

46 CHESS TIPS

The suggestions below are for players who know the legal moves but want to improve their chess strategy. There will be times when you may not be able to follow these suggestions, or where you have a good move which may violate one of them. But generally speaking, the closer you stick to these rules, the better your game will be.

THE OPENING

1. Control the center! If you can keep your opponent from attacking you from the center, it will be much harder for him. Attacking from the sides (flanks) is harder and takes more time. Also, your pieces normally attack more squares when they are located in the center, and are positioned to attack either side.
2. Put one or two Pawns in the center within your first few moves. The most common and safe openings are to move your King's or Queen's Pawn two squares. If you can move them both, and they are both safe, you will have a big advantage!
3. "Develop" your pieces quickly and well. This means to bring out your back rank pieces early in the game into good attacking positions. The player whose pieces are ready for action sooner will be able to control the course of the game.
4. Develop pieces by attacking whenever possible. This often makes your opponent waste a move by moving or defending an attacked piece.
5. Don't bring out the other Pawns early, except for good reason. They control space but don't have much power. Be especially careful with your "f" Pawn. If you move it before you castle, you can end up in early checkmate. For example: 1. f4 e6 2. g4 Qh4++
6. "Knights before Bishops": Bring out your Knights first, toward the center (to c3, f3, c6, or f6) whenever possible. They are more effective in the center, controlling space and able to support center Pawns. Keep your knights away from the edges and corners of the board ("Knights on the rim are grim!").
7. Then bring out Bishops, to the 5th or 6th rank when possible.
8. Castle early. This not only protects your King, but also helps to develop one of your Rooks. It is the only chance you have to move two pieces at once. King-side castling is easier (only two pieces need to be moved first) and is considered slightly better because the King is further from the center of the board and is less exposed.
9. Try to prevent your opponent from castling. You can do this sometimes by putting the King in check if your opponent has no blocking moves. You can also do this by trading Queens early, forcing your opponent to use his King to re-capture (for example: 1. e4 e5 2. d4 d5 3. dxe dxe 4. Qxd8) Or try to create a "check line" (which your opponent cannot cross in castling).
10. After castling, wait as long as possible before moving the Pawns shielding your King. They are his bodyguards and protect him. But if pressure begins to build, you may have to move a Pawn to create an escape route for your King. Try not to move your Bishop's Pawn, as this opens the King to attacks from the center.

11. Do not move your Queen out too early! It is too easy to attack with less valuable pieces. You will generally waste time, and sometimes lose your Queen. No Queen adventures! eg:

e4 e5
Qg4 Nf6
Qf5 d5
Qf3 Bg4
Qb3

12. Don't block your own pieces during the opening. For example, don't move your King's or Queen's Pawns out one square if this will block the opposite Bishop from developing. (Bishops trapped by your own pieces are called "Bad Bishops.") Strong attacks are generally impossible from cramped positions.

13. During development, try to move each piece only once. It is normally better to get another piece out than to move a piece to a slightly better spot. Wait to move a piece a second time until other back rank pieces have been developed. Exceptions: Freebies (easy captures of opponent's pieces) or Survival (to avoid being captured)

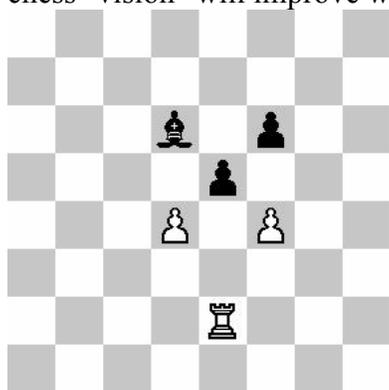
14. The opening is finished when you have one or two center pawns out, two or three minor pieces out, and you have castled.

THE MIDDLE GAME

1. Make the best possible move! Look carefully at a square to which you want to move to be sure the square is safe. This is the mistake most commonly made by beginners. Be especially careful to watch out for your opponent's Knights!

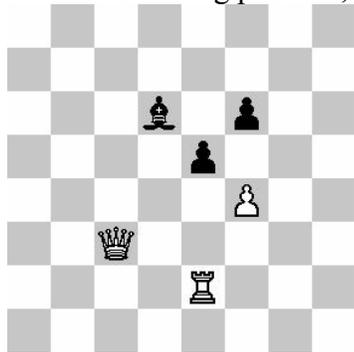
2. Learn to count. First, remember what the pieces are worth. Memorize this if you haven't yet. Otherwise you won't know when to trade pieces. Queen=9, Rook=5, Bishop=3, Knight=3, Pawn=1.

3. Learn to count, continued: If the piece you are moving can be captured after your move, can you capture the attacking piece afterwards? And if you do, will still another capture follow? Often pressure builds on a square and captures are followed by several re-captures. Figure out who will be ahead when the capturing is over. Your chess "vision" will improve with time. For example:



White should attack, because it wins the exchange (1. fxe fxe 2. dxe BxP 3. RxB)

But in the following position, although it is similar, white should NOT continue the attack



1. fxe fxe 2. either RxB or QxB loses

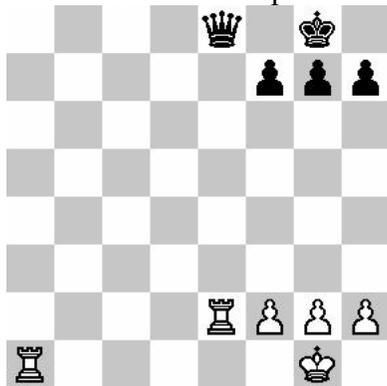
4. When two of your pieces are able to capture an opponent's piece, take with the piece of least value.
5. Move your Rooks out after some middle-game play. There is a good chance you will have an open file, where no pawn or piece is blocking the way. With an open file, rooks can develop much more quickly than by "going around the corner." But don't be in a hurry to bring them out.
6. Try to develop good position. Put your pieces on "active squares," where they have maximum attacking power. Are your pieces moving forward, in a position to help each other, but still protected? (Try to accumulate small advantages.) Try to increase the pressure against your opponent's pieces and King
7. Avoid moving too quickly. When you see a good move, wait. Look for a better one.
Questions you should ask before EVERY MOVE:
 - Why did my opponent move there? What is he/she trying to do?
 - Is one of my pieces in danger?
 - Are there any other threats I should look out for? (eg Mate)
 - Are any of my opponent's pieces in danger (i.e. do I have an easy capture?)
 - Are there any weaknesses in my opponent's position I can take advantage of? (especially two pieces on the same line)
 - When I move, will the piece I am moving be on a safe square? Will it be on a better square?
8. Do not put your opponent's King in check unless you have a good reason. Good reasons include achieving a better position for the attacking piece, or creating a double attack (attacking another piece while also putting your opponent's King in check).
9. Similarly, avoid useless attacks on other pieces. Don't do it unless there is a reason. If they can simply move out of the way (or, worse yet, move to a better square), what have you gained?
10. Fight for your Pawns. They can often make the difference in a close game. In the end-game, a one-Pawn advantage can be decisive.
11. Look to develop double attacks. Any time you can attack two pieces at once (including the King), you have a good chance of capturing one of them. Some examples follow:
12. Look for "pins." These occur where an opponent's piece cannot move because to do so would leave the King in check (an "absolute" pin) or leave another valuable piece open to attack (a "relative" pin). The pinned piece cannot be used by your opponent, and is often easy to attack.

13. Look for "forks" -- situations where your pieces can attack two of your opponent's pieces at the same time. One type of fork occurs when two of your opponent's pieces are on the same rank or file (where they can both be attacked by a Rook or Queen) or on the same diagonal (where they can both be attacked by a Bishop). Keep on the lookout for these patterns.

14. Look for "skewers." These are situations where you attack a King or a valuable piece of your opponent's, forcing it to move, and you then attack another piece behind it!

15. Build "batteries," in which two pieces are on the same line, with the rear piece supporting the attack of the forward piece.

16. Try to "connect" your Rooks, which means having them on the same rank or file. This may permit them to attack the King or Queen without risk of being taken, and positions them for decisive end-game attacks and sacrifices. For example:



If white moves Rae1, it both defends the rook on e2 and allows an attack on black's Queen.

17. Have a plan. For example, when you have developed well enough that you are prepared to begin an attack, decide whether to attack on the King's side or the Queen's side. Then position your pieces so that they are attacking the same side. Or, if you are ready to attack your opponent's King, plan to attack with more than one piece. (Attacking with one piece rarely works.)

18. Think about Pawn structure. For example, "Pawn islands" (consecutive Pawns on a diagonal) are stronger than Pawns in a horizontal line (on the same rank), and much better than doubled or tripled Pawns (on the same file). "Isolated" Pawns (unable to be defended by other pawns on either side) are easy for your opponent to pick off, so try to avoid getting them.

19. Know when to trade pieces. For example:

- a) Trade pieces of even value when you are ahead, not when you are behind.
- b) Trading a piece for a better piece generally makes sense.
- c) If you are even in material, an even trade may make sense if you have a badly-positioned piece (eg a trapped piece, a "bad" bishop, or doubled pawns) and your opponent's piece is putting pressure on you.

20. Concentrate and be alert! Don't fiddle with your pieces or let yourself be distracted by other activity in the room. Bobby Fischer said the biggest difference between him and his opponents was that he gave 90% of his attention to the game. He thought most players give as little as 30%.

21. Don't relax if you are ahead. With one careless move, you can lose the lead quickly.
22. If you are behind, don't give up! Keep making strong moves, and hope your opponent will give you an opportunity to catch up. (This happens often in games between beginners!) Where there's life, there's hope.

THE END-GAME

1. Try to force your opponent's King to the edge, or to a corner if possible. It is generally more difficult to mate the King if he is in the middle. Conversely, if you are losing, try to get your King to the center!
2. Try to promote one of your Pawns to another piece, generally a Queen. If you have a "passed" Pawn, who cannot be attacked by opposing Pawns on a file to his left or right, that is probably the one to try to promote.
3. Create an outlet for your King if he is at risk of being trapped, especially on the back rank.
4. Activate your King. His role changes entirely in the end game. Although he moves only one square at a time, he is often crucial to winning during the end-game, protecting advancing Pawns and other pieces.
5. If you are advancing a Pawn with your King next to it for protection, try to keep your King ahead of or even with the Pawn (not behind it).
6. Know how much strength is needed to get your opponent into checkmate. For example, if your opponent has only a King left, you can win easily with a King and a Queen or with a King and a Rook. You can also gain checkmate with a King and two Bishops, or with a King, a Bishop, and a Knight, but these games are very difficult. A King and two Knights is not enough to win unless your opponent makes a big mistake.
7. Try to reduce the number of squares your opponent's King can move to, to make mating easier. For example, try to put your opponent's King in a box, then make it smaller.
8. When Kings are facing each other with one square in between, this is called "having the opposition." The opposition is generally a good position to be in, as it creates a lot of blocking power against your opponent's King. So go for the opposition if you have a chance.
9. Avoid a stalemate if you are ahead, and try for stalemate if you are behind. Stalemate is very common among beginners where one side has overwhelming strength at the end of the game. It occurs frequently, too, where one side has only a King and the other side has a King and a Queen. Practice getting your opponent into checkmate -- not stalemate! -- with a King and a Queen.
10. Learn and practice common mating combinations. For example:
 - a. Queen next to the King in a protected spot (Supported Mate)
 - b. Trapping the King on the back rank (Corridor Mate)
 - c. Two Rooks versus King (rolling the King back)
 - d. King & Queen versus King
 - e. King & Rook versus King (careful to keep your pieces together)
 - f. King & Pawn versus King (tricky)