

How to run a good Troop Meeting

The weekly meeting is the glue that holds a Scout troop together. Well-planned meetings run by the troop's youth leaders can be full of excitement and satisfaction. Meeting time devoted to learning new skills and organizing future campouts, service projects, and other activities will help keep interest levels and enthusiasm high.

Troop meetings serve many purposes, including these:

Motivating Scouts. From Scouts' points of view, troop meetings are chances for them to get together with their friends for fun and adventure. For Scoutmasters, meetings offer many avenues to encourage Scouts to learn, to advance, and to improve themselves.

Strengthening patrols. Patrols have opportunities at troop meetings to meet together, to learn as a team, and to share what they know. Whether they serve as the honor guard during an opening flag ceremony, as the presenters of a Scouting skill, or as the organizers of a game or activity, every patrol can contribute to every troop meeting.

Learning and practicing Scouting skills. A portion of a troop meeting may be devoted to the demonstration and practice of skills that will enhance Scouts' ability to hike and camp, and to pass requirements for higher ranks.

Exercising leadership. The troop's youth leaders take leading roles in planning, conducting, and assisting the success of troop meetings. Leadership is a skill that can be learned only by experience, and troop meetings serve as regular occasions for that to happen.

Promoting Scout spirit. Troop meetings offer ideal settings for patrols to take part in contests and competitions that test their expertise and their abilities to cooperate with one another. Most troops have a troop meeting or activity every week. Meetings should occur at the same time every week to help boys and their families schedule effectively. If a troop has camped all weekend, the patrol leaders' council may decide to forgo the meeting the following week.

Most troop meetings occur on weeknights and should not last longer than 90 minutes to get boys home in time for homework and adequate rest. Troop meetings should not always be held at the same place. For example, now and then a troop may meet at a fire station so the member can learn about how their town is protected on a summer evening. They may meet at city hall. They might gather at a local pool to pass some of the swimming requirements for a rank or merit badge.

Weekly troop meetings should be fun and full of action and excitement. They can be opportunities to learn new skills and plan future activities and service projects. Aside for the Scoutmaster's Minute, the content and conduct of each section of a troop meeting is the responsibility of the Scouts themselves.

Planning a Troop Meeting

Responsibility for the conduct and content of a troop meeting falls to the scouts themselves. Troop meetings are planned well in advance by the senior patrol leader and the patrol leaders' council.

Each troop meeting should have been planned the previous month at the meeting of the patrol leaders' council. The senior patrol leader will have assigned patrols and individuals to take care of portions of a meeting, giving as many Scouts as possible the chance to contribute. The seven-part troop meeting plan provides the framework for efficient, well-run meetings.

The Seven Parts of a Troop meeting

The seven-part plan for troop meetings is an important guide, but use flexibly. The times noted in the plan are suggestions only and can vary to fit various situations. For example, the troop may be getting ready for a campout. The usual amount of time set aside for patrol meetings might be expanded to allow Scouts time to complete their patrol camping preparations. A troop nearing the date of a district camporee may devote extra time to skills instructions so that everyone will be ready for activities involving the theme of the camporee, and the interpatrol activity can include an extended competition that also focuses on the key skills.

When the minutes allotted to one part of the troop meeting plan increase, consider shortening other portions of the plan. Every troop meeting should be interesting and useful, and it should begin and end on time.

The Pre-opening

As Scouts begin to arrive for a troop meeting, a patrol leader or an older Scout assigned by the senior patrol leader should get them involved in a preopening game or project designed so that additional Scouts can join as they show up. The preopening is often well-suited for the outdoors. Those in charge of the preopening activity should be ready to start about 15 minutes before the scheduled beginning of the meeting. Varying the activities from week to week will keep the preopening fresh.

Scouts whose patrol has been assigned to serve that week as the service patrol should use the preopening time to prepare for the troop meeting. The meeting room may need to be rearranged, chairs set up, flags displayed, and other preparations completed before the meeting can begin.

The Opening (5 minutes)

Call the meeting to order on time, instructing Scouts to line up in formation by patrol. The patrol responsible for the opening ceremony may conduct a flag ceremony and then lead the troop members in the Scout Oath and Law and the Pledge of Allegiance.

Skills Instruction (15 to 20 minutes)

This portion of the meeting is devoted to the mastery of knowledge that Scouts need to participate fully in an upcoming activity, or upon skills they must learn to complete advancement requirements.

The skills to be taught at each meeting will have been determined in advance by the patrol leader's council. Often the skills will relate directly to the month's program plan for troop activities. Instruction should be hands-on learning rather than lecturing. All skill instruction should follow a simple process called the Teaching EDGE. First the skill is explained, then demonstrated. Then the learner is guided as he tries the skill. Enabling, the last E in EDGE, means creating an environment for the trainee to continue to be successful (like providing an opportunity to practice and use the skill).

Those who may be effective in teaching skills are the troop guide, instructors, junior assistant Scoutmasters, assistant Scoutmasters, and members of the troop committee. Older Scouts and members of the Venture patrol also can be effective instructors, though at most meetings they will be involved in their own activities.

Whenever possible, troop skills instructions should be divided into three levels:

- Basic Scouting skills instruction for the new Scouts
- Advanced instruction for the experienced Scouts
- Expert instruction for the Venture patrol

Each instructional area should be separated from the others so there are no distractions.

Patrol Meetings (5 to 20 minutes)

End skills instruction on time and ask patrols to go their patrol areas for their patrol meeting. Patrol leaders will take charge of the patrols.

Matters to be dealt with during a patrol meeting include taking attendance, collecting dues, planning the patrol's involvement in upcoming troop activities, selecting menus for hikes and campouts, assigning patrol members to specific tasks, and working out any other details for the smooth operation of the patrol.

Circulate among the patrol meetings and be ready to serve as a resource if a patrol leader asks for your assistance. If you notice that patrols have completed their work, call the patrols back together and move on to the next part of the troop meeting.

Interpatrol Activity (15 to 20 minutes)

You or someone appointed by you can lead this opportunity for the patrols to interact with one another in a competitive or cooperative effort. The activity might be a game that will test the skills the Scouts are learning for an upcoming activity like pitching tents or tying knots, for example. Troop Program Resources has a wealth of games that foster friendly teamwork and

competition,. The BSA manual Project COPE, No. 34371, also contains many appropriate games and challenges.

Closing - Scoutmaster's Minute (1 minute)

The closing of a meeting is the Scoutmaster's opportunity to step forward. Ask everyone to sit quietly, then turn the meeting over to the Scoutmaster for reminders and announcements about upcoming events, support of the patrols for their achievements and progress, and perhaps a word of wisdom or two.

The "After the Meeting" Meeting (5 minutes)

Ask members of the patrol leaders' council to stay a few moments after the closing to discuss with you and the Scoutmaster the quality of the just-concluded meeting. Offer praise for portions of the meeting that went well, and talk about ways that future troop meetings can be improved. Make a few written notes so that suggestions can be explored more fully at the next patrol leader's council meeting.

Here are some questions to ask:

- What should we start doing that would make the meeting better?
- What should we stop doing that didn't work for us or got in the way?
- What should we continue doing that worked well for us? This is an important question because it helps us identify our strengths.

Finally, review the troop meeting plan for the next meeting and make sure that everyone who will have a role is aware of the assignment and is prepared to do a good job.

While the patrol leader's council is reviewing the meeting, the service patrol can put away troop gear and return the meeting room to order.