

# Understanding the BSA Scout Oath: Facts, History, and Meaning

As a BSA Scout, there are certain principles and guidelines that you're expected to follow. **It might seem at first glance that these rules only benefit those around you, but the reality is that they're there to help you too!** You can turn to them in times when you're unsure of what to do, and they'll guide you to the right choice and the proper course of action.

Out of all these principles, the ones that are most well known are probably those inside the Scout Oath and the Scout Law. **These guidelines are often recited at troop meetings, both to keep them at the forefront of your mind and to drive home their importance.** Here's a short video (0:31) if you'd like to hear the Scout Oath spoken by Scouts just like you :)

## [The Scout Oath](#)

To be honest, I didn't have a hard time memorizing the Scout Oath or the Scout Law. Because I said them so frequently along with the rest of my troop, they naturally became ingrained in my memory. **Rather, the true challenge was to see the words for what they really meant.** It was only as I made an effort to live by those teachings that I came to truly understand them.

Now that I have that knowledge under my belt, I want to pass it on to you! **In this article, I'm going to give you an in-depth rundown of the Scout Oath.** But before we start, let's take a quick glance at the Scout Oath as a whole:

*"On my honor, I will do my best*

*To do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law;*

*To help other people at all times;*

*To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight."*

**Now, I'll give you a look at the history of the Scout Oath.** I'll then break down the Scout Oath line by line, exploring the essence of each associated promise. You can feel free to skip straight to the detailed rundown, but I'd encourage you to read about the Scout Oath's past if you're interested!

## The History of the Scout Oath

We're going to go back to the early days of Scouting, back when the Founder of Scouting was still putting all his ideas together. **This is the original Scout's Oath, as featured in the 1908 book [Scouting for Boys](#), written by Robert Baden-Powell himself:**

*“On my honour I promise that –*

- 1. I will do my duty to God and the King.*
- 2. I will do my best to help others, whatever it costs me.*
- 3. I know the scout law, and will obey it.”*

Sounds pretty different, huh? While some pieces of it may be familiar, the language has certainly changed in other parts. **Directly following the Scout’s Oath, Baden-Powell goes on to say that:**

*“While taking this oath the scout will stand, holding his right hand raised level with his shoulder, palm to the front, thumb resting on the nail of the little finger, and the other three fingers upright, pointing upwards.”*

I’m sure that sounds familiar! **After all, that’s the very same secret sign that the Scouting movement uses to this day.** Isn’t it interesting to see that while some things have changed, other things have stayed very much the same?

**It’s worth noting that while the words within the Scout Oath have certainly changed, the significance behind it has not.** It’s still a promise built on a Scout’s honor, and it still holds the same importance and value that it did over a century ago.

Want to learn more about *Scouting for Boys*? You’re in luck! **Here are a few fun facts about the original 1908 edition, just for you:**

- It discussed lots of different subjects, from patriotism to first aid
- It’s a rewrite of the 1899 book [\*Aids to Scouting\*](#), also written by Baden-Powell
- It’s no longer owned by anyone, so you can read it online for free

Now that you have a good idea of the Scout Oath’s history, let’s get to the main attraction! It’s time to go through the current Scout Oath line by line, analyzing the meaning and purpose of each. **Get ready!**

“On my honor, I will do my best...”

Ready for the first line? Let’s start with “on my honor.” The meaning of the word “honor” depends greatly on context, as it can be used in many different ways. **As part of the Scout Oath, however, this definition by Cambridge Dictionary fits it best:**

*“A good character, or a reputation for honesty and fair dealing.”*

“On my honor,” then, is used to mark a promise. **It says to the listener, “I will keep my word.”** Honor may call to mind the knights and warriors of medieval times, but it has just as much significance and value as it did all those centuries ago! A Scout’s honor is their reputation of strong character and good spirit, and it’s what they strive to maintain at all costs.

**When you think about it, it's a cycle of sorts:** Following the Scout Oath helps a Scout keep their honor alive, and their honor serves as the basis and foundation of the Scout Oath, "on my honor." Pretty neat, right? :)

Of course, the Scout Oath isn't the only tool you have for preserving your honor! **There are other resources you can turn to, such as:**

- Scout Law
- Outdoor Code
- Scout Motto
- Scout Slogan

Now, let's move on to the next part of this line! **"Do Your Best" is probably a familiar phrase to you, as it *is* the Cub Scout Motto and all.** However, let's dig a little deeper. What comes to mind when you think of "doing your best?"

Chances are that it makes you think of hard work and great effort! The tasks we tackle over the course of our lives aren't always easy to complete. There will be times when you struggle, and there will be times when you get frustrated. When that happens, hold your head high and stand strong. Remember: **Perfection is unachievable, but your best is *always* within your reach.**

"To do my duty to God and my country..."

It's time for the second line of the Scout Oath! To put it simply, "duty" is a responsibility to act. It's when you're obligated to do something, either by morality or by law. **In the case of the Scout Oath, your duty is a *moral* one.** It's a responsibility that you carry whether you're wearing your uniform or not, and it's a key part of what makes you a Scout.

When you take the word "God" at face value, you might first think of the Christian deity. **However, in the Scout Oath, the meaning is not so limited.** Scouts BSA does not require you to belong to a specific religion, and it will not push you into a particular faith. No matter what it is you believe in, "duty to God" means following the principles that go along with your beliefs.

Here are a few examples of how a Scout might perform their duty to God! **Depending on your beliefs, carrying out your duty to God could look something like:**

- Studying scriptures
- Praying to a higher power
- Attending a worship service

**Just like duty to God, "duty to country" can come in all shapes and sizes.** There are so many ways to express your patriotism, from taking part in flag ceremonies to marching in parades. You

can also do good for your country in more subtle ways, such as volunteering or participating in service projects.

Duty to country is a concept that extends far beyond the ranks of Scouts BSA. **Former US President John F. Kennedy once said something very memorable and important about the responsibility to safeguard and care for one's country.** It goes like this:

*“Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.”*

Have you heard this quote before? I wouldn't be surprised at all if you have. It's very well known, and there's a good reason for that. **The message behind it is just as relevant today as it was back then, and it will continue to be relevant for as long as there are countries to call home.**

“And to obey the Scout Law...”

Now, this is the part where the Scout Oath and the Scout Law intersect! The Scout Law is an important part of the Scout Oath, so no Scout should ever neglect it. **By following the principles of the Scout Law, you make yourself a true example of who a Scout should be.** In case you could use a refresher, this is the Scout Law:

*“A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.”*

Every value laid out in the Scout Law is essential to remember, as they are the cornerstones of an ideal Scout. **Of course, while remembering them is important, that's not enough on its own.** You must make an effort to live by them at all times, allowing them to shape your character and influence your actions.

**If you want more information, I'd recommend taking a close look at ScoutSmarts' [very own guide](#) to the Scout Law!** It breaks down the Scout Law by each of the twelve values, going into close detail on the meaning of each :)

Up to speed on the meaning and significance of the Scout Law? Awesome! **Let's move on to the next part of the Scout Oath.** The one we're about to cover is very important, and it's one of the first things people think of when they picture a Scout!

“To help other people at all times...”

When you picture a Scout “helping other people,” what comes to mind? Do you think of the Scout saving someone from a life-threatening situation? **While helping other people certainly *can***

**involve bravery and heroics, it doesn't always have to.** There are more subtle ways to help someone. On that note, let's take a look at the Scout Slogan:

*"Do a Good Turn Daily."*

A Good Turn can be anything from taking part in disaster relief to helping an older person cross the street. **There's no good deed too small to be recognized, and there's no Good Turn too simple to have meaning.**

Here are a few examples of helping other people:

- Picking up litter
- Recycling plastics
- Taking part in a cleanup project
- Volunteering at a local library

If you see someone who needs a hand, never hesitate to step in and give them some help! Of course, your efforts to assist don't need to be limited by what's in front of your eyes. **Put some thought into how you can make your ideals bloom in the world around you.** Follow your passions and values, and you'll find yourself improving society in deep and meaningful ways.

**"To keep myself physically strong..."**

The benefits of physical fitness are well known, and the need to keep yourself healthy is one we all understand. **If you're not good to your body, your body won't be good to you.** From a very young age, we are taught to be careful what foods we eat and to exercise regularly. These lessons are important to keep in mind, as putting them into action will serve you for life.

As you know, physical strength is so valuable that it gets its very own place in the Scout Oath. Scouts need to be aware at all times, and a vital part of that is being aware of the future. **To keep yourself in good shape as you grow older, make sure to take proper care of your body!**

You may be wondering how best to keep yourself healthy. **There are many ways to stay physically strong, but here are a few of the finest:**

- Eat a balanced and nutritious diet
- Get a full night's sleep
- Avoid using harmful substances
- Exercise frequently

When it comes to your own physical health, don't take the easy way out! You don't want to look back on your youth later in life and wonder why you didn't take care of yourself sooner. **You can't improve the past, but you can absolutely upgrade your future!**

## “Mentally awake...”

As I said before, it's vital to keep yourself aware of your surroundings. **The phrase “mentally awake” means exactly that!** As you probably guessed, “awake” is not to be taken literally here. As a Scout, a good night's sleep is not only important but encouraged :P

The world is a busy place, so it's easy to become overwhelmed by just how much there is to absorb. **Still, do your very best to keep your surroundings in mind.** The needs of the people around you, the consequences of your actions, and the events in the news are all things that deserve your full attention!

To be an active and engaged citizen, it's vital that you help those in need and shape society for the best. That's why this part of the Scout Oath is so important! **Here are a few ways to keep yourself mentally awake:**

- Avoid using substances that will dull your senses
- Resist the urge to scroll through your phone around others
- Keep an eye on possible outcomes and make informed decisions

Following this part of the Scout Oath will greatly benefit both you and those around you! There's so much more you can achieve when you're aware of what needs to be done. **Being mentally awake allows you to show your true value as a Scout.**

## “And morally straight.”

Here's the very last part of the Scout Oath! As the word “moral” implies, “morally straight” has to do with the idea of right and wrong. In this world, there are noble actions and there are harmful ones. **Keeping your moral compass pointed north will help you behave in a way that benefits the world around you.**

So, how does a Scout keep their character strong? The answer's simple: **Use the principles of Scouts BSA to guide you.** That's what they're there for, so use them to your full advantage! As you progress through your Scouting career and live by the rules you recite, you'll come to understand the nature of an ideal Scout more and more clearly.

Want some time-tested ways to embody the true spirit of a Scout? There are so many to choose from! **That said, here are a few that come to mind for me:**

- Keep the desires and needs of all people in mind
- Work toward a future that you truly believe in
- Treat those around you with dignity and respect

Live by this final part of the Scout Oath, and the spirit of Scouting will gradually become a part of you. **As you embrace the values of a true Scout, the right choice to make will become clearer and clearer with every decision you face!**

## Conclusion

The Scout Oath is a promise built on honor, and it is your personal guide. By sticking to it, you make your character stronger and your values greater. **Follow it as you would the Scout Law: with persistence, attentiveness, and care.** Your life will change for the better as you embrace the true nature of a Scout.

Remember, it's your responsibility as a Scout to live by the words of the Scout Oath. Following through on that obligation will benefit you, the people you care about, and the world at large. **So, never hesitate to put the Scout Oath into action!** I hope this article was helpful, and thanks for reading :)