

HOW TO BE A GREAT CHESS TOURNAMENT PLAYER

🏆 "Play Smart. Play Fair. Have Fun!"

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Understanding the Rules



Learn and Remember the Basics

- Every piece moves in a special way. Practice until you're confident with how each one moves.
- Remember check, checkmate, and stalemate may be said but is not required to be said. When beginning to play tournaments, you should alert the opponents in a soft, low voice.
- Learn and understand "en passant". It may be used in every game.
- Know when a draw can happen (stalemate, repetition, insufficient material, 50-move rule).



Tournament Rules are Stricter

- ALL cellphones, tablets, and smart watches must be turned off. NO ELECTRONIC DEVICES is a rule at ALL official tournaments.
- Use the same hand to move and press the clock. You can decide if it's your left hand or your right hand, but you may not use both during a single move.
- Once you let go of a piece, the move is final.
- If you touch a piece, you must move it (if it's legal). If you touch an opponent's piece, you must capture it (if it's legal).
- Think before moving a piece. Know where it starts and where it's going before touching it. Don't pick up a piece and hold it in the air trying to decide where it will move.
- To fix pieces on the board that may be off-center in a square, say "Adjust" before touching the piece.
- Do not move your piece until your opponent has pressed the clock. You may NEVER press your opponent's clock even if they forget. You may point to the clock to remind them to press their clock.
- Avoid illegal moves. You may have a penalty if you make too many illegal moves. Penalties may range from just a warning to losing time to even forfeiting a game.
- Do not talk during the game to your opponents, to friends or other players, or to parents. Don't suggest moves to your opponent.



Tip: Practice "touch-move" and "Clock use", and "Notation" at home so they become a habit.



Using the Chess Clock



Why Clocks Matter

- Each player has a set amount of time for the whole game.
- The correct order of things: (1) Move your piece. Promote the piece in the case of

promotion. (2) Press Clock (3) Notate. Do not press the clock before moving.

- You may go to the bathroom anytime but may not pause or stop the clock. When you return, your clock may be counting down if your opponent moved. You may ask your opponent where they moved. Be sure to notate the move before you move.
- If your time runs out, you lose—even if you're winning on the board! EXCEPTION: You have only a King or King/Knight or King/Bishop remaining. That is insufficient material to win so you will have a Draw if your opponent runs out of time. If you have enough pieces to win and you run out of time, you lose.



Your Responsibilities

- Press your side of the clock after each move. NEVER press your opponent's side.
- Don't slam it—be respectful and press your clock softly.
- Watch your time carefully, but don't worry. In kids tournaments, you have plenty of time.



Writing Chess Notation



Why Notation is Important

- It's required in most tournaments.
- Helps you learn from your games afterward.
- Useful if there's a dispute or if you want to show your coach.
- Notation sheet will be used to fix a "messed up" board.



How to Do It examples

- Each square has a letter (a-h) and number (1-8).
- Write the piece and square. Examples:
 - e4 = pawn to e4 g3= pawn to g3
 - Nf3 = knight to f3
 - Kf3 - King to f3
 - Qh5 = queen to h5



How to Do It - more examples

- If you capture a piece, write "x" (exd5 means pawn on the "e file" captures the piece on d5 and Qxa6 means Queen captures piece on a6).
- If you Castle, write O-O on the shorter side or O-O-O on the longer side
- If you give check, write "+" (example: Qh1+ means Queen moved to H1 and placed the King in check)

✓ Tip: Write your move right after you play it and after you press your clock not later. Write your opponent's move before you move.

✓ Note: If either you or your opponent have less than 5 minutes remaining, BOTH of you MAY stop notation. There are exceptions to this note so please ask a Tournament Director (TD).

📖 Strategy and Planning

🌱 Think Before You Move

- Don't play the first move you see—look for better ones.
- Ask yourself:
 - "What is my opponent trying to do? How will my opponent move if I make this move?"
 - "What is my plan? What is my opponent's plan?"

🕒 Basic Strategy Ideas

- Control the center (e4, d4, e5, d5).
- Learn to defend against Scholar's Mate so that you cannot lose to it.
- Develop all your pieces early.
- Castle to keep your king safe.
- Don't move the same piece too many times in the opening.
- Avoid unnecessary pawn moves early.

🎯 Plan, Don't Just React

- Every move should help your short-term or long-term plan.
- If you don't see a good attack, improve your worst piece.

🤝 Good Sportsmanship

👤 Before the Game

- Shake hands or say "Good luck!" politely.
- Sit quietly and focus.

👑 During the Game

- Don't distract your opponent (no talking, tapping, singing, dancing, or sighing).
- Do not play with pieces you've captured. Leave captured pieces alone on the table.
- Do not doodle or take notes other than writing moves. Do not play with the pencil.
- Be patient if they take a while—they have the right to use their time.
- Keep emotions in check—even when you blunder or win big.
- Do not stall.

After the Game

- Shake hands or "fist-bump" and say "Good game" or "Thank you for the game" whether you win or lose.
- Don't brag if you win. Don't make excuses if you lose. Empathize with your opponent.
- Congratulate your opponent if you lose just as you'd want to be congratulated if you win.
- Take your scoresheet and replay the game at home or with your coach to learn how you could have played differently and possibly better.

Patience and Empathy

Be Patient

- Some players think longer. That's OK. Are you playing too fast?
- Rushing them or showing frustration is disrespectful. You may stand up. In most kids tournaments, you may not watch other games in progress.

Empathize with the Loser

- Losing can feel disappointing.
- Imagine how you would feel in their shoes.
- A kind word goes a long way:
 - "You played well."
 - "That was a fun game."
 - "I liked your idea on move 10."

 Good players respect their opponents. Great players inspire them.

Final Thought

Becoming a great chess tournament player isn't just about winning—it's about playing with skill, respect, and a positive attitude. Chess takes many many years to master. Remind yourself that you are just beginning to learn, even after only 2-3 years.

 Remember: Every tournament is a chance to learn and grow!