



## Dog Scouts of America Evaluation Criteria

## Dog Scout Certification

**PURPOSE:** The Dog Scout title is the first step in the dog/handler team's DSA experience. The Dog Scout title must be earned prior to earning any of the available specialty badges. Dogs may work on training for other badges and may even meet the requirements entirely with a qualified evaluator present prior to Dog Scout Certification but forms for these badges may not be presented until after this test is passed.

Earning the Dog Scout title requires the dog/handler team to demonstrate specific knowledge and behaviors that show the handler is a responsible dog owner and the dog is a model citizen, one welcomed in public in many different environments.

The Dog Scout Certification is not a "walk-in" test. The Scoutmaster Evaluator must observe the dog on 3 separate occasions in order to complete the requirements for the badge. The Evaluator may ask for more repetitions than required if he/she doesn't feel the requirements have been clearly demonstrated. The handler should understand that the dog requirements for the title are critical skills that must be worked on and reinforced throughout the dog's life.

If the Scoutmaster sees anything during observation or testing that makes him/her feel the dog might be a danger to others or that the handler's commitment to reward-based training or responsible dog ownership is greatly lacking, the Scoutmaster will let the team know they are not quite ready to earn the title. The Scoutmaster should be able to list specific incidents that illustrate his/her hesitation to certify the person and/or dog. Reports of incidents made by others may also be taken into consideration. The number of incidents and/or sources is important when making this determination.

The handler should understand that a qualified Scoutmaster Evaluator may require a retest on any item or on the entire test even after the dog has met the requirements initially if the Evaluator sees a pattern of behavior that is not in line with what is required ongoing of any Dog Scout.

**DOG REQUIREMENTS:** The dog must show through a series of exercises that he can successfully demonstrate the basic behaviors that are expected consistently of all Dog Scouts. The required behaviors and the dog's understanding of a "marker" are the basis for specialty badges the dog may go on to earn.

**HANDLER REQUIREMENTS:** By completing the [DSA Handler Written Test](#) or attending a Dog Scout class at camp the handler demonstrates an understanding of what it means to be a Dog Scout parent. Through working on training with the dog, the handler shows how operant conditioning works and clearly shows through words and actions an ability to uphold our vision and mission and will live by the Dog Scout Laws.

If a dog is known to be a Dog Scout his behavior and that of the handler is a reflection on Dog Scouts of America, other Dog Scouts and other dog owners. It is the handler's job to always try to keep the dog feeling safe enough that he doesn't need a threat display to move others farther away. If this means the handler/dog team doesn't get to do certain activities or that the team must stay farther away from the action, then that is part of being a responsible dog parent. A dog that is likely to act in a manner unbecoming a well-mannered scout must never be advertised as a Dog Scout. This includes a bandana or uniform on the dog or a "proud parent" or other DSA logoed item on the handler.



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**TREATS & REWARDS:** While DSA recommends and encourages treats, play and other rewards to be used during training, the testing is meant to show that the dog has reached a level of proficiency where a reward is not necessary in demonstrating the behaviors. Behaviors may not be rewarded with food (or other valued item like a favorite toy), luring or the implications of food rewards during testing. The dog may be rewarded between test items as directed by the Evaluator. Verbal praise should be used throughout the testing.

**REACTIVE DOGS:** DSA understands that not all dogs are outgoing, extroverted and love all other dogs. DSA also strongly supports training and conditioning programs that use rewards, desensitization and/or counter conditioning. We recognize that dogs with issues require handlers who remain aware of the dog's surroundings and take proactive measures to help the dog feel safe.

Dogs with reactivity issues may test for and earn the Dog Scout Title. Handlers of these dogs must demonstrate a solid academic understanding of training and desensitization and can clearly articulate what triggers the dog. When in public the handler must always demonstrate the management and training skills needed to keep the dog's outbursts to a minimum. Reactive dogs are still required to complete the requirements as described.

Handlers must be honest with themselves about their reactive dog's readiness to represent Dog Scouts of America, especially if their dog has shown reactivity (barking, snapping, lunging, etc.) toward other dogs or people. Successful handlers of reactive dogs have such good dog management skills that others would be surprised to learn the dog sometimes has issues. These dog/handler teams are ready to take the test. Conversely, dogs that frequently "go off" on other dogs or people need to learn better coping skills while the handlers work on better management of the dog's environment.

Any reactivity issues must be brought to the attention of the Scoutmaster prior to testing. The Scoutmaster will bring up any reactivity issues observed during training or testing to the handler with a recommendation of actions to take to minimize reactivity and better manage the environment. The Scoutmaster has the final word on whether the dog is ready to become a Dog Scout.

**REQUIRED EXERCISES:** All exercises must be completed as described. The Dog Scout test is evaluated using a stringent set of requirements in order to maintain a high standard of integrity consistent from one Scoutmaster to another. Determination of if the dog being tested meets the requirements as described is the responsibility of the Scoutmaster.

- ⇒ Safe around people – This exercise simulates meeting a stranger in public, such as on a walk, where the stranger wants to greet the dog. This is NOT a CGC greeting as defined by the AKC. No obedience behaviors or manners are being tested with this exercise.

The stranger will approach the dog/handler team and will say something like "What a pretty dog! Can I say hello?" When the handler gives permission, the stranger will step forward but wait until the dog shows interest before attempting to touch or pet him. The tester can wait as long as necessary to see if the dog will approach. Once the dog approaches and indicates a willingness to be touched, the individual will pet the dog briefly and say thank you before



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continuing on their way. The dog should not be in a stay but may be cued to sit before the stranger makes contact if the handler desires. The dog can be cued to “go say hi” or some other signal that lets the dog know it is okay to greet the individual.

The dog should display safe behavior during the entire interaction. Dog behavior during greeting varies widely among dogs and can range from dogs that are shy, but willing to approach the person to be touched to a dog that can’t wait to say hi and doesn’t want the greeting to end. Dogs should display a willingness to approach the stranger and at least a tolerance of contact from them.

It is primarily the dog’s temperament that is being observed in this part of the test. However, the owner may help the stranger do a proper greeting (as they would with an actual stranger) by asking the person to crouch down instead of bending forward at the waist or ask the stranger to stand still and hold out his/her hand to let the dog come to them. If the stranger is doing anything unsafe or the owner feels the dog is about to go past its comfort threshold, the owner is expected to keep the dog safe and stop the interaction. The Scoutmaster will still need to see at least two proper greetings.

### ALLOWED:

- Movement from the dog
- Expressing pleasure at the greeting

### NOT ALLOWED:

- Physically forcing contact with the stranger
- Snapping, growling or aggressive behavior
- Shy or fearful reactions without recovery
- Physical restraint of the dog
- Any behavior that might endanger the stranger

⇒ Safe around dogs in a managed environment – This exercise shows that the dog is safe around other dogs that may want to greet him. All dogs are on leash and the handler must remain alert and aware in order to manage the environment and ensure the dog feels secure.

The exercise may be completed in one of 2 ways.

1. Handler and dog are approached by a person with a polite and non-reactive dog. The approaching handler stops and asks if the dogs may greet. When given permission the individual continues approaching and the dogs are allowed to briefly interact (around 3-5 seconds). The leashes must remain loose and the dogs are called away from one another after just a few seconds. During the exercise the dogs should be free to express normal body language and neither dog should be on a stay. Dogs should not be forced to interact but must be given the access and permission to do so if they choose.
2. Dog and handler go for a short walk with another dog/handler team with the dogs walking parallel to one another. One person’s dog should walk on the left and the other



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on the right so that there is no person between the dogs. The humans should be close enough together that they could reach toward one another and touch each other's fingers if they chose to. During the exercise the dogs should be free to express normal body language as they walk. Dogs should not be forced to interact but must be given the access and permission to do so if they choose.

Whichever method is used for testing, it is the handler's responsibility to watch the dog for signs of pending trouble and to stop the exercise if needed. The handler should not allow their dog to be rude in any way to the other dog. The Scoutmaster must see the exercise performed at least twice successfully with different dogs.

### ALLOWED:

- Dog showing interest
- Normal canine curiosity
- Movement by the dog (moving his feet), though not moving away as if to escape

### NOT ALLOWED:

- Physically forcing the dog to interact
- Snapping, growling or aggressive behavior
- Physical restraint of the dog or tight leash

- ⇒ Sit – The dog must start the exercise in a stationary standing position or from a down position. The dog should quickly sit in response to the handler's cue. The handler may use a verbal cue or hand signal but may not touch the dog. The cue may be repeated but it should be clear that the dog is responding to the cue and not guessing the proper response. The dog moving into the sit position should be clearly in response to the cue and not simply because the dog was going to sit anyway. The leash may not be used in cueing the dog. The Scoutmaster must see at least 2 sits on cue. They may be done in quick succession or in combination with the required downs.
- ⇒ Down – The dog must start the exercise in a stationary standing position or in a sit position. The dog must lie down quickly, elbows on the ground in response to the handler's cue. The handler may use a verbal cue or hand signal but may not touch the dog. The cue may be repeated but it should be clear that the dog is responding to the cue and not guessing the proper response. The dog moving into the down position should be clearly in response to the cue and not simply because the dog was going to lie down anyway. The leash may not be used in cueing the dog. The Scoutmaster must see at least 2 downs on cue. They may be done in quick succession or in combination with the required sits.
- ⇒ Come when called – The dog should start the exercise in either a sit or down position and may be off leash, on leash or on a long line that is dragged. The handler should give the dog a cue to stay and then walk at least 20' away from the dog as directed by the Scoutmaster. The handler must be facing in the direction they are travelling but may glance over his/her shoulder a few times to be sure the dog is maintaining his position. Once the handler is at least 20' away he/she will stop and turn to face the dog and pause for 3 seconds before calling the dog.



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The dog may be placed on an independent stay to start the exercise and should move toward the handler only after the recall cue is given. If the dog is still working on his stay a helper may step in and hold the leash to help the dog maintain the position. If a helper is used it must be clear that the dog understands the recall cue and is not returning to the handler just because the collar was released, the handler turned around or because the dog wanted to follow where the handler went. The helper should use his/her voice or a toy to draw the dog's attention to him/her. The handler should call the dog on when the dog's attention is on the helper. The long line is only used for safety in unsecured areas and helps to prevent the dog from running off. The line may not be held by the handler but may be held by the helper if absolutely necessary.

The dog should move directly to the handler without detours or pauses. The dog needs to get close enough to the handler to be caught by the collar without the handler moving his/her feet. The handler may pat his/her legs, clap his/her hands, crouch down and be encouraging as the dog is returning. The dog does not need to do an obedience "front" or "finish". The Scoutmaster must see at least 2 successful recalls shown at different times/days or done back to back.

ALLOWED:

- Sit or down to start
- On or off leash or on a long line
- An assistant to hold the dog

NOT ALLOWED:

- Handler walking backwards
- Pauses, detours or delays upon recall
- Dog remaining out of reach upon recall

- ⇒ Stay – The dog must start in a sit or down position. The handler should give the dog a cue to stay and then walk at least 20' away from the dog as directed by the Scoutmaster. The handler must be facing in the direction they are travelling but may glance over his/her shoulder a few times to be sure the dog is maintaining his position. Once the handler is at least 20' away he/she will stop and turn to face the dog. The Scoutmaster may ask the handler at this point if he/she has the required 2 clean-up bags on them. Once bags are shown, handler returns to the dog. A formal "finish" (walking behind the dog) is not required.

The dog must remain in the position in which it started until the handler is all the way back to the dog (close enough to touch the collar). The dog should not move until the handler gives a release cue but a dog that pops up after the owner gets close enough to touch the collar would still pass. It is allowable to put a long line on the dog for testing if the exercise is not done in a secure area. The Scoutmaster must see at least 2 successful stays shown at different times/days or done back to back.

ALLOWED:

- Sit or down to stat
- On or off leash or on long line

NOT ALLOWED:

- Handler walking backwards
- Dog moving out of position
- Excessive cues to stay



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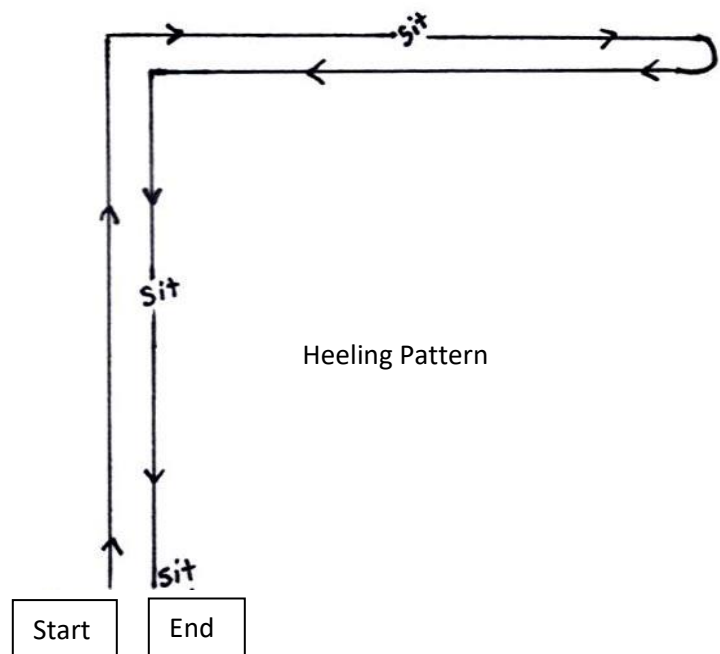
- ⇒ **Heel** – The dog must be able to demonstrate his ability to maintain a heel position while travelling in a pattern as directed by the Scoutmaster. The dog should start on the handler's left side facing in the same direction of travel. As the team moves forward the area between the dog's head and shoulder must be in line with the handler's left hip. The dog should be close to, but not crowding, his handler so that the handler always has freedom of motion.



Large dog in proper heel position

This is NOT simply loose leash walking. The dog must demonstrate that it understands the heel cue by working to remain in heel position while the owner demonstrates the following movements in this sequence (based on diagram below); 20' in a straight line, right turn, 10' in a straight line, stop and cue the dog to sit (cue not required), 10' in a straight line, about turn, 20' in a straight line, left turn, 10' in a straight line, stop and cue the dog to sit (cue not required), 10' in a straight line and stop. The dog may be asked to sit (cue not required) to finish the exercise.

The leash must remain visibly loose for at least 95% of the pattern, meaning there is obvious slack in the leash between the handler's hand and the dog's neck. The leash snap must be hanging vertically. It should be clear that the dog understands what "heel" means and where the heel position is located without luring (acting as if there is a treat) or targeting, as opposed to the dog just walking next to the handler as if out for a stroll. The handler must not vary his/her speed in order to keep the dog in the heel position. The dog should maintain heel position with the handler rather than the other way around.



Distances can be longer but should be at least as described above. This should be an "L" shaped pattern with a right turn, about turn, a left turn and three sits -ending with the handler back at the starting point. For the about turn the handler may turn to their right or their left to go back the way they came.



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Cones or other markers should be used at the corner and at the point of the U-turn to help the handler remain in a straight line. It is recommended that this exercise be completed outside and there should not be walls within 8' of this pattern as these might aid in keeping the dog next to the handler. The Scoutmaster may advise the handler to add the two sits within the pattern at any point that is not on a turn. The pattern may be flipped if needed based on the space available.

The dog should not sit automatically at a halt but should be cued to sit instead. We are not looking for a trained behavior such as what is done during an obedience competition. The Scoutmaster is observing to make sure the dog is sitting in response to a sit cue.

Since the Scoutmaster must see the exercise performed successfully at least twice the pattern must be completed again after a break. The team should not go directly from one pattern directly into a repeat of the pattern. The exercise may be completed off leash if desired by the handler but it must be very clear to the Scoutmaster that the dog maintains the proper position throughout the heeling pattern.

### ALLOWED:

- Verbal encouragement to the dog
- Exercise performed off leash
- Flipping the pattern to meet the needs of the space

### NOT ALLOWED:

- Tight leash
- Dog out of position more than 5% of time

⇒ Leave it with food – This exercise simulates being out for a walk with the dog on a loose leash and suddenly coming across a tempting item on the ground. The dog must demonstrate that he will respond quickly to a leave it cue before close inspection or contact is made with the food item. “Leave it” must be spoken in a normal, friendly tone of voice while walking with the dog within easy grabbing distance of food that he wants and knows it is on the floor. A sample of the food should be given to the dog prior to the start of the exercise to demonstrate that it is something that the dog clearly wants.

The dog needs to correctly pass by the tempting food while on a leash that always stays completely loose. Passes need to be close enough that the dog could easily get the item. The dog demonstrates that he CHOOSES not to get it.

The handler may say the cue as early in the pass as they would like and may repeat the cue in a friendly or neutral tone a few times while passing by the item. At no point should the cue or the handler's body language be menacing or used to communicate an “or else” warning to the dog.

During the pass-by the handler and dog should maintain pace without slowing down or speeding up. The test should be performed with the handler and dog in a walking gait before, during, and



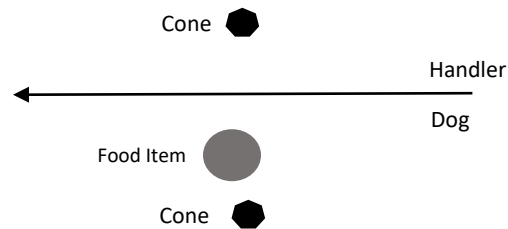


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after passing the food item. If the leash goes tight or the dog tries to closely inspect or get the food (or gets it) that is not a correct pass. The Scoutmaster may ask for as many passes as he/she feels necessary to demonstrate a proper leave it after failed passes.

For testing a cone or other marker may set up 6' to either side of the item. The 6' distance can be adjusted to make it a comparable level of difficulty for extra large and extra small dogs. The dog and handler must pass between the cone and the item with the dog next to the item.



Some dogs don't generalize well so when told to "leave it" the command may apply only to that item, in that spot for a long time. After each pass the Scoutmaster will MOVE the food item a short distance while the dog is watching so that the item becomes "new" to the dog.

Moving the item to make it different for the dog can be accomplished in any number of ways. The easiest way to do this is to simply move the food item at least 20' from the original position in any direction. As the food is moved, cones (if used) should not be moved with the food. It should be clear to the dog that the food item is what the dog is supposed to leave, not the cones.

If the dog has no interest in the food item offer several items that would normally be very tempting to a dog. These would include things like hotdog pieces, an open can of tuna or cat food, peanut butter, cooked meat, etc. A pan or pizza box with a little food left can be good items to try if the dog appears finicky as is something like a dead fish. If the dog is highly toy motivated but remains lacking in motivation for the food the leave it can be demonstrated with a favorite toy. This should be a last resort and it must be proven without a doubt that the dog has no interest in the food.

For the test the food must be in the open and uncovered. It should not be in anyone's hands. It's best to use something that the dog cannot swallow and something that can be taken away from the dog easily if he does grab it.

The dog must choose to not touch or closely investigate the food item after he has been told to leave it. The dog should immediately look for eye contact once told to leave it. However, a dog that clearly shows that he is choosing to leave the item can pass the exercise without eye contact. The dog must not pull the leash tight, scramble to get the item, whine or bark or exhibit any other behavior that shows the dog is not making the choice to leave it. The Scoutmaster must see 3 correct passes in a row with no failed pass attempts. If there are failed passes or if





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the Scoutmaster is unsure if the dog was intentionally ignoring the food item or if he just didn't see it, he/she can ask for additional passes as needed to ensure the dog is making a choice. The food must be moved each time a pass is attempted.

ALLOWED:

- A variety of food items
- Dog showing interest in food item
- Repeated cues

NOT ALLOWED:

- Harsh or stern commands
- Tight leash
- Whining, barking or scrambling

- ⇒ Leave it with an animal – This exercise simulates being out for a walk with the dog on a loose leash and suddenly coming across an animal of a different species. The dog must demonstrate that he will respond quickly to a leave it cue before close inspection or contact is made with the animal. "Leave it" must be spoken in a normal, friendly tone of voice while walking with the dog within close proximity to the animal that he has interest in.

There are several different items that can be used for this exercise. It can be a live or formerly live animal if the situation is safe for the animal and the dog. An easy-going cat, a guinea pig or a bird in a crate/cage are all appropriate for this exercise only if the animal is not afraid of the situation. A replica of a live animal qualifies if it visually looks like a real animal as has at least 2 of the following qualities: scented with a real animal's scent, moves like a real animal, has actual animal fur or makes a realistic animal sound. Fur Real toys that look, sound and feel like the real things are good choices for using a replica. Livestock is also suitable for this exercise.

Testing for this exercise must proceed exactly as described for the leave it with food. The dog must choose to not touch or closely investigate the animal after he has been told to leave it. The dog should immediately look for eye contact once told to leave it. However, a dog that clearly shows that he is choosing to leave the animal can pass the exercise without eye contact. The dog must not pull the leash tight, scramble to get the animal, whine or bark or exhibit any other behavior that shows the dog is not making the choice to leave it. The Scoutmaster must see 3 correct passes in a row with no failed pass attempts. If there are failed passes or if the Scoutmaster is unsure if the dog was intentionally ignoring the animal or if he just didn't see it, he/she can ask for additional passes as needed to ensure the dog is making a choice. The animal must be moved each time a pass is attempted.

ALLOWED:

- Live or life like animals
- Dog showing interest in the animal
- Verbal encouragement to the dog

NOT ALLOWED:

- Harsh or stern commands
- Tight leash
- Barking, whining or scrambling



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- ⇒ Pick up and dispose of dog waste – The handler must demonstrate proper clean up of his/her dog's waste or that of another dog. Proper clean up included completely picking up all waste, closing the bag and depositing it in a waste can. The handler must have at least 2 waste pick up bags with them whenever the dog is present. This test item also includes the handler's promise to always clean up after his/her dog, implied simply by the handler attempting to earn the Dog Scout title. Failure to properly and completely clean up after the dog at any time during observation and testing is unacceptable. The Scoutmaster must at some point see the handler pick up and dispose of dog waste.

**GENERAL INFORMATION:** The use of head collars or front attach harnesses are allowed only if there is a physical safety need such as a frail or disabled handler with a large, exuberant dog. These items can only be used as a "safety net" and not to control the dog during testing exercises. Choke chains, prong collars and electric shock collars are not allowed during testing and we highly discourage the use of these during training. These types of collars cannot remain on the dog even if the leash is attached to a different, acceptable type of collar. Buckle collars and limited slip collars that are properly adjusted are allowed. This means that the collar is only snug around the dog's neck when it's in the tightest position and cannot constrict the dog's skin/muscle. A standard harness with the leash attached over the dog's back is also allowed. Any other gear that is designed to or is used to physically punish the dog or is aversive to the dog as observed by the Scoutmaster is not allowed.

The leash used can be of any material (leather, nylon, cloth) and can be any length that gives enough slack to maintain a loose leash yet is not long enough to get in the way. A loose leash is one where there is no tension in the leash between the dog and handler.

The Dog Scout test is a pass/fail certification based on performance that is either acceptable or unacceptable. When a dog/handler team demonstrates a non-passing performance on any exercise the team must perform the exercise 3 times correctly to compensate for the non-passing performance. Sometimes it's appropriate to wait a bit of time before retrying the exercise. This could be at the end of the test, later in the day or on a different day. The Scoutmaster has the sole discretion to determine pass/fail on any exercise or on the test as a whole.

The Dog Scout title is for the dog. If the handler has more than one dog, each dog must be tested separately. The handler's written test may be waived for a handler who has previously submitted it with another dog.

**REVOCATION OR REFUSAL OF CERTIFICATION:** Dog Scouts of America reserves the right to refuse to certify any handler and/or dog based on the observations of the Scoutmaster and/or others who know or have observed the team. The Dog Scout title can be revoked if the dog's temperament changes for



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the worse or if the handler is not working to manage the dog's environment appropriately or not acting as a good representative of Dog Scouts of America. The dog requirements for the Dog Scout title are critical skills that must be worked on and reinforced throughout the dog's life. Therefore, we reserve the right to retest any dog at any time, regardless of when the team was tested or who did the testing. The Dog Scout title is representative of the relationship between the handler and the dog and NOT just the performance of the dog for the test.

Questions or concerns regarding any aspect of the Dog Scout Test or any Scoutmaster's decision should be addressed to the Merit Badge Program Administrator. Detailed contact information can be found on our [web site](#).