with Seniors
- Otter Games
- Otter Olympics

Visit a senior center and do some fun activities or crafts with them

Since COVID, a lot of nursing homes no longer encourage outside visitors. You could have a grandparent or other senior visit one of your meetings, make cards to be delivered to a nursing home, or write letters to seniors. One resource is https://loveforourelders.org/, which provides a rotating list of seniors who would like to receive letters. They ask for legible writing, but you could have an adult write what the kids want to say then have the kids decorate the letter or make artwork to include in the packet.

Meeting agendas including interacting with seniors:

- Games with Seniors

Adaptations

The physical activities in the Blue Paw can definitely require some adaptations for scouts with mobility issues. Tailor the games and activities to the needs of your scouts and use the opportunity to reinforce the idea of welcoming everyone into otter games. If you have a scout who is not able to do a hike, you can look for accessible/paved trails. A night hike could be replaced by doing a stargazing activity that doesn't require hiking on an uneven trail at night.

Handicraft Badge (Tan Paw)

The tan paw is all about creating things. This is a good one for kids to work on at home if they are so inclined–their parents can email pictures of their creations.

The requirement to create a collection of 25 things requires the kids to do the legwork at home, but they should be encouraged to share their collection at a meeting. For the thank you card requirement, any time you do a field trip or have a speaker is a great opportunity to make a card. You can either do it as part of the meeting itself or the next time you meet. You should be able to meet all the other requirements through the following meetings:

- Maps, Compasses, and Orienteering
- Homes and Habitats
- Introduction to Whittling
- Blanket Forts
- Plants and Seeds (also part of the green paw)

Requirements

Make art showing a scene or event

This can be a picture of just about anything, as long as they can tell you what it's about. For kids who are not into drawing, they could create a collage or a painting. For kids with motor challenges, big dot markers or similar can be an option.

Meeting agendas including creating art showing a scene or event:

- Beautiful Birds
- Homes and Habitats
- Wonder Walk (Nature Walk)

Create a picture of your home

As with the art showing a scene or event, this can be done using any medium. This requirement is a good opportunity to talk about the different types of homes that people (or animals) live in.

Meeting agendas including creating art showing a scene or event:

- Homes and Habitats

Make a thank you card and deliver it

You can make a thank you card any time you do a field trip or have a speaker come to a meeting. Kids can also do this one at home and send a photo of what they made.

Meeting agendas including making a thank you card:

- Emergency Preparedness

Make a map or diagram

This can be a map but could also be a labeled diagram. For kids with fine motor or writing challenges, you could even have a word bank that they cut out and paste in the appropriate places.

Meeting agendas including making a map or diagram:

- Maps, Compasses, and Orienteering

Create trail signs using rocks or sticks

Trail signs are something you can incorporate into any hike, especially when you are talking about

wayfinding.

Meeting agendas including making trail signs:

Make a model

This could be from a kit, or it could be as simple as bringing Lego bricks to a meeting and having the kids create something with them. As long as they are building something 3d, it counts.

Meeting agendas including making a model:

- Introduction to Whittling

Make two craft items

There are so many different craft ideas. Remember to keep them simple and accessible to Otter-age kids.

Meeting agendas including making a craft:

- Blanket Forts
- Introduction to Whittling

Make a bird feeder from reused items

Bird feeders can be as simple as a pinecone covered in peanut butter and rolled in bird seed or something more complex with decoration.

Meeting agendas including making a bird feeder:

- Beautiful Birds
- Plants and Seeds

Tie two different knots

Kids should learn how to tie a reef knot and sheet bend. You could also teach a clove hitch, but that may be harder for otters to grasp. Sheet bends are great for learning how to make blanket forts (or even hammocks!)

Meeting agendas including tying knots:

- Blanket Forts

Display a collection with at least 25 things

This is one that the kids will have to do at home, then present at a meeting. The collection can be anything the kids are interested in: matchbox cars, Pokemon cards, rocks, even junior ranger badges. It's easy to incorporate into your opening or closing, or you can have them present during story time.

Participate in a service project making or collecting things to donate

It's important to make sure that you choose a project that the kids can help with. Otters are great at assembling, so if you have a line of items and need one of each in a bag, that's a perfect project. We've also had them help sort clothing for a donation, and had them help tie the edges of fleece blanket donations (which has the added benefit of helping them practice their reef knot).

Meeting agendas including participation in a service project making or collecting things to donate:

- Homes and Habitats

Adaptations

The tan paw may require adaptation for kids who struggle with writing or fine motor skills. There's a great guide to tan paw adaptations at Guides4Guides:

Tan Paw Adaptations from Guides4Guides

Nature Badge (Green Paw)

Like the handicraft badge, the nature paw has a couple of requirements that lend themselves to working on at home. The requirement to plant and take care of a tree, flower, or food in a garden is one they can do with their parents, or you can do a service project planting trees. Aside from that, you can accomplish all the requirements for the Green Paw with the following meetings:

- Plants and Seeds (this is also part of the tan paw above)
- Leave No Trace & Trail Clean Up
- Wonder Walk (Nature Walk)
- Amazing Animals
- Tree Planting Service Project
- Zoo/Wildlife Rescue Field Trip

Requirements

Learn about caring for the environment and the rules of "Leave No Trace"

It's a good idea to talk about leave no trace and caring for the environment whenever you are on a hike. Not picking plants and staying on the trail are important to reinforce with Otters. This is also a good one

to cover on a camping trip.

Meeting agendas including learning about caring for the environment and leave no trace:

- Leave No Trace & Trail Clean Up

Learn about caring for pets

You can combine this with a trip to the animal shelter, or it's a good idea to have a dog trainer or vet tech come to your meeting. If you can have a well-behaved pet or two as a demonstration, that's also fun.

Meeting agendas including learning about caring for pets:

- Amazing Animals

Make a scrapbook about an animal you like

For this, the kids can draw pictures, use photos, cut images out of magazines, etc. If you had a kid who was motivated to make a digital presentation, that would also work, although it would be difficult to do that at a meeting. One other idea is to combine this with a field trip to the library where the kids could research an animal of their choice.

Meeting agendas including making an animal scrapbook:

- Amazing Animals

Collect or show 10 nature items that are different types of the same thing

This pairs well with going on a nature walk and having the kids collect the items along the way, but you could also do it in a single location. Rocks, shells, leaves, pinecones, flowers, etc. are all good choices. Remind the kids to follow leave no trace principles (could they point out 10 flowers rather than picking them for example?). Also remember that in most cases it is illegal to take feathers.

Meeting agendas including collecting or showing 10 nature items:

- Wonder Walk (Nature Walk)

Take a nature walk

At the otter level, it can be hard to differentiate between a “hike” and a “nature walk”. A nature walk can be more focused on exploring and discovering all the little wonders along the way, as opposed to doing a longer distance on a trail. Something like tidepooling or exploring a creek may also cover this requirement.

Meeting agendas including taking a nature walk:

- Wonder Walk (Nature Walk)

Grow a seed in a water soaked paper towel

This is a great project to do at a meeting then send kids home to observe over the next week or two. You can use these Otter Observation Sheets to keep track of observations that they make.

Meeting agendas including growing a seed in a paper towel:

- Plants and Seeds

Regrow a carrot top or other plant in water

This is a requirement that will require doing it at home due to the length of the experiment. Instructions are here: Regrow Carrot Tops in Water. You can sprout carrot seeds in a paper towel at the same time to explore the differences in how things grow.

Meeting agendas including regrowing a carrot top in water:

- Plants and Seeds

Plant and take care of a tree, flower or food in a garden

This is a great meeting to do as a service project, whether it's on your own or in partnership with another organization. Ideas and resources can be found on the Tree Planting service project page.

Visit a zoo or wildlife rescue to observe different types of animals

This meeting relies on having a zoo or wildlife rescue nearby. Zoos can be quite expensive to visit, although many offer group rates. Some of the families in your group may already be members, which can also save money on admissions. If it is not a possibility for your group, consider visiting a wildlife refuge or other place where there's a good variety of wildlife.

Take part in a trail or park cleanup

Doing a trail clean up of your local park is a great way to teach environmentalism and get the kids excited about helping the earth! If garbage isn't an issue where you are, you could also do invasive plant removal.

Meeting agendas including regrowing a carrot top in water:

- Leave No Trace & Trail Clean Up

Adaptations

Service Badge

As written in the current Otter handbook, the service badge lays out 6 “community helper” field trips for otters to participate in. These are not all available or accessible in every community. Your group may choose any 6 field trips that fit the spirit of the badge. Your group may also elect to have a speaker come to visit your meeting instead of doing a field trip.

Field Trip Ideas

Visit with local police and find out some ways to help prevent crime and be safe

This one can be tricky depending on the relationship between police and the community in your area. Keep in mind that not everyone may feel comfortable or safe around police officers. You could consider hosting a community safety officer or someone who works with the houseless population in your area come to a meeting instead.

Meeting agendas including visiting a police station:

Visit the local fire department and find out the danger of fire and some ways of preventing it

Visit with an ambulance crew or emergency room staff and learn about what they do

Visit your mayor or other government official and learn what it means to be a good citizen

Visit an exhibit or attend a performance to learn how art helps individuals and our community

Visit a sanitation or recycling facility and find out about recycling and helping your family reduce, reuse, and recycle

Visit a farm and learn where our food comes from

Visit a library and learn about all that libraries provide to our community

Attend a cultural center or event and learn about how diversity enriches our community

Visit an animal shelter and learn about everything shelters do to help animals

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