Getting Better

“Let’s Play Chess” includes all the basic rules and pointers you will need to get started on a lifetime of chess fun. You will be ready to find chess partners among the millions of chess enthusiasts around the world.

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Let’s Play Chess

Chess is a game for two players, one with the “White” pieces and one with the “Black” pieces. At the beginning of the game, the pieces are set up as pictured at right. (See diagrams below to identify pieces.) These hints will help you to remember the proper board setup:

1. Opposing Kings and Queens go directly opposite each other.
2. The square in the lower right hand corner is a light one ("light on right").
3. The White Queen goes on a light square, the Black Queen on a dark square ("Queen on her own color").

The Pieces and How They Move

White always moves first, and then the players take turns moving. Only one piece may be moved at each turn (except for casting, a special move that is explained later). The Knight is the only piece that can jump over other pieces. All other pieces move along unblocked lines. You may not move a piece to a square already occupied by one of your own pieces. But you can capture an opponent’s piece that stands on a square where one of your pieces can move. Simply remove the opponent’s piece from the board and put your own piece in its place.

The King

The King is the most important piece. When he is trapped, his whole army loses. The King can move one square in any direction — for example, to any of the squares with dots in this diagram. (An exception is casting, which is explained later.) The King may never move into check — that is, onto a square that is attacked by an opponent’s piece.

The Queen

The Queen is the most powerful piece. She can move any number of squares in any direction — horizontal, vertical, or diagonal — if her path is not blocked. She can reach any of the squares with dots in this diagram.

The Rook

The Rook is the next most powerful piece. The Rook can move any number of squares vertically or horizontally if its path is not blocked.
Special Moves

CASTLING

Each player may castle only once during a game and when certain conditions are not. Castling is a special move that lets a player move two pieces at once — the King and one Rook. In castling, the player moves his King two squares to its left or right toward one of his Rooks. At the same time, the Rook involved goes to the square beside the King and toward the center of the board (see illustrations at left).

In order to castle, neither the King nor the Rook involved may have moved before. Also, the King may not castle out of check, into check, or through check. Further, there may not be pieces of either color between the King and the Rook involved in castling.

Castling is often a very important move because it allows you to place your King in a safe location and also allows the Rook to become more active.

When the move is legal, each player has the choice of castling kingside or queenside or not at all, no matter what the other player chooses to do.

EN PASSANT

This French phrase is used for a special pawn capture. It means “in passing,” and it occurs when one player moves a pawn two squares forward to try to avoid capture by the opponent’s pawn. The capture is made exactly as if the player had moved the pawn only one square forward.

In the diagram, one of the Black pawns moves up two squares to the same square as the White pawn. On its turn, the White pawn may capture the Black pawn that just moved on the square marked with the X. If the White player does not exercise this option immediately — before playing some other move — the Black pawn is safe from en passant capture for the rest of the game. But new opportunities may arise for each pawn in similar circumstances.

About Check and Checkmate

The main goal of chess is to checkmate your opponent’s King. The King is not actually captured and removed from the board like other pieces. But if the King is attacked (“checked”) and threatened with capture, it must get out of check immediately. If there is no way to get out of check, the position is a “checkmate,” and the side that is checkmated loses.

You may not move into check. For example, moving into a direct line with your opponent’s Rook if there are no other pieces between the Rook and your King is an illegal move. Otherwise, the Rook could “capture” the King, which is not allowed.

If you are in check, there are three ways of getting out:
1. Capturing the attacking piece;
2. Placing one of your own pieces between the attacker and your King (unless the attacker is a Knight or a Pawn);
3. Moving the King away from the attack. If a checked player can do none of these, he is checkmated and loses the game.

If a King is not in check, but that player is on move and can make no legal move, the position is called a stalemated and the game is scored as a draw, or tie.