

## Official USCF Rules

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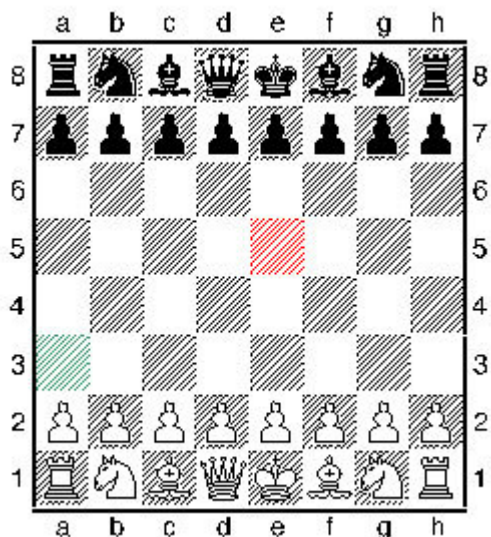
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#### I. Setting up the pieces



Chess is played on an 8x8 board. White moves first. When you set up the board, remember the following things:

- "White is right!" Make sure the right corner of the board is on a White square. Many movies, T.V shows, and even art exhibits with chess sets get this wrong.
- Queen on her color! If you are White the queen should be on a White square. If you are Black, the queen should be on a Black square.

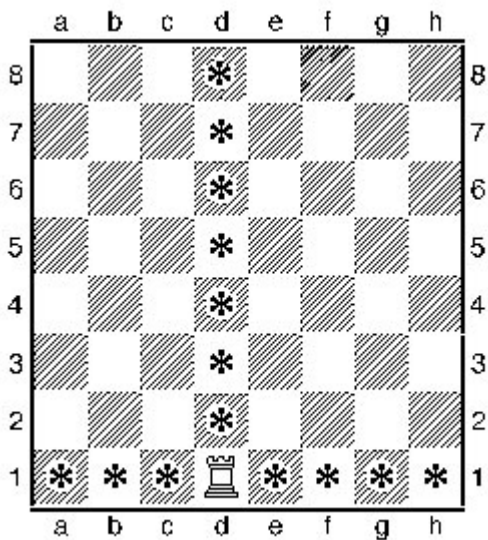
The letters on the bottom (a-h) of the board correspond to files. The numbers on the side of the board refer to ranks (1-8). Each square has a name. The red square is called **e5**.

**Question 1: What is the green square called?**

Using these names to record your chess moves is called "Algebraic Chess Notation" Strong players invariably do this, so that they can learn from their games.

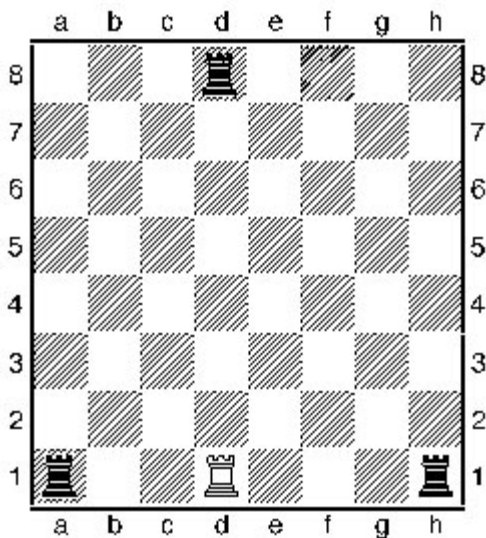
**II. Piece movements Part I- The Rook and The King**

1. The Rook: Let's start with the most straightforward piece.



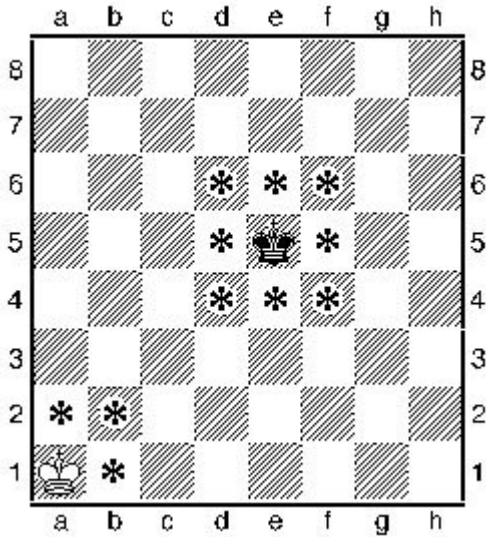
The rook can move horizontally and vertically as many squares as it wants. The rook can move to any of the starred squares.

The rook captures in the same way that it moves.



If it's White's turn, he can take any of the three rooks. If it's Black's move, Black can use any of her rooks to take the White rook.

**The king** has little mobility. But the king's value is unquantifiable, because its entrapment ends the game. It moves one square in every direction.



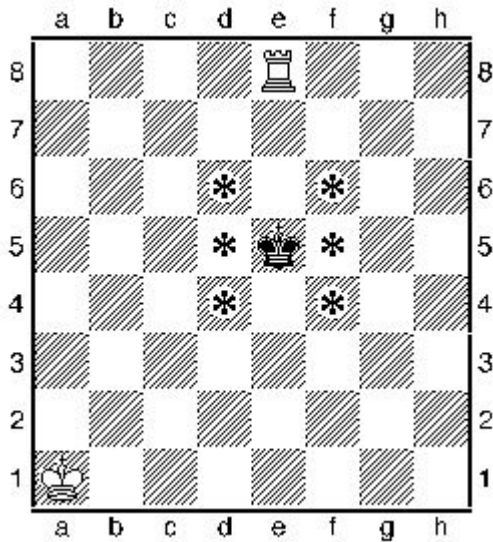
The White king can move to any of the three starred squares in the corner. The Black king can move to any of the eight starred squares.

The king captures in the same way it moves, but unlike any other piece, the king cannot be captured.

### III. Check and three ways to get out of check

Check is the heart and soul of the game, so let's go over it now- and then we can review it with each new piece we learn to move!

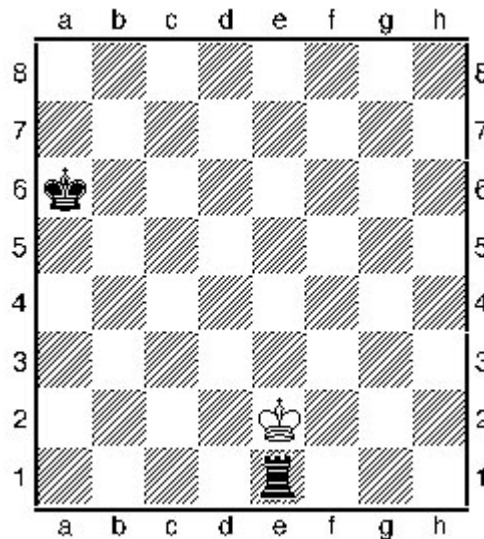
When a piece threatens the king with capture (attacks), the king is in check.



The White rook checks the Black king.

**A checked king must escape check in one of three ways.**

Here, the Black king can get out of check by moving to any of the starred squares. **Fleeing is the first way to get out of check.**

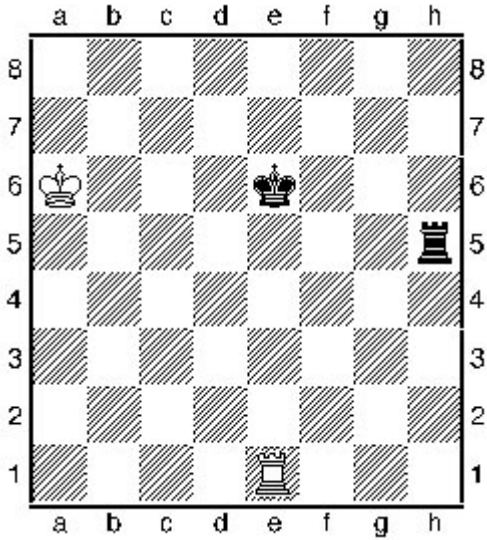


**Question: Why can't he move to e6 or e4?**

The White king can simply capture the Black rook to get out of check.

**Question: How many squares can the White king flee to? Is it better to capture or flee here?**

**Blocking is the third way to get out of check.** Think of this as the king throwing one of his bodyguards in front of himself, to shield himself from injury.



The Black rook on h5 can block the check by moving to e5.

**The king is never allowed to put himself in check.**

Two kings cannot touch. In other words, they can't be on adjacent squares.

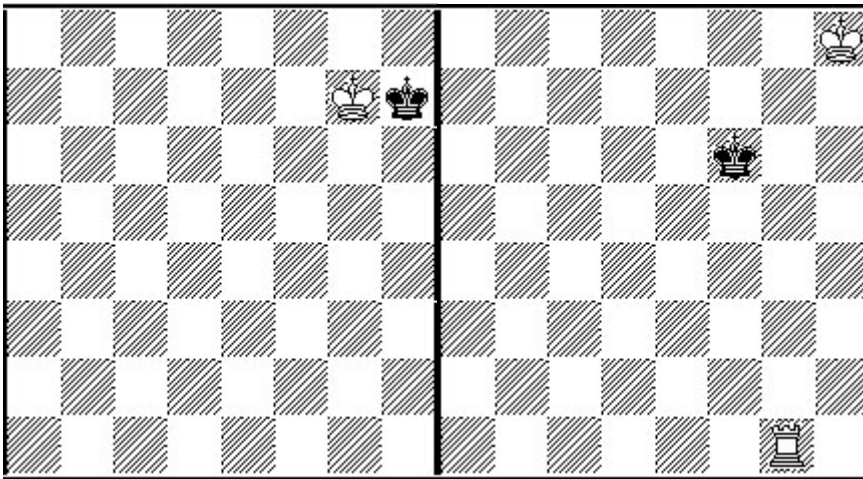
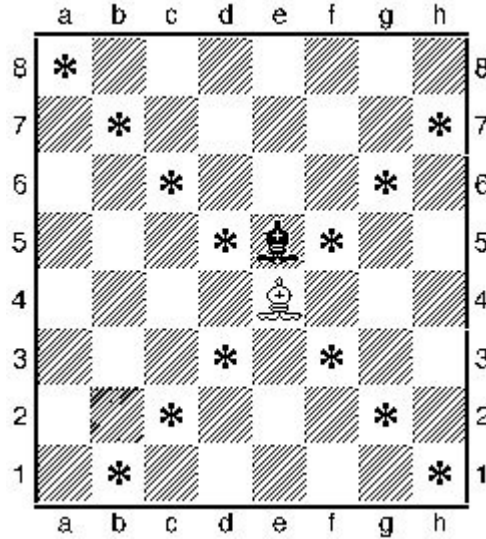


Diagram 1 (left) is **NOT ALLOWED** because kings move one square in each direction, and therefore would be putting themselves in check if standing right next to each other. You will never see this position in a real game of chess.

In Diagram 2, the Black king may not move to g5, g6 or g7, because he would be putting himself in check.

**IV. Piece Movements Part II. The Bishop and The Queen**

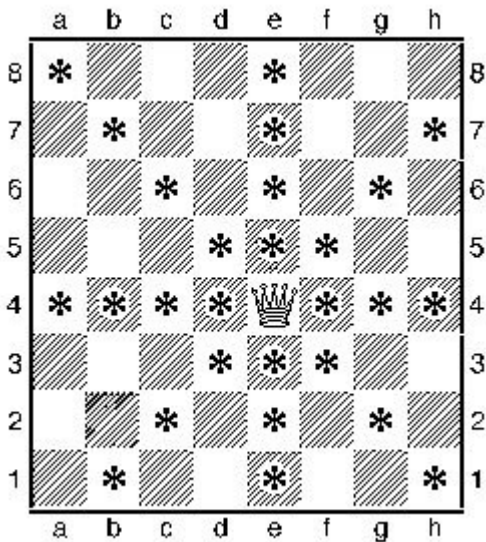
**The bishop** moves diagonally as many squares as it wants. Bishops remain on the same color all game. Explaining his divorce, World Champion Boris Spassky's said, "We were like bishops of opposite colors." An apt analogy: Bishops of the opposite color

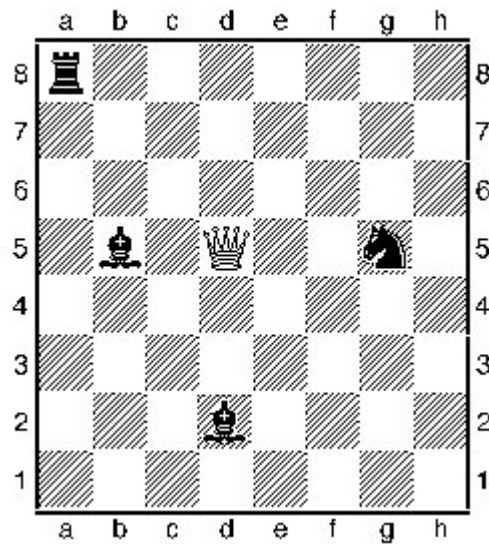


live on the same board but never, ever have contact.

The bishop on e4 can never have a rendezvous with the one on e5.

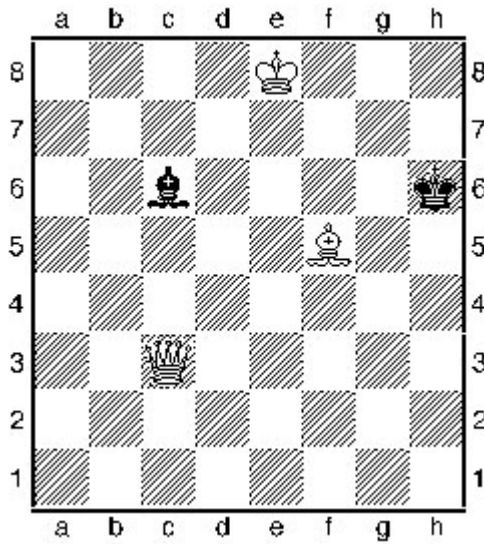
**The queen** is the most powerful piece on the board. She moves like the rook and bishop combined: diagonally, horizontally and laterally as many squares as she wants. Like the rook and bishop, she captures in the same way that she moves.





The queen can move to any of the starred squares.

The queen can capture any of the Black pieces with her next move.



Let's review check with the bishop and queen.

The Black bishop is checking the White king. White can use any of the three methods to get out of check:

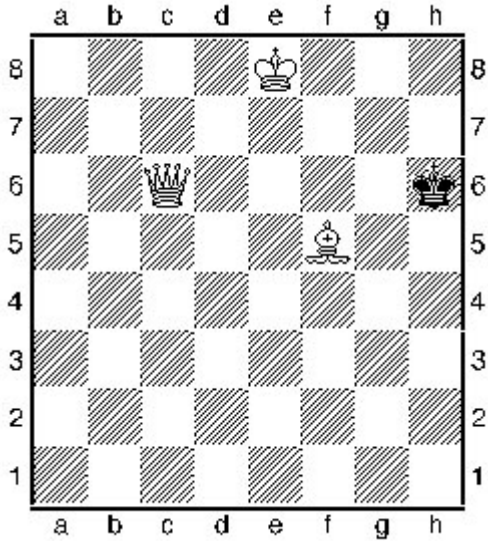
**Fleeing** with the king, to f8, d8, e7 or f7.

**Blocking** with the White bishop, by moving to d7.

Using the queen to **capture** the bishop on f3.

Let's say White is hungry and goes for the third choice.

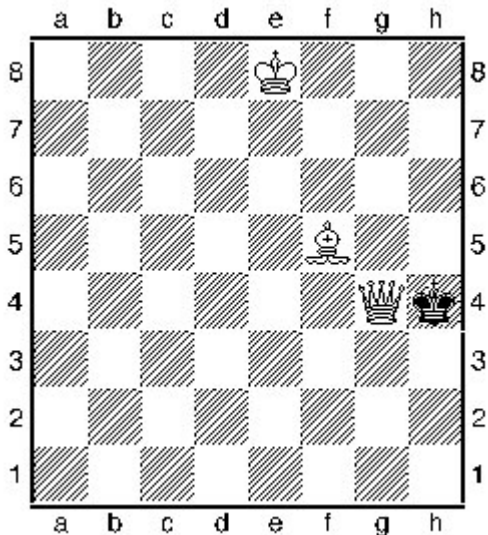
Now we have this position:



Black can only flee here. His three choices are to flee to g7, g5 or h5.

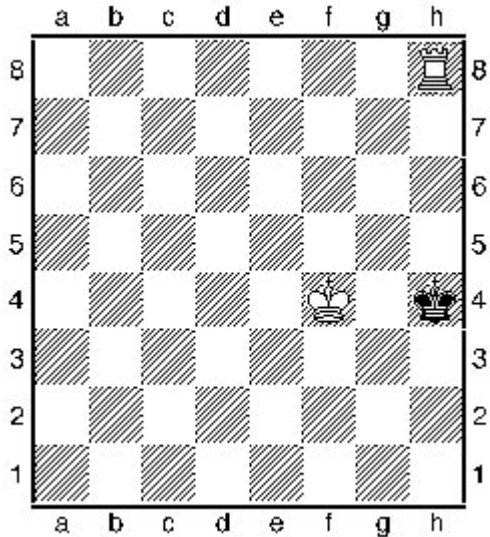
### Checkmate-

Checkmate is when a king has no way to escape from a check. (There are no squares to flee to, no way to block or capture the checking piece.) Checkmate is the goal of chess and ends the game. Many chess lovers are drawn to the game by checkmate- it's a clear competitive purpose and to many, aesthetically pleasing.





The Black king cannot capture the White queen, because the White bishop backs her up. The king cannot flee nor block.



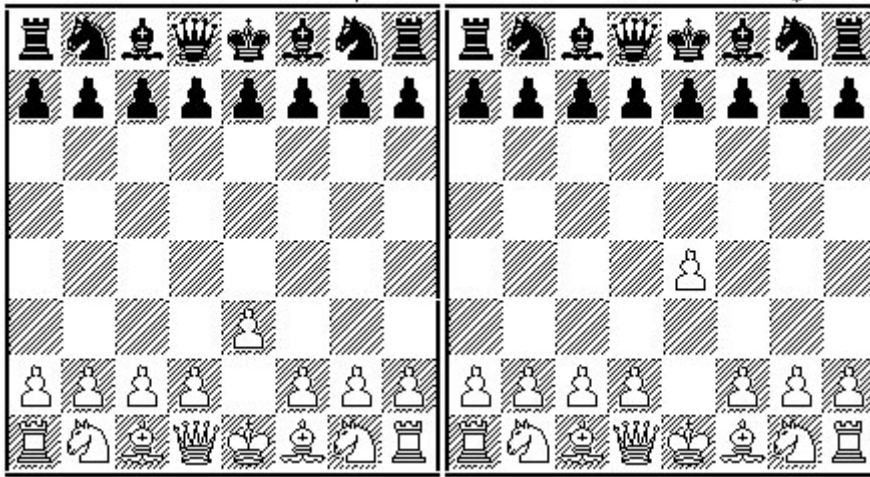
The Black king cannot escape from the rook check and move to g5,g3 or g4, because the White king is covering all those squares.

Question: What do checkmated kings in diagram 1 +2 have in common?

## V. Piece Movements Part 3 The Pawn and the Knight

**The pawn** is the weakest piece on the board, but don't underestimate their importance. Philidor, the 18th century French chess champion, called pawns the "soul of chess."

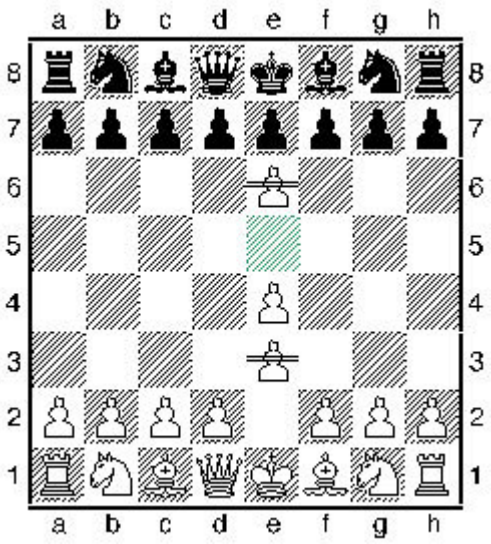
Learning the pawn's move is tricky. The pawn is the only piece on the board that does not move backward. A decision to barge ahead with a pawn is final, which is why such precision is required with pawns. On their first move, the pawns can move forward **one or two squares**. Think of the two square push as the pawn's morning cup! After each pawn has moved, it can only move one square forward at a time.



Either e3 or e4, the morning coffee jump is allowed!

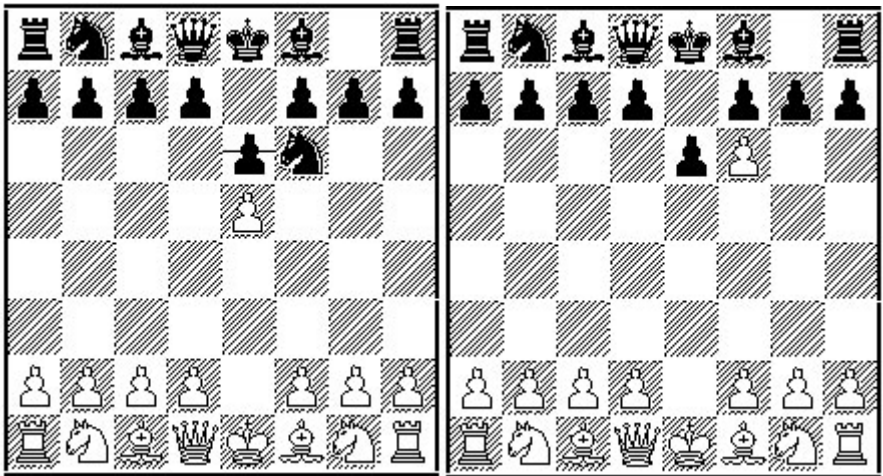
Tip: Most top players serve their pawns morning coffee.

Once the pawn has already moved, it cannot move two squares.



The e4 pawn may move to the green square e5 but it cannot have another cup of coffee and move to e6, nor can it move backwards, to e3.

**The pawn captures diagonally only. The pawn is the only piece that does not capture in the same way that it moves.**

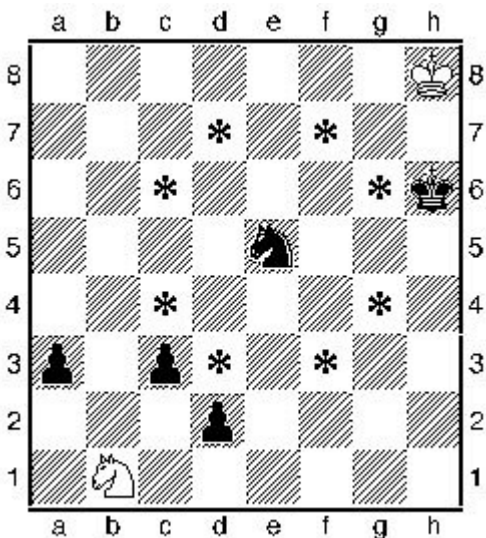


In Diagram 1, the pawn on e5 can capture the knight on f6. The pawn cannot capture the pawn on e6.

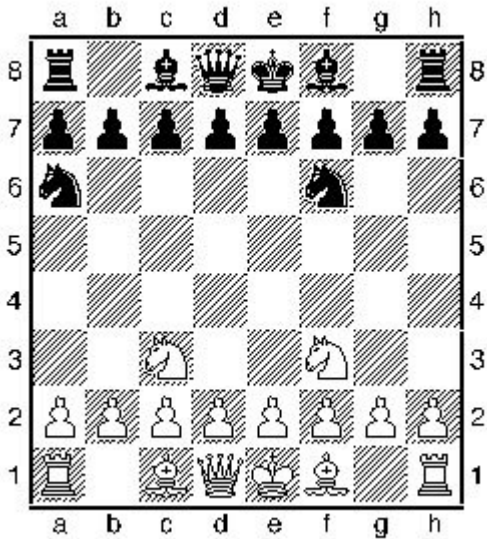
Diagram 2 shows the position after the pawn captures the knight. Now Black can take the f6 pawn with his g7 pawn.

**The knight** is the trickiest piece to learn. Newcomers to chess often find the knight so hard to remember that they keep the knights in the back row. Such a scorned knight feels sad and depressed. Don't let it happen to yours, because knights are the most special piece in chess. Author-philosophy-grandmaster Jonathan Rowson writes: "They are the curvy pieces that bring a circular aspect to an essentially linear game."

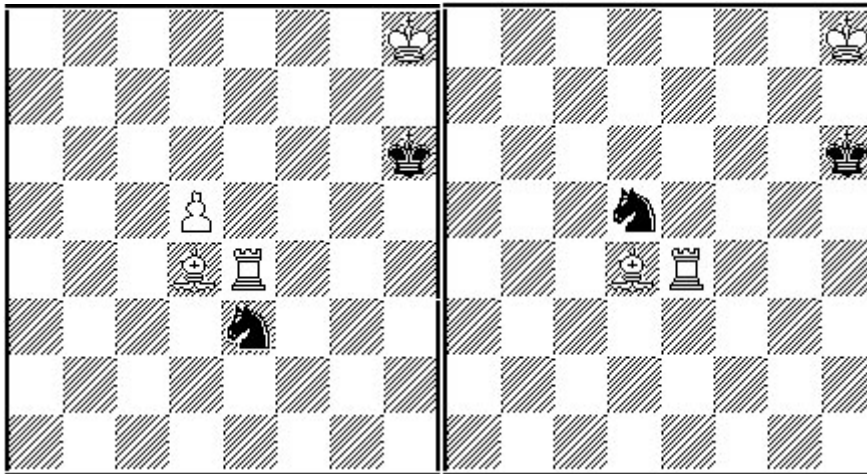
The knight moves two squares one way, and then one square the other, in the shape of an L. The knight captures in the same way as it moves.



The Black knight can go to any of the starred squares. The White knight can capture any of the three Black pawns. Notice that knights always switch the color of square they rest on- they're on a constant rotation between day and night shifts. **Knights are the only piece that can jump over other pieces.** However, they do not capture any pieces that they jump over.



At the start of a chess game, the knights can jump out immediately over his own pawns, like in the diagram above. All the other pieces must wait for the pawns to free up space for them to move along diagonals, files and ranks.

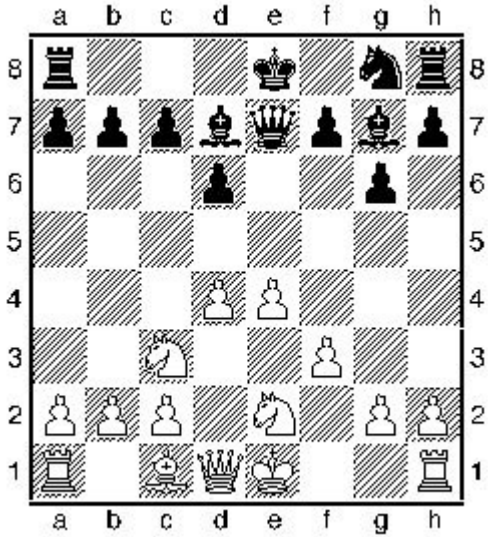


The knight in Diagram 1 can jump over the rook and bishop to capture the pawn on d5. The only piece the knight takes in the process is the d5 pawn (Diagram 2), which was on its destination square.

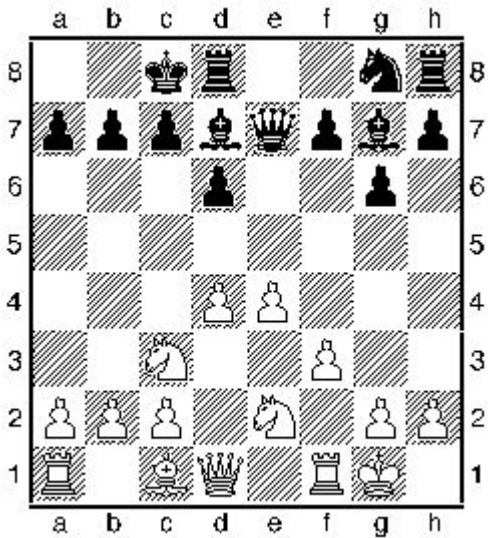
**Part VI: Special Moves- Castling, Pawn Promotion and En Passant.**

**Castling** is a special move using one rook and the king.

Castling is the only time in chess in which you can move two pieces at once. There are two varieties, queenside and kingside.



In this diagram, both White and Black can castle to reach the position below.



White castled kingside and Black castled queenside. Remember that the King always moves two squares when castling. Many players forget this and move the king an extra square (to b8) when castling queenside.

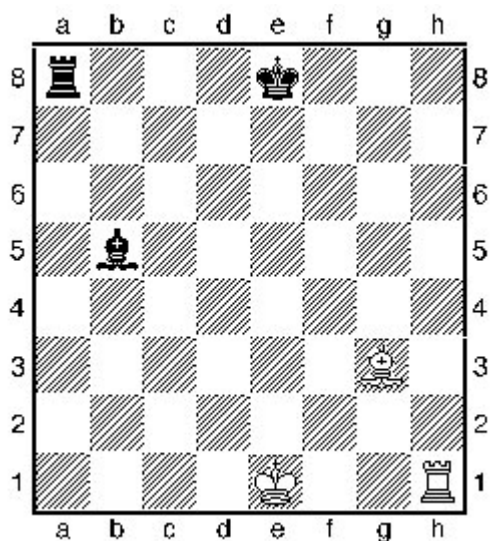
**TIP: Top players castle nearly every game. It makes the king safer, and also gets the powerful rook out of the corner.**

**Is Castling allowed?**

You can only castle, if all of the following are true

- #1- Your king has not moved yet
- #2- The rook you want to castle with has not moved yet
- #3- There are no pieces between the rook and the king
- #4- You are not being checked. (You can't castle out of check!)
- #5- The process of castling will not put or land the king in check.

Rule 5 is the trickiest: Even masters have asked questions about whether or not a king is moving through check while castling.



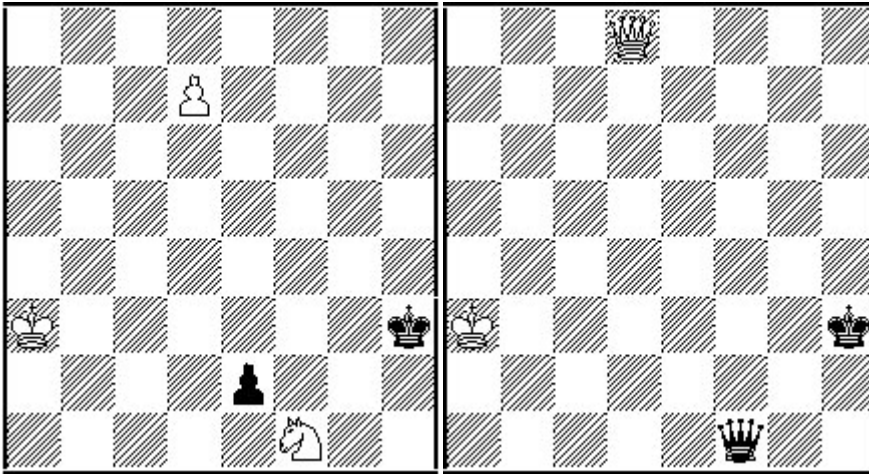
Even if White has met the conditions of the first four rules, he cannot castle in the positive above, because on his way to g1, the bishop on b5 would check the king.

Black on the other hand, is free to castle. The bishop on g3 hits b8, but the Black king does not have to go through this square to castle.

### Special move #2- Pawn Promotion

Pawns cannot move backwards, so you might wonder what happens when they reach the last rank.

They turn into any piece that you want, except the king. 99% of the time, players choose the most powerful piece on the board, the queen. For this reason, “queening” is just as popular a phrase as “promoting.”

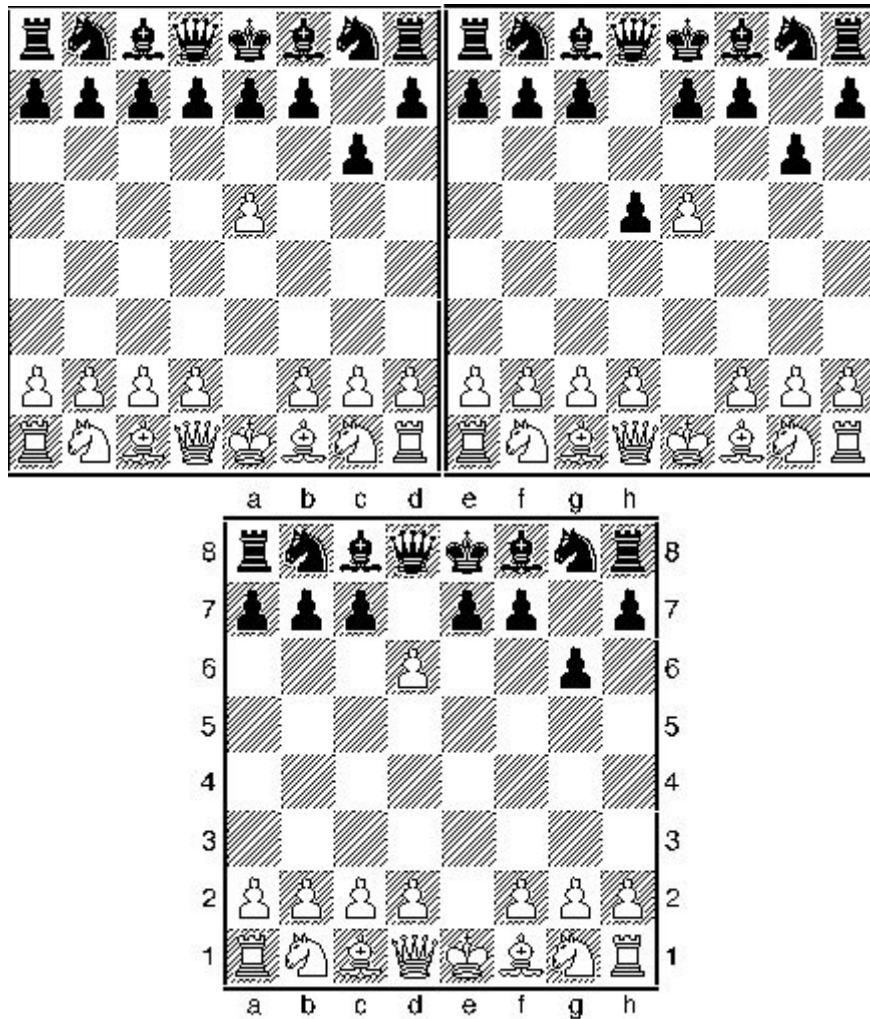


In Diagram 1, both players can promote to make a queen in Diagram 2. White can promote by playing d8=Q. The Black pawn on e2 can capture the knight on f1, or advance to e1, in both cases making a queen.

You can promote to a queen even if you already have a queen. Some high-end chess sets even come with an extra queen.

### **Special Move #3- En Passant**

**En passant** is French for “in passing”. This rule can only be used in a very specific situation.



If a pawn has reached the fifth rank as in diagram 1, (or the fourth rank for Black) and a neighbor enemy pawn takes a morning coffee jump (in diagram 2), the White pawn can capture the zealous enemy pawn (diagram 3) as if it had only moved one square.

### Part VII.- Scoring and Drawing.

#### What's a chess point?

In competitive chess every game is worth one point. Checkmate is one way to win the whole point, but you can also win if your opponent resigns or runs out of time.

#### Draws

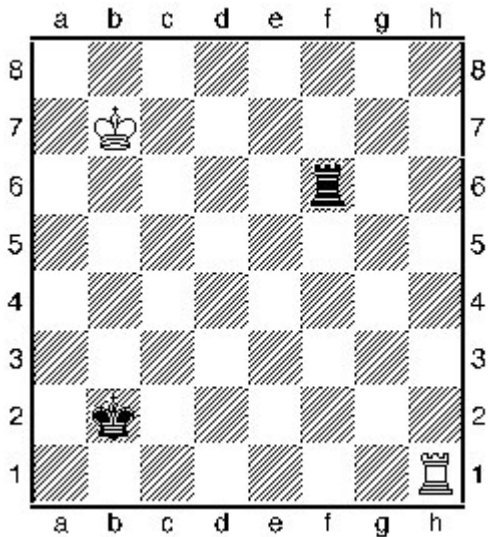
A game can also end in a draw. Nobody wins or loses, and each player gets 1/2 a point. There are many paths that end in a draw.

1. Agreement- both players agree that the game is likely to be a draw.
2. Insufficient mating material. (Don't ever use this phrase on a date!)
3. Stalemate
4. Three move repetition
5. Both players run out of time
6. 50 Move rule

Let's look at examples of each.

#### Draw #1- Agreement

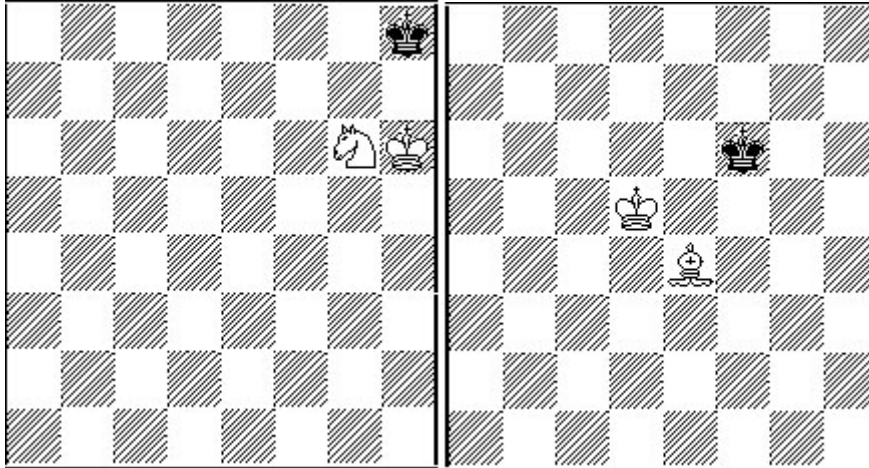




Each side has a rook and a king. This is a perfect example of what's known in competitive chess circles as a "dead draw". If both players are confident that their opponents will not give up their rook, they'll agree and shake hands immediately.

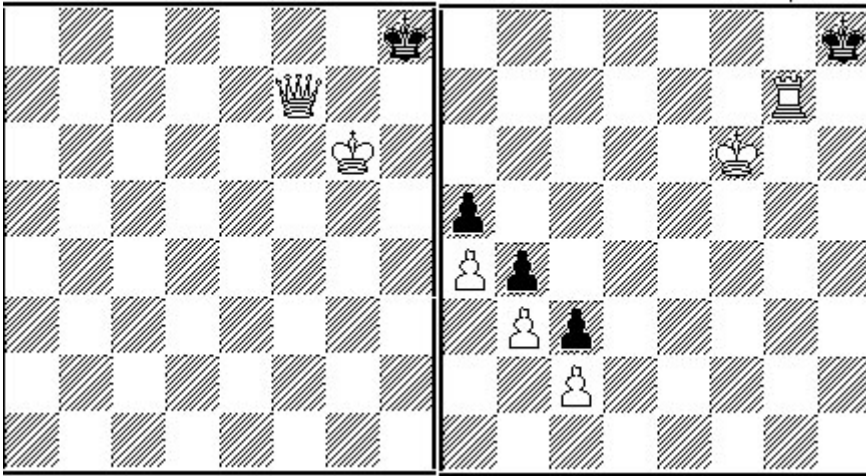
**Draw #2-Insufficient Mating Material-**

A knight and a king or a bishop and a king are unable to checkmate a lone enemy king.



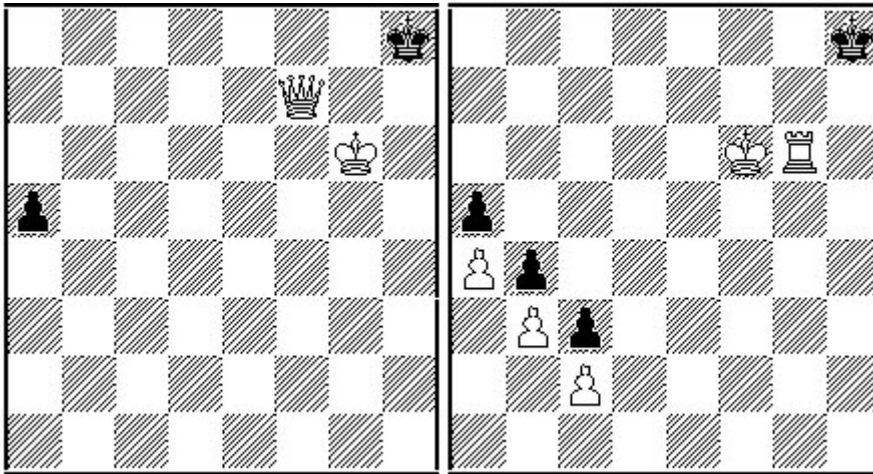
Even after hours of play, the knight in Diagram 1 or the bishop in Diagram 2 will never mate the Black king. In either position, Black can claim a draw by insufficient mating material. Queens and rooks however, can mate a lone king. If there is a pawn on the board, you cannot claim insufficient mating material because that pawn can transform into a queen or a rook.

**Draw #3- Stalemate** is a very important rule. If an opponent cannot move any of his pieces, including the king, the position is a stalemate and is scored as a draw.



Both positions are stalemate because Black has no legal moves. Notice that in Diagram 2 Black has several pawns, but it's still stalemate because he cannot move any of them. Who do you think is happy in each position?

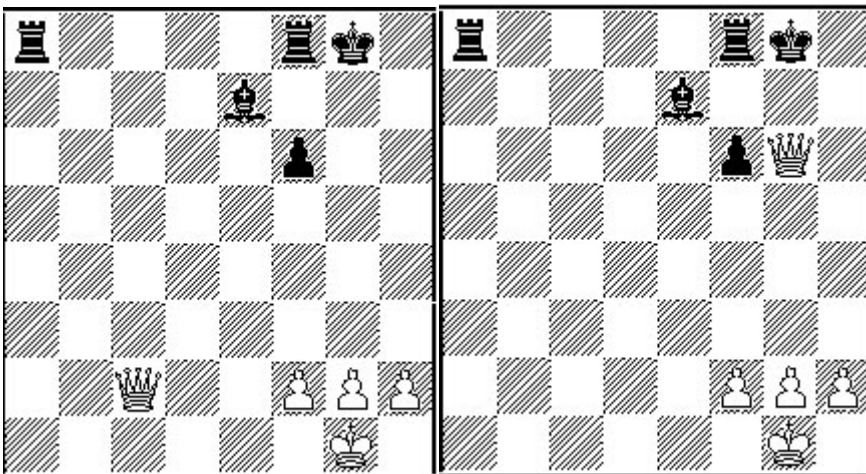
These positions are **not stalemate**:

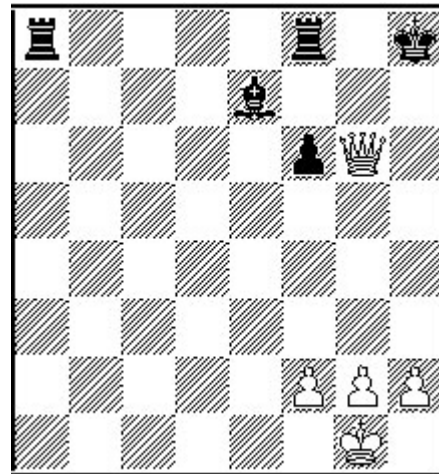


In Diagram 1, Black can move the pawn on a5. In Diagram 2, Black can move the king to h7.

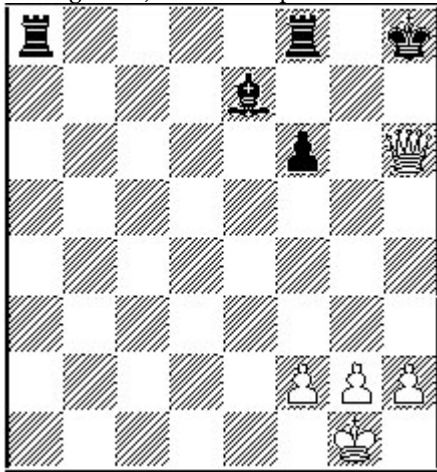
**Draw #4- Repetition of Position-**

When a chess position is repeated three times, either player can claim a draw by repetition. The most common way to achieve three-move repetition is via perpetual check, as in the example below.





In Diagram 2, The White queen lands on g6, delivering check to the g8 king.



The Black king escapes to the only possible square-h8, and the White queen checks again on h6. The king moves back to g8, and White checks again on g6 forcing Black to return to h8. After three times, either player may claim a three-move repetition.

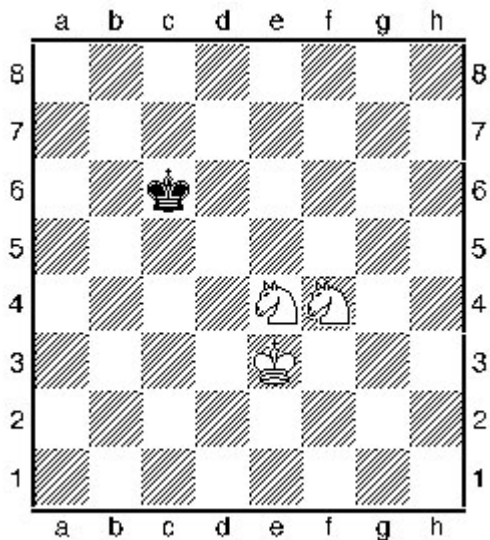
**Draw #5- Double Time Forfeit**

If both players run out of time, it's a draw. If both players have run out of time, but there's checkmate on the board, the checkmated player wins the game. Position takes precedence over the clock.

**Draw #6- 50 Move Rule-**

If no pawns or pieces have been traded for more than 50 moves, a game is determined to be a draw. This rule requires that the player who makes the claim write down his moves.

For instance, in this position:

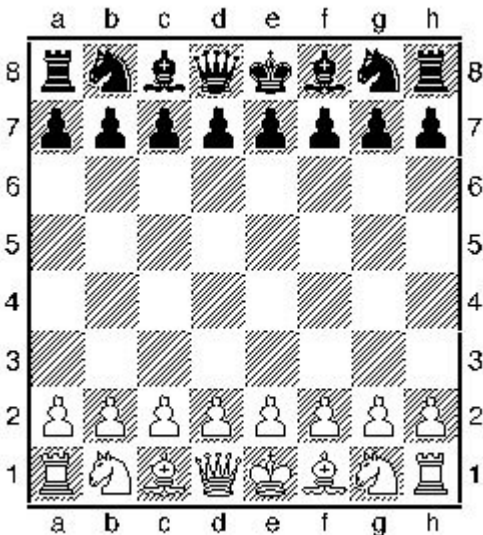


White has two knights, and has been hopping around for hours, unable to checkmate you. If you'd been recording the moves, you can claim a draw after 50 moves.

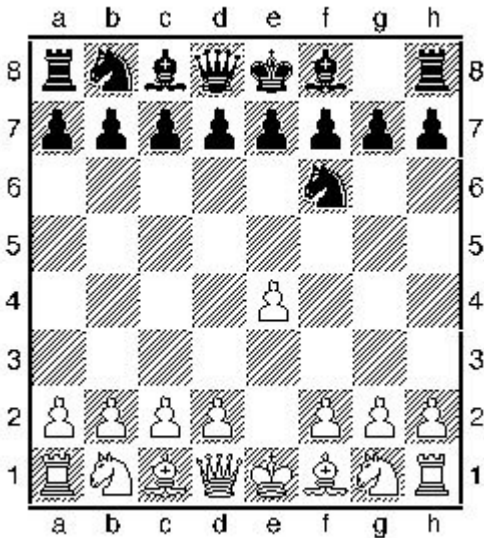
**Chess Notation:**

When you become a member of the USCF, you'll see that a lot of thrilling chess games and stories are filled with chess notation. You also are required to take notation in most official chess tournaments, so it's great to get a firm handle on it as you start to play. Impress your friends by telling them that you're learning an ancient language called Aracaissaic. The pieces are abbreviated to the following letters:

- King- K**
- Queen-Q**
- Rook- R**
- Bishop- B**
- Knight- N**



To record a move, you simply use the symbol of the piece followed by the square that it moves to. The pawn has no symbol. To record the move of a pawn, you write the square it moves to. Because every other piece has a symbol, everyone will know you mean the pawn. For instance, the most popular first move (played in the diagram below) is recorded as e4.



Black's response is called the Alekhine Opening, named after the former world champion. It is recorded as Nf6.

### Other symbols

- Castling- o-o
- Queenside castling- o-o-o
- Capture- x (i.e. BxNf6 means bishop captures knight on f6)
- Check- +
- Checkmate- ++ OR #
- White wins- 1-0
- Black wins- 0-1
- d pawn promotes to a queen- d8=Q
- Good move- !
- Bad move- ?
- Brilliant, soul searing move- !!
- Blunder- ??
- Interesting move !?
- Dubious move ?!

### Part VIII-Tournament Rules

Chess tournaments are formal chess competitions, and naturally there are more stringent rules in tournaments than in a casual café game. If you're thinking of playing in tournaments you might want to follow most of these rules even in casual play, to practice for the real thing.

#### 1. The clock

All serious tournament chess games are played with double plated clocks. Player A, with the Black pieces begins a game by shaking hands with his opponent and pressing his clock button down, thus starting Player B's clock. When Player B, playing with White, moves, she hits her clock button and Player A's time starts running. This goes on throughout the game. Only one side of the clock ticks at a time.

There are two types of clocks, digital and analog. Normally, the player who has the Black pieces chooses equipment. However, digital clocks are easier for tournament directors and players to read, so they are now favored. If either player has one, he or she can insist on using it.

#### 1b. Time-control

Before the game, the clock is set to a pre-determined time limit. The most popular time control in the United States gives each player two hours for the first 40 moves. If your opponent spends more than 2 hours for his first 40 moves, you win. However, you must keep score to claim a win by time in a non-sudden death time control.

After 40 moves, each player gets an extra hour. The extra-hour time control is a sudden death control. There are no chances to get any more time. The popular U.S. time control I just described is recorded: "40/2 SD/1"(40 moves in 2 hours, Sudden Death in one hour.)

Many tournaments have only one sudden death time control. SD/30, SD/60 and SD/90 are popular time controls where the double-digit numbers are minutes. Occasionally, there are tournaments with three time controls. Always make sure you know and understand the time control before the tournament.

If you are using a digital clock, you can set it with time-delay. Time delay gives each player 5 seconds before his or her clock

starts running. To balance this, a few minutes are subtracted from the first time control. This results in fewer mad scrambles at the end of games, once again making it easier for both T.Ds and players. (But not for drama queens!)

### **1c. Winning on time-**

A player wins on time when his or her opponent flag falls, or if using a digital clock, when the clock reads zero or -1. However, the winning player must claim this victory before his own flag falls or he is checkmated. In the first case, the game is determined a draw. In the second case, checkmate overrules the fallen flag and the checkmater wins.

Remember: A spectator or a T.D is not allowed to call the flag. (This confuses many foreign opponents, because in the official rules of FIDE, the international chess federation, a T.D is permitted to call "time.")

**2. Touch move-** If you touch a piece, you must move it. If the piece has no legal moves, there is no penalty for touching it. If you touch an opponent's piece, you must capture it if possible. When castling, you must touch your king first. If you touch the rook first, you have to move the rook.

If your opponent touches a piece and doesn't move it, you should stop the clock and call a Tournament Director to the scene of the crime. If there were no witnesses and your opponent is a halfway decent liar, you're probably out of luck. If you touched a piece, be a good sport and follow the rules! Your integrity is worth more than a bad move. Back when Bobby Fischer was a decent guy, he was accidentally fiddling with a pawn in a simultaneous exhibition (in these "simuls", a GM plays many opponents at once). He realized it was his own pawn from one of the games! In a simul, he would have been within his rights to excuse himself and move another piece. But Bobby refused to compromise the rules, and made a terrible move with pawn, eventually losing the game.

### **3. Claiming draws**

**3a. 50 move rule** starts when the last trade or pawn move occurred. If after that pawn move or trade, the winning side cannot achieve checkmate, or initiate another trade or pawn move, the game is considered a draw. The winning side has not proved that he can make progress. You can only claim the 50 move rule if you have an accurate score-sheet or if a Tournament Director is watching and recording the game. If any pawn moves, you must restart the count at zero.

**3b. Three-fold repetition** is when a position occurs three times in the same game. The repetition does not have to be consecutive. The draw should be claimed by the player who wants a draw, before making her move. The player should stop the clock, call the T.D over and inform him that the move she is about to make will result in a three-time repetition. Most of the time, players agree to a draw in anticipation of three-fold repetition without the help of a T.D.

### **3c. Insufficient mating material**

Call a tournament director over before or after your flag falls to claim this draw. If a player wins on time, but has insufficient mating material, the game will be recorded as a draw.

### **3d. Insufficient winning chances**

When a player is low on time, but has a completely winning game, she can try to claim a draw by asserting that her opponent has insufficient winning chances. Nowadays, most Tournament Directors refrain from making such high stake decisions and instead give the players a digital clock and allow them to decide the result by using an increment or time-delay, usually five seconds. As long as the player completes each move within five seconds, she can't lose on time. The player who wanted a draw because she was low on time can win if her opponent refuses the draw and insists on playing it out with the digital clock.

**4. Cheating** is absolutely forbidden in chess. You can lose your USCF membership for life if caught cheating. During a tournament game it is forbidden to read opening books, consult with friends, lose on purpose to distort the results, or run back to your room to analyze with your chess computer. Most U.S tournaments have so many participants that the honor system is partially in place. Players chat between games regularly, but usually they are talking about neutral topics. If you suspect your opponent is cheating, immediately inform a Tournament director. Complaining to T.Ds after the game rarely works.

**5. Cell phones** are just one of many disturbances in a modern chess hall. Because they are so omnipresent, penalties for keeping your cell phone on are extremely harsh. In some tournaments, you lose the game immediately. In most USCF tournaments, you lose a chunk of time for the first infraction, and the game for a second. Spectators cannot be penalized for using cell phones, though they might be kicked out of the tournament hall for repeated infractions. These are just the most important tournament rules. If you want to have everything in writing or are interesting in organizing a tournament of your own, you should definitely check out the 416-page book, the U.S. Chess Federation's Official Rules of Chess. Also be sure to read starting out [F.A.Q.](#), the Tournaments FAQ and the [glossary](#) of chess terms. Maybe you will discover a question you didn't even know you had!

Learning and remembering the rules of chess only takes a weekend, but the road to mastery is endless. If you're looking to improve your game, be sure to check out Basic Tips, [Chess Life Online](#), [Chess Life magazine](#) and the [USCF puzzle collection](#). But most important of all is practice. Whether it's enrolling in an official tournament, playing with your work buddies at lunch or an excuse to call up that attractive friend, break out the pieces and PLAY!