REQUIREMENTS BY SKILL

Swimming & Water Safety Requirements by Rank

Two swim tests, reaching and throwing rescues, and boating basics.

Aquatics shows up at Second Class and First Class. Second Class covers safe swimming, the beginner swim test, and reaching/throwing rescues. First Class raises the bar to the swimmer test and adds boating safety and a line rescue. Because most of it needs a pool or lake and qualified supervision, troops usually knock it out at summer camp or a single planned aquatics outing — which works well, as long as a leader is tracking which scouts still need which pieces.

> Requirements are paraphrased for planning, and numbers follow the current Scouts BSA Requirements book. Verify wording at scouting.org before signing off.

How Swimming & Water Safety Builds Across the Ranks

Second Class

5a Explain the precautions needed for a safe swim (the points of Safe Swim Defense).

Sign-off: Scout can name the key points — supervision, buddy system, swim ability groups, lookout, discipline — not just "don't swim alone."

5b Pass the BSA beginner test: jump in over your head, level off, swim a short distance, turn sharply, and swim back.

Sign-off: Administered under qualified aquatics supervision. A camp swim check usually covers it.

5c Demonstrate water rescues by reaching with an arm or leg, reaching with an object, and throwing lines and objects.

Sign-off: Scout actually performs each method from shore or deck, with a "victim" in the water.

5d Explain why reaching or throwing rescues come before swimming rescues, and why a rescuer avoids contact with the victim.

First Class

6a Pass the BSA swimmer test.

Sign-off: Same test as the "swimmer" classification at summer camp. Get a copy of the camp record if it happened there.

6b Explain the precautions for a safe trip afloat (the points of Safety Afloat).

6c Identify the basic parts of a canoe, kayak, or other boat, and the parts of a paddle or oar.

Sign-off: Point to the parts on a real boat if possible — a diagram is the fallback.

6d Describe proper body position in a watercraft and explain why it matters.

6e With a helper and a practice victim in deep water, show a line rescue as both tender and rescuer.

Sign-off: Scout performs both roles. The victim should be a reasonable distance out in deep water, under lifeguard supervision.

After First Class

Swimming merit badge is one of the three options for an Eagle-required slot (with Hiking and Cycling), and Lifesaving is an alternative to Emergency Preparedness. A scout who struggled with the First Class swimmer test often benefits from going straight into Swimming merit badge at camp afterward.

Swimming EAGLE — Eagle-required option — natural next step after the swimmer test.

Lifesaving EAGLE — Eagle-required option (or Emergency Preparedness). Builds directly on the line rescue.

Canoeing — Expands on the First Class boat-parts and body-position requirements.

Kayaking — Same idea for kayakers.

Can rank work count toward a merit badge? Sometimes. Under the Guide to Advancement (4.2.3.6), one activity can count for both when the two requirements match exactly and have the same purpose, like camping nights for the ranks and the Camping merit badge. For safety skills such as first aid and CPR, the counselor should be satisfied the Scout still remembers what was learned. When requirements only look alike, the Scout still does each one's own work. The unit leader or merit badge counselor makes the call.

One Aquatics Session for Mixed Ranks

Pool or lake with a trained aquatics supervisor and lifeguards. About 2 hours.

1. **Safe Swim Defense talk (all)**
   Open with the safe-swim precautions. Second Class scouts explain them back (5a). It doubles as the safety briefing for the session.

2. **Swim tests**
   Run the beginner test for Second Class candidates (5b) and the swimmer test for First Class candidates (6a). Record results on the spot.

3. **Rescue stations**
   Second Class scouts do reaching and throwing rescues (5c, 5d) from the deck. First Class scouts pair up for the line rescue, trading tender and rescuer roles (6e).

4. **Boat basics (dry land)**
   With a canoe or kayak out of the water, First Class scouts identify parts and discuss body position and Safety Afloat (6b, 6c, 6d).

5. **Close out**
   Before anyone leaves, write down who completed what. Aquatics sign-offs are the easiest to lose track of.

Signing It Off

Swim tests must be run under qualified aquatics supervision — a parent watching at a hotel pool doesn't meet the standard.

Summer camp swim checks are the most common place scouts pass 5b and 6a. Ask the scout to bring home the camp's record or blue card notes, and enter it right away.

Explanations (5a, 5d, 6b, 6d) can be signed off in a troop meeting. Rescues and swim tests can't.

Common Mistakes

Assuming a strong swimmer "already passed" without an actual test on record.

Signing off the line rescue after a dry-land demo. It needs a practice victim in deep water.

Telling a scout there's an easy alternative to the swimmer test. Alternatives exist only for scouts with documented disabilities, through the council's official alternative-requirements process.

> **Safety:** Every aquatics activity must follow Safe Swim Defense (and Safety Afloat for boating), with an adult trained in those programs present.