



# eBay

## The ISCA Getting Started Collecting Series

In the past few years, the internet has become a bigger and bigger part of patch collecting. At one commercial web site in particular, thousands of Scout patches change hands every week. That web site is eBay. eBay is a commercial auction site where sellers place items for sale and buyers bid. eBay runs the auctions. The eBay site can be found by first going to [www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com) and then clicking on “Collectibles” then “Historical Memorabilia” “Fraternal Groups” then “Boy Scouts”. Another way to find the BSA category is to go to [www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com) and search for “Boy Scout” up top in “What are you looking for?” If you click on any of the item titles shown, at the top of the description you will see “Collectibles > Historical Memorabilia > Fraternal Groups > Boy Scouts >”. Click on the “Boy Scouts” link. Once you get to the BSA category for the first time, you can save a book mark under your favorites to make it easier next time. You can look at all of the Scout items from this section or you can go to any of the categories within Boy Scouts. On the left of your screen, just a little ways down, you will see something like this:

- Badges, Patches (8294)
- Books, Manuals (1335)
- Cups, Mugs (141)
- Equipment (286)
- Pins (416)
- Postcards, Cards (98)
- Uniforms, Clothing (985)
- Other Items (2321)

These are categories for items within Boy Scouts. The numbers in parentheses will be different. They are the number of items in each category currently available. If you click on the “Badges, Patches” link, you will see:

- Council Patches (1488)
- Jamboree Patches (550)
- Merit Badges (280)
- Order of the Arrow Patches (1745)
- Other Badges, Patches (4085)

Again, the numbers will be different. If you wanted to see the council patches, click on that link. Be aware, however, that there is nothing to force people to list items in the right category. It is in fact pretty common to find things in the wrong categories, so it pays to look at all of the categories. When you look at the “Boy Scout” category you see all of the items in all of the categories under Boy Scouts and all of the categories under those categories, so you can just look at the Boy Scout category to see all of the Scout items. Sometimes, people have great luck finding good old Scout items by searching other categories that have nothing to do with Scouts. Sometimes you can get lucky and find some good bargains because other most people do not search those categories for Scout items.

**Searching eBay.** It is pretty common for there to be well over 10,000 listings in the Boy Scout category at all times. You can find what you want by searching. For the simplest searches, just type a word that you want to find like your council or lodge name. You may want to type just the most important parts of these names. For example if you are from Greater Cleveland Council, you would probably want to search for “Cleveland” and not the full council name. You can search for more than one thing at once. Say you are interested in Cleveland council items, Cuyahoga Lodge #17 items, and Cleveland Camp items from camps Clendening, Beaumont, and Belden. You could search for

(cleveland,cuyahoga,17,beaumont,clendening,belden)

List everything you want to find separated by commas and surrounded by parentheses. Capitalization does not matter. This search will turn up items that you are not interested in such as S-17 issues from other councils, but it gives you a much shorter list to check than checking through all of the BSA items. Say you are interested in patches from Shawnee lodge #109. You might search for

(shawnee,109)

This search will turn up a lot of items from Shawnee lodge #51 in Saint Louis. Instead you could search for

(shawnee,109) -Louis -51

This search will turn up all items that have a “Shawnee” or a “109” in the title except those that also contain a “Louis” or a “51”. This helps narrow the list a lot. There is a risk though. This search would also exclude items like “51 patches from Shawnee Lodge 109”. To find more items, search the descriptions too. Click the check box “in titles &

descriptions”. This search will be much slower than just searching the titles, but it may turn up some good things that you would otherwise miss. You can sort your search results by time remaining or by price. For example you may want to see first all of the least expensive items or those that are closing soon. You can also book mark your searches and use them over and over. Each time you do the search you will see all items that match your search pattern, not just those that were found the first time, and they will be sorted just as you specified. You can also save your searches so that they are available for you to use again on other computers. We will say more on this later.

**How to Bid.** Any one can look at patches on eBay. If you want to buy or sell, you need to register with eBay and get an ID and password. At the bottom of most eBay pages is a link you can click to register with eBay; just click on the word “register”. You will need to fill out your name and other information and select a user ID and password. Registration is free.

When you find an item you are interested in you can do one of two things. You can bid on it or you can wait and watch it and perhaps bid later. All of these things are easier to do if you “sign in” with eBay. Then you will not be prompted for a user ID and password every time you bid or do other things besides browse. Click the link at the top of most pages that says “sign in”. Then provide your user ID and password. If this is your home computer and you are not worried about other people using it, you might also click on the check box that “Keep me signed in on this computer unless I sign out.” Then eBay will remember your user ID and password across sessions, although you will have to reenter it on occasion.

A very handy feature on eBay is “My eBay”, which you can get to from the top of most screens by clicking on “My eBay”. It contains information about what you won, what you bid on, what you are selling, and what you are watching. When you see an item you are interested in, but you are not ready to bid, on the upper right part of your screen, you can click on “Watch this item”. Then that item is added to the list of items you are watching in your my eBay screen.

Before you bid on an item, you should thoroughly read the description. Ask yourself a bunch of questions. Is the item what you think it is? Has the seller identified it correctly? Might it be a fake? What is the condition? Has it been sewn or washed? Is the scan good enough? Should I ask the seller for another scan? What are the shipping costs? If it does not say ask the shipper before bidding. If you win more than one item, will the seller combine shipping costs (ship both for one price) or does the seller demand that you pay the shipping cost for each item? Ask before bidding if it does not say. Will the seller ship via

First Class mail (which is cheaper) or does he require you to pay for more expensive shipping like priority mail? Is the seller willing to insure the item (at your expense) if it is expensive? Does the seller require insurance? Does the seller use private insurance instead of postal insurance? This could result in your item sitting in your mail box in the rain. Will the seller accept personal checks or are money orders required? Are credit cards accepted or PayPal? If the seller wants cash, you probably should not bid. You should also see if you can find the same item available on the web from one of the regular dealers. You would be surprised at how often people pay more on an eBay auction than they would have to pay to buy the same item at fixed price.

You need to also consider the seller's reputation and feedback. Every registered eBay user has a feedback profile. In every transaction, both the buyer and the seller can enter feedback on the other, positive, negative, or neutral. Positive feedback counts one point, negative feedback counts minus one point, and neutral feedback counts zero. When feedback is entered, you can also enter a comment stating that things went well or stating what the problem was. You can respond to comments too stating your side of the story. eBay counts the total number of positives and negatives and also the first piece of feedback from each individual. Your feedback number is based on just this first piece of feedback. Reputable sellers have feedback ratings of 100% or at least in the high 90 percents, like 99.7%. When a seller has a feedback rating on the order of 99+% and hundreds or thousands of positive feedbacks, you can usually bid with confidence. Even the most reputable dealers sometimes get negative feedback through no real fault of their own. You can read all comments. Sometimes you will see silly negatives like "Seller changed 50 cents to ship but only used 37 cents postage." Fifty cents is a very reasonable shipping charge, and negative feedback accompanied by comments like that should be ignored. Sometimes you will see a series of comments like "Negative. Buyer did not respond to e-mail." with a response like "Sorry. I was in a coma." and a follow up like "Transaction completed satisfactorily." However, if the seller has substantial negative feedback and the reasons seem serious, you should be very careful bidding. You may get burned.

You can bid on an item at any time, as long as it is open. Items tend to be open for either seven or ten days, although shorter auctions are possible. A seven day auction gives you 604,800 different seconds in which you can bid. You may bid in any one of those seconds, and you may bid more than once. When you bid in the last few seconds, it is called "sniping." While some people mistakenly argue that sniping is wrong, it is completely within the rules to bid in every single one of those seconds. The advantage of sniping is it does not give other people a chance to see your bid, react, and bid higher. Someone may bid \$10 thinking that that is the highest they would go, but when you bid \$11, they may think that maybe \$12 is really the highest they would go. If your bid comes in one of the

last seconds, they may not get that chance. There are a number of potential disadvantages of sniping. If your computer, eBay, or your ISP goes down, or if you forget to bid, you may not get your bid in. Your bid may also be too low, and you will not get another chance to try again. Whether you bid early or bid late, remember, the auction is not over until it is over. You may be high bidder with one tenth of a second left, but you can still be outbid. I once refreshed my screen on an auction I was winning, and it showed me winning with zero seconds left. It did not say the auction was closed, so the actual amount of time left was between 0 and 0.5 seconds. When I refreshed again, I had been outbid!

Some items come around on eBay a lot. You can snipe for those to get them at a better price. Others come around very rarely. When one of these appears, if it is something that you have been looking a long time for, you can bid more than once. You can bid on the last day many hours before the auction closes. You can then snipe to get in a last second bid in case anyone is trying to beat you at the last minute. It is okay to bid against yourself, you will (almost always) not be raising the price. To understand this, you need to understand how bidding on eBay works.

**How Bidding Works.** Say a patch appears on eBay with a minimum bid of 50¢, and you are the first bidder, and you enter a bid of 71¢. The item will show you as high bidder with a bid of 50¢. Only you and eBay will know that the maximum bid that you entered is 71¢. When you enter a maximum bid like 71¢, and you win, that may not be what you pay. What you pay is a minimum bid increment above the second high bidder or your maximum bid, whichever is less. When someone bids against you, eBay will automatically increase your bid for you up to the maximum amount that you specified, in this case 71¢. The minimum bid increase for an item under a dollar is 5¢. So the next person has to bid at least 55¢ over your 50¢. Say someone enters a bid of 60¢. Your bid would be increased to 65¢, which is the minimum bid increment, 5¢, plus the other person's high bid. Now, if you see that you have been bid up near your maximum, and if you decide to increase your maximum, you can "bid against yourself". You can enter a bid of say 91¢. Your actual current bid price of 65¢ would not change but eBay would remember your new maximum bid. Say the next person entered a bid of 90¢. Your maximum bid, 91¢, is less than 95¢, which is the new bid of 90¢ plus the minimum bid increment of 5¢, but since you are still high bidder with a maximum of 91¢, your bid is increased to your maximum bid of 91¢. Now, if you see that you have been bid up to your maximum, and if you decide to increase your maximum, you can "bid against yourself" again. You can enter a bid of say \$2.00. This time, your actual bid price of 91¢ would change. It would increase to 95¢, which is the minimum bid increment above the second high bidder. It did not increase the first time because the difference between your bid and the second high bidder's bid was the minimum bid increment. In the second bid, that was not true so eBay increased your bid.

At a price of one dollar, the minimum bid increment increases from 5¢ to 25¢. Let's say there are a few seconds left, your current bid is \$1.25, and someone enters an almost last-second snipe of \$2.00, the same as your bid. A second later, someone else enters a last second snipe of \$2.10. Then the auction closes. Who wins? You do even though you did not have the final high bid! Your maximum bid exactly matched the maximum for the first sniper. Since your bid was in first, yours has precedence. You remain high bidder but at a price of \$2.00. When the second sniper bids, the minimum bid is  $\$2.00 + 25¢ = \$2.25$ , so his bid of \$2.10 is unacceptable and eBay rejects it. Interestingly, if the first sniper had not raised your price to \$2.00, a bid of \$2.10 would have been more than the minimum increment above \$1.25 and you would have lost at a price of \$2.10, which is the minimum of \$2.25 (your \$2.00 plus the 25¢ bid increment) and the \$2.10 maximum bid of the sniper.

The minimum bid increments for items under \$25 is 50¢ and for items up to \$100, it is \$1.00. It is possible to win items by bidding less than the minimum bid increment above the second high bidder's maximum bid. If your bid is more than the minimum increment above the current price, it is acceptable. If it is also more than the current high bidder's maximum price, you become high bidder, even if your bid is not more than the minimum bid increment above the second high bidder's maximum (which you can't know). Some people bid in odd amounts to try to take advantage of this. Say you don't want to pay more than about \$5 for a patch. Many people would not put in a maximum bid of \$5, but would instead put in a bid like \$5.14 or \$5.31 hoping to be just above the other guy who also may have bid \$5 plus change. All bid amounts except the high bid are protected (not shown) until after the auction closes.

**How much should you bid?** Say you see a flap from your lodge, and you expect it to sell around \$5. You want it so badly, that you are even willing to pay more. You might bid \$6 or even \$10. If you are right, and no one else bids more than about \$5, you will win and have to pay a price equal to the second-high bid plus 50¢. This could be substantially less than your maximum bid. You have to be careful though. Say you decide that you want it so much that you put in a bid of \$50, even though you expect it to go for \$5 and change but you want to make sure you win even if it goes higher. This is fine unless someone else does the same, and then, you could end up paying a substantial amount of money for a patch that will probably sell for considerably less next time. Don't bid more than you are really willing to spend.

When you bid on an item, you are making a commitment to buy that item if you are high bidder. You need to honor that commitment and pay in a timely manner. If the auction closes on Friday evening, and you will be at a campout, you should respond to the seller on Sunday when you return and get payment out on Monday. If an auction closes on Sunday evening of your first day at summer camp, you should tell the seller in advance that you will be gone when the auction closes, and if you are high bidder you will pay when you get back. Most sellers are pretty understanding when notified in advance. What would be better still is to ask them if it is OK with them if you bid knowing that the item will close while you are gone.

After the auction closes, you need to get in contact with the seller. Usually the seller will get in contact with you first. You should agree on shipping and insurance charges and pay promptly. When the transaction is successful, you should leave positive feedback. If the seller does not leave positive feedback immediately, don't be afraid to ask. Many sellers do not do automatically leave feedback, but even many of those will do so on request. Do not leave negative feedback on successful transactions, even when things do not go perfectly. E-mail the seller to work things out. You can even get a seller's phone number from eBay to talk things over. Most buyers and sellers of Scouting items live by the Oath and Law and want to do the right thing. However, you should always be careful.

eBay is a lot of fun, and some really cool items are coming out of closets and attics all over the world. You can find some great items and sometimes even some great deals. You can also get caught up in "auction fever" and pay way too much. Remember, almost everything will come around again. It is not unusual for an item to sell for a high price, and then a few weeks later sell for a much lower price. Don't bid more than you can comfortably afford to spend. Good luck and good bidding!

-- Warren F. Kuhfeld