

FIRST CHESS OPENINGS

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FIRST CHESS OPENINGS

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FIRST EDITION

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INTRODUCTION TO CHESS NOTATION

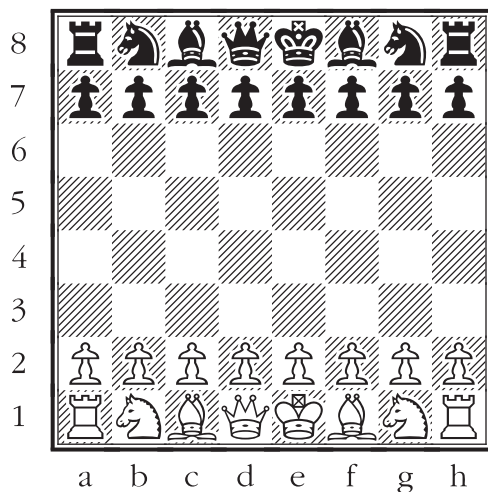




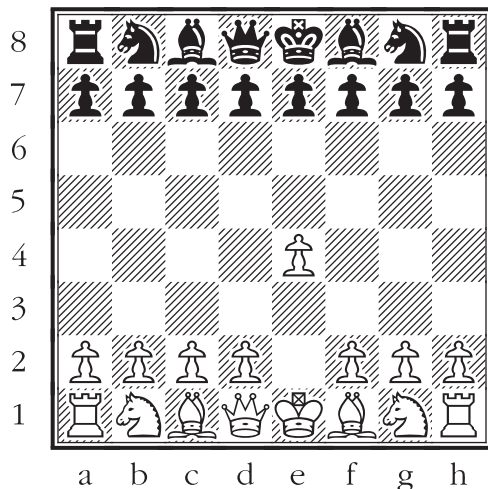
ON CHESS NOTATION

Chess moves are written using a special system known as **algebraic chess notation**. Tournament players are required to write down moves of the game using an accepted form of chess notation. Most players use a concise, short form of the notation. This book uses the long form, which is much easier to use. The short form is only used in the graphs. Each move is described using a system of coordinates. The numbers on the left side of the chessboard describe the horizontal rows, called **ranks**. The letters at the bottom indicate the vertical columns, known as **files**.

FIRST CHESS OPENINGS



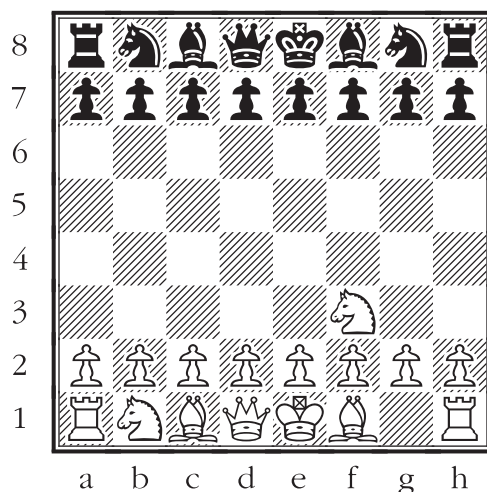
To find the name of a square, you first look at the file, and then find the appropriate rank. In the diagram below, the pawn in the center of the board is at the square e4.



To describe the move that brought the pawn to e4, we indicate both the starting square and landing square, separated by a hyphen or dash: e2-e4. Since this is the first move, we use a move number in front of it: 1.e2-

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e4. That's how we handle normal pawn moves. If something other than a pawn is involved, we include an abbreviation for king (K), queen (Q), bishop (B), knight (N), or rook (R). We have to use "N" for knight, since K is already taken by the king, and the king outranks a knight!



White's move to reach the position shown is 1.Ng1-f3. The knight moved from g1 to f3. The system of describing moves is easy enough, but there are a few wrinkles. If the move is a capture, the starting square and landing square are joined by the letter *x*. If a knight on f3 captures an enemy pawn at e5, we would write it Nf3xe5, not Nf3-e5. If the move puts the enemy king in check it is customary to mark it with a plus sign (+) as a suffix.

If a bishop at c4 captures a pawn at f7, placing the enemy king in check, we use Bc4xf7+. If a pawn advances to the last rank and promotes to another piece, the piece is given after the landing square. If a pawn moved from g7 to g8 and turned into a queen, and the queen places the enemy king in check, then it is g7-g8Q+. Checkmate uses a pound sign (#) instead of a plus sign (+).

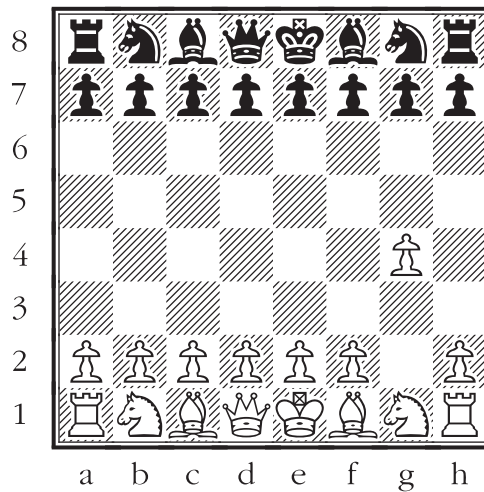
Castling has special forms too, generally indicated by connected *O*. For this book, though, we will just use the word *castles* and indicate kingside or queenside only if both are possible. O-O is kingside castling, and O-O-O is

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queenside castling. Moves are presented in pairs. So 1.e2-e4 e7-e5; 2.Ng1-f3 shows that at the first turn, each player moved the king pawn two squares forward, and then at the second turn, White brought out the knight to f3.

Here is an example of a complete game, the shortest possible checkmate, known appropriately as **Fool's Mate**.

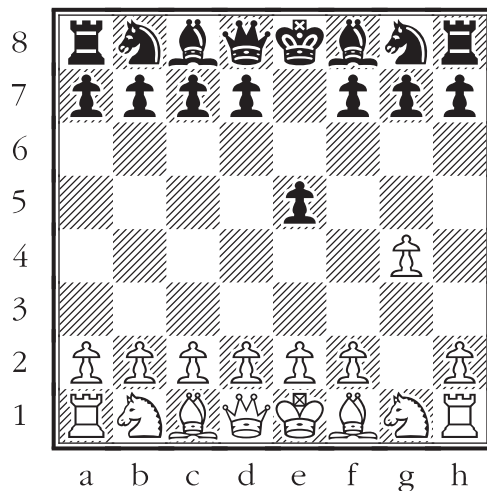
1.g2-g4?



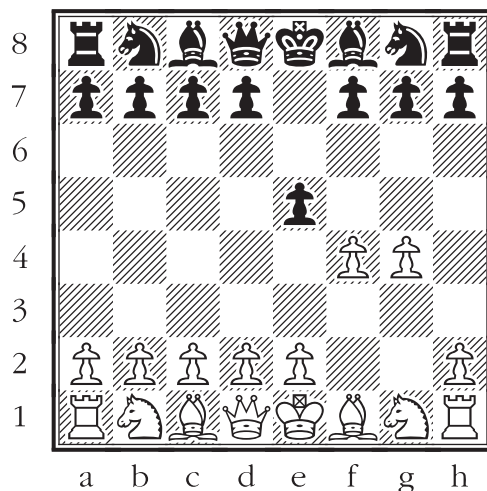
This is without doubt the worst possible opening move. The kingside is weakened, and it won't be safe to castle there. The pawn isn't really attacking anything, and Black can always escape any attack by castling on the queenside

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1...e7-e5



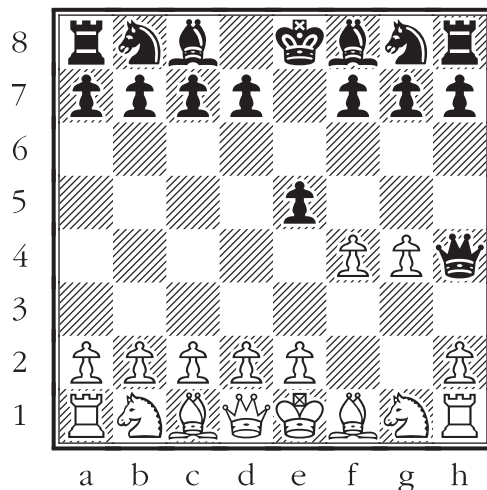
A good reply, planting a pawn in the center and setting up the trap.
2.f2-f4?



White falls into the trap. The f-pawn should stay home until after you've castled, at least most of the time. The weakness of the king position is fatal!

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2...Qd8-h4!#.

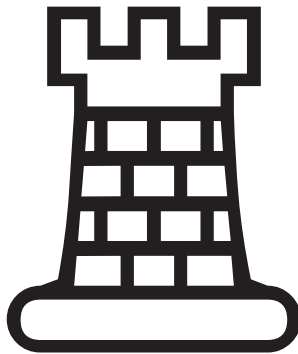


If we just want to comment on Black's move, we use an ellipsis (...), for example Black's checkmating move was 2...Qd8-h4#. The pound sign indicates checkmate.

Notice that above the diagram I have embellished the moves with exclamation and question marks. In this book we will not use a lot of fancy chess symbols. I will award the exclamation mark to moves that I want you to pay particular attention to. These are the moves you should commit to memory. I have marked these moves because they may be too difficult for a beginner to find at the chessboard.

Conventionally, this designation is used to mark moves that are considered the best available moves in the position. In this book, it is used to indicate the best moves for you to use against the level of competition you will ordinarily be facing. You can actually follow all the moves just by moving the piece on the starting square to the indicated landing square. The rest is extra information, included by tradition.

INTRODUCTION TO OPENINGS





ON OPENINGS

The opening part of the game is one of the most difficult challenges facing any new chess player. Once upon a time, the task was not too daunting because most people played one of a small set of approved opening strategies. In the computer age, however, many previously discarded openings have been rediscovered. You can find huge books devoted to openings once considered so insignificant they didn't even merit a footnote in the opening manuals.

If you've struggled to get out of the opening stage of the game with a position you can be happy with, this book will show you the way. Unlike most books on openings, which can run several hundred pages, here you will find only the essential elements needed to get you on your way.

The opening strategies presented here have been used by some of the world's finest professional players, but they do not require a great deal of memorization. From the vast palette of opening colors, we have selected a group that fit into a nice pattern, so that the amount of material you will have to absorb is not overwhelming.

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Many scholastic players invent their own opening strategies or use a preferred stock of moves and formations. They're not concerned what the chess authorities might think of such moves. Instead, they rely on experience. If an opening strategy works then they are likely to repeat it. If it fails, then they are more likely to switch to some other approach.

Beginners do not play the same openings as the pros. The task is more difficult, because it is not clear at first, whether an opponent's move is good, bad, or simply unusual. I often recommend that players new to the game apply opening strategies from the distant past. Before the twentieth century, opening strategies were, for the most part, quite simple. It was only in the last century that new ideas were introduced to open up a wide variety of strategies based often on ideas that were contrary to popularly held views of the past. It is easier to play like Paul Morphy—the world's best player before the Civil War—than to play like modern superstar Garry Kasparov. Chess in Morphy's day was straightforward and a little bit crude. Modern chess is far more complicated in professional play.

So, for beginners, the best openings tend to be those that were played a long time ago. Such openings are appealing because they are based on simple ideas and strategies that have stood the test of time. This book will teach you how to use these strategies to your advantage, and to understand critical concepts without rote memorization.

Strangely, the openings played by beginners are a lot trickier than those played by professionals. One reason beginning openings are so appealing to novice players is that they contain a great number of dangerous traps. Many seemingly logical moves turn out to be refuted, as most players learn through painful experience. You'll learn to avoid the pitfalls and traps that might lead to a swift and ignominious defeat by following the advice presented in this book.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

To get the most out of this book, you need to approach it in the right way, so that it fits your current understanding of the game. If you've been playing for a little while, you should find the amount of material you need to learn reasonable. If you've just learned how to play the game, then you

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might be a little bit intimidated by all of the different openings and the moves needed for combat.

If you have only learned of the rules of the game, you'll want to pay a lot of attention to the materials in the rest of this chapter. You'll get clear guidelines that will help you to find an acceptable move, even if you don't remember any of the exact moves demonstrated in the book. Above all, you must try to get your king castled to safety. In some openings, this isn't so easy. As you read through the remainder of this book, pay very special attention to those exceptional cases, where you don't get to castle early.

Don't try to memorize a lot of specific variations. Observe the general flow of the opening and in particular remember the moves that are used to get the kingside bishop and knight into the game, so that castling can be achieved. After you have been playing chess for awhile, you'll find that some opening strategies pop up all the time, while most others are rarely or never seen. It is a lot of work to learn all of the openings. Usually, it isn't necessary.

The openings you really need to know are the ones your opponents choose to play against you. As you encounter opponents who play different openings, you can add these to your arsenal as required. If you have the time, try to learn as many of the opening strategies presented in this book as you can. But don't feel that you have to learn them all in order to be confident at the chessboard.

Charts are presented throughout the book showing the most popular choices for the opposing side. If you are playing against beginners, these statistics won't have much relevance, but as your opposition gets stronger, you will find that the graphs can tell you which moves you are most likely to run into. Rare moves in chess openings tend to be bad moves. You don't have to prepare for them, since you can usually find a good way to counter them during the game, without assistance.

The general guidelines I present should make sure that you don't get into any serious trouble at the start of the game. The specific moves, if you know them, will improve your results. You have to keep in mind that in most cases the opening stage of the game will not be decisive, and results of the game will depend on mistakes made later on. Eventually, you'll become a better chess player. At some point you will want to refine

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your choice of opening strategies, and take up some more advanced plans. Don't try to change or replace all of your openings at once. Make small changes, adding some deeper knowledge to the openings you already know, or choosing a slightly different path than the one presented in this book for beginners.

For example, I recommend the Advance Variation of the Caro-Kann Defense with the move 4.Bd3. Once you have acquired more skills, you might prefer bringing out one of the knights instead of that move. I've kept things as simple as possible. You'll encounter some of these specific opening strategies later on in the book.

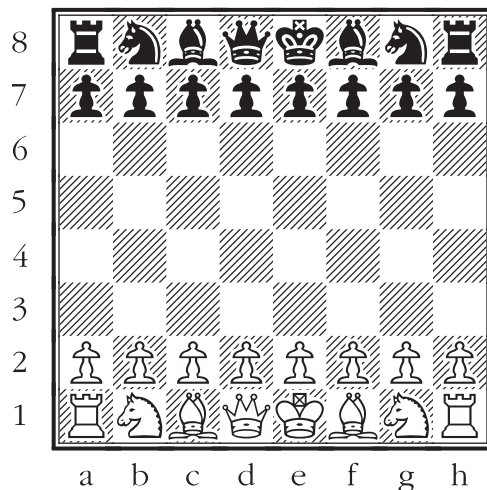
I believe you can play all of the specific recommendations in this book at least until you are a club-level player. For those familiar with the chess rating system, that would be about 1400 on the Elo scale. You don't need rankings to determine whether your opening strategies are appropriate.

Give yourself some time to gain experience with the suggested moves. Then stick with them as long as you are getting good results. The result of the opening is not the same as the result of the game, of course. Just look at the board after ten moves or so and as long as you are not more than one pawn down, and your king is safe, then the opening is working well enough for you.

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THE STARTING POSITION

When you start the game, your pieces are set up according to tradition. Your king is in the center of the board and the army's main forces are sitting behind a row of pawns.



What should you do first? Of course you can simply move pieces as recommended in books or by a teacher, but that's not going to solve the overall problem of getting your pieces into the game. You need to have some idea of what you need to accomplish with your first few moves. I'm going to give you four simple goals. In the main part of this book, I'll be showing you specific moves to use in specific situations, but these goals will allow you to find the best moves, or at least acceptable moves, in every situation.

Your first goal is to take control of part of the center of the board. In most military battles, and a large number of sporting contests, control of the center is a powerful tool in establishing the conditions for successful attack. You should send one or two of your pawns to occupy important central squares. Ideally, you will place pawns both at d4 and e4 as White, or d5 and e5 as Black.

Once we've managed to achieve all or part of this goal, you need to turn your attention to your king. The safety of the king is very important

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early in the game. Until the king is safe, it is open to attack by enemy forces. To safeguard your king, use the special move known as castling. In order to castle, we must move out all of the pieces that stand between the king and one of the rooks.

It is easiest for the king to castle on the side where there are only two pieces standing between the king and the rook, a bishop and a knight. In the other direction, the queen also would have to be moved. That requires more time, and time is very valuable in the opening.

After you castle, you have to get the rest of your pieces into the game. It is important to consider the role of the rooks. The rooks normally enter the battle from the center of the board, using lines that are opened when some of the central pawns are exchanged. Your third goal is to connect the rooks, by making sure that all of the pieces standing between the rooks are moved out of the way. After castling, of course, the king will already be on the far side of the rooks.

Once your two rooks can see each other, your fourth and final goal is to move one of the rooks onto a central file, either the d-file or the e-file. You can use a file that is open for business. A rook can act only as far as it can see, so sitting right behind a pawn is useless, and should be done only when the pawn absolutely requires the protection of the rook.

THE FOUR GOALS OF OPENINGS

GOAL 1: CREATE IDEAL PAWN CENTERS

GOAL 2: CASTLE!

GOAL 3: CONNECT THE ROOKS

**GOAL 4: CENTRALIZE AT LEAST ONE
ROOK**

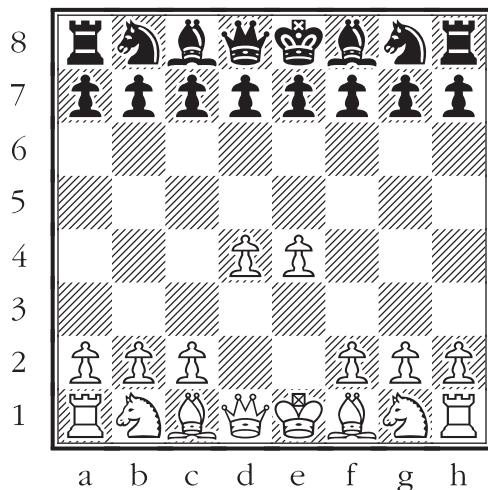
We will go through each of these four goals in more detail in the sections that follow. You'll be surprised how effective this opening strategy is. Even if you haven't learned any specific moves, you can avoid trouble by trying to achieve these four goals.

Along the way though, you'll have to watch out for specific threats. You can't just blindly make moves that achieve these goals, while letting your opponent capture all of your pieces!

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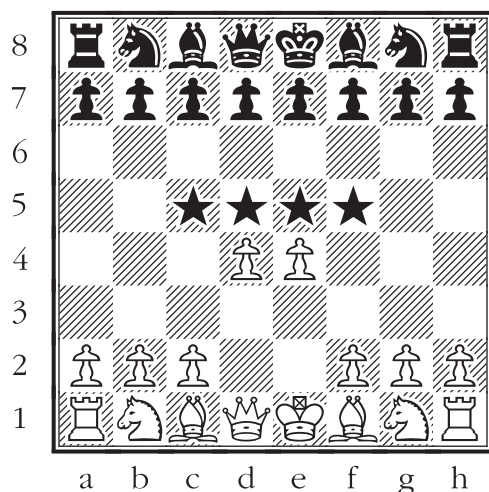
GOAL 1: CREATE IDEAL PAWN CENTERS

Imagine that your opponent is in a generous mood, and offered you a chance to make the first two moves before replying. You could really take advantage of this by placing two pawns right in the middle of the board.



Let's see what we have accomplished. Your two pawns sit in the middle of the board, ready to capture any piece daring to advance to the neighborhood. Both of your bishops can enter the game, your knights can support each of the central pawns, and the queen can come into the game whenever she wants. The only way the king can be attacked is along the diagonal running from a5 to the king's home square at e1. So, your king has a little breathing room, but is not in any danger. Castling can be achieved after just two more moves. Control of the central squares deprives Black of their use. This is illustrated in the picture below, where the controlled squares are highlighted.

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If Black puts any pieces on those highlighted squares, White will be able to capture them. This pretty much limits Black to putting pawns on those squares, and even then the consequences of capturing the pawn would have to be considered.

You can see how putting two pawns in the center of the board leads to good things. In most openings your opponent will not allow you to achieve this. You might be allowed to place the pawns there temporarily, but Black will use something called a **pawn break** to challenge that center. The pawn break takes place when a pawn moves forward to challenge an enemy pawn. In the position above, Black has four potential pawn breaks—one on each of the highlighted squares.

When you're playing with the Black pieces, you will not want your opponent to be able to enjoy the luxury of the ideal pawn center. That's why on the first move, you'll place a pawn in a position to prevent this from happening. You can do so on the very first move, if White moves the king pawn two squares forward. Then you can, and should, move your king pawn two squares forward as well.

If White advances the queen pawn instead, then you should move your queen pawn forward two squares. More advanced players can allow White to establish the ideal pawn center, only to break it down later. However,

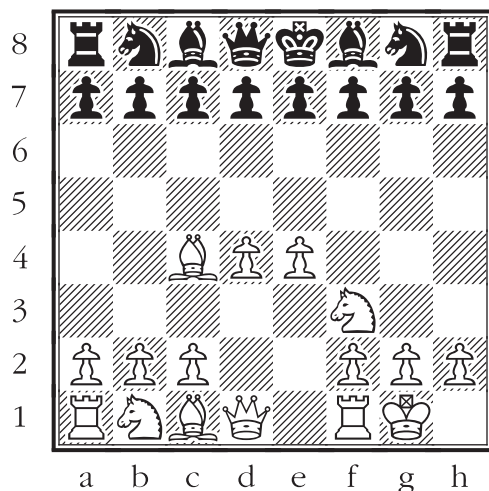
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beginners should stick to the classical method of preventing the ideal pawn center from being established in the first place.

GOAL 2: CASTLE!

Some years ago, I was watching a game being played by one of my top students, a true chess prodigy. His mother was also watching, extremely nervous as always. Her understanding of the game of chess was limited.

As the game went on, her son's king remained on its home square and eventually, it was hunted down. After the game, the mother admonished her son, asking over and over, "Why didn't you castle?" Indeed, this young master, trying to play a sophisticated opening strategy, had left his king in the center far too long, and suffered the ultimate humiliation.



In the made-up position above, we are ignoring Black's moves so we can concentrate on opening strategy for White. You could only achieve such a position if Black were willing to do nothing but move knights out and back to their original squares.

White has set up the ideal pawn center, placed the bishop in an attacking position at c4, and placed the knight on its logical post at f3. With no pieces standing between the king and rook, White was then able to castle.

The castled king is safe, because there are no weaknesses in the pawn

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barrier standing in front. The knight defends the otherwise weak pawn at the edge of the board. A rook as well as the king guards the always-vulnerable pawn at f2.

You cannot devote all of your attention to keeping your king safe. It would be ridiculous to mobilize your entire army for purely defensive tasks. The castle formation pictured above is the best way to keep your king safe while giving most of your forces a free hand to go out and inflict damage on enemy positions.

A REMINDER ON CASTLING

The castling rule is a bit tricky, so you have to make sure that you understand how the castling move works, and when you are allowed to use it. Castling was introduced many centuries ago in order to provide a way for each player to get the king to safety early in the game. Castling is a double move, just like the rule that allows you to move a pawn two squares instead of one as long as it is still on its home square.

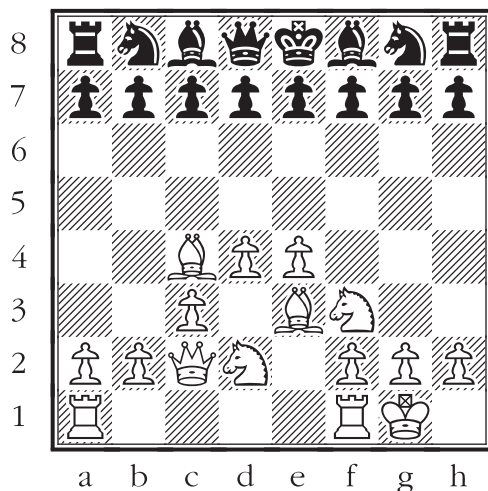
When you castle, the king makes a double move, moving two squares toward the edge of the board in either direction. The rook then moves to the square on the far side of the king. In tournament competition, it is important to touch the king first, because castling is considered a king move. You can't castle when you're in check, or if the king would be in check after castling, or would be in check on the square it crossed to reach the castled position. In that sense, it is similar to the en passant rule. In that case, a pawn is captured if it moves two squares forward but would have been capturable had it moved only one square. The idea is that whenever you are allowed to make a double move, you aren't allowed to skip past danger.

Either way, many players aren't aware that the restrictions that apply to the king do not apply to the rook. You may castle even when the rook is under attack, or if a square passed over by the rook when castling would make it a target of attack. Castling is a king move, and the restrictions apply only to the king.

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GOAL 3: CONNECT THE ROOKS

Once your king is tucked away safely, the next task is to get your pieces into the game. Often, you hear the advice, “develop your pieces.” The problem is that they don’t say which pieces should be developed. Of course, every situation is a bit different, so it is not always easy to decide how to bring your forces into the game. In any case, you need to involve the rooks at some point. Rooks need room to maneuver, and therefore, you should move out all of the pieces that stand between the rooks. So instead of an abstract notion of developing your pieces, focus on this concrete goal: Let your rooks see each other.



The picture above shows just one possible formation for your pieces. The important thing is that the rooks are connected and either rook can take up a position in the center of the board or wherever it happens to be needed. In this particular case, the queen and bishop and knights are used to support important central squares and only the bishop at c4 is in an attacking position.

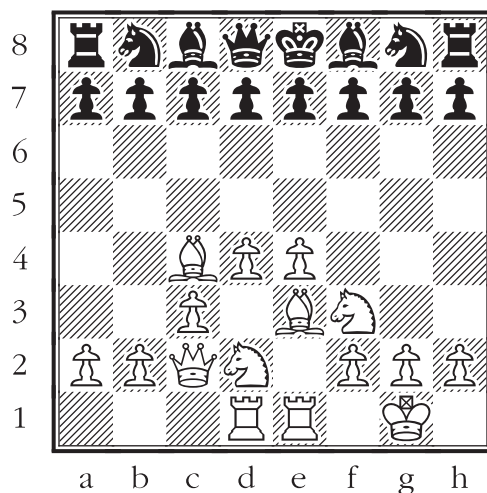
There are many other ways of setting up your pieces and, of course, your formation will depend on what the opponent is doing. In this instructional diagram, Black has been doing absolutely nothing so this is not a practical formation. You will notice however, that the White pieces

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are all in the center of the board. Not running around in some far-flung territory, hoping to invade without any real support.

GOAL 4: CENTRALIZE AT LEAST ONE ROOK

Once the rooks are connected it makes sense to move either one or both of the rooks to the center of the board. Keep in mind that the center of the board is where the opening battle of the chess game takes place. Having rooks on the central files makes it possible to launch an early attack against an enemy king, should he remain too long in the center of the board.



Looking at the formation above, you might think that the rooks are useless, because there are too many pieces in front of them on the central files. This can be deceptive. Pieces standing in the way can often easily be moved out of the way. Pawns are more problematic. However, pawns can get off the highway if any pawn or piece is captured. Since pawns capture diagonally, any capture will remove them from the file they stand on. So rooks and queens can have a powerful influence on a file, even when there are numerous pieces standing in their way.

Once you have brought at least one rook to the center of the board, your opening tasks are complete. Accomplishing the four goals is not always easy. Your opponents will often do things to prevent you from

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simply seizing the center, castling, and dealing with your rooks. However, once you have completed the four steps, you are ready to engage in the big battles that make up the game of chess.

ON THE VALUE OF THE PIECES

It is very important to know which of your pieces are valuable, and which are expendable. Chess is a very complicated game and the value of pieces is not a fixed number. When starting out in the game, you are often told that each piece is worth a certain amount of points. There is a great deal of disagreement as to what those exact figures are, though generally a pawn is always considered to have a value of one point. Traditionally, knights and bishops are worth three points each, a rook is worth five, and the queen will be either nine or ten points. Using this point system, you can determine whether or not to exchange pieces. For example, two rooks are worth about the same as a queen.

As you gain experience, you'll come to learn that those numbers are very flexible. A lot depends on where the pieces are located and the stage of the game. In the opening part of the game, a pawn is worth next to nothing. Later in the book you'll learn about gambits, openings where a pawn is deliberately sacrificed just so that other pieces can get into the game quickly. In the middle of the game, the value of a pawn depends on where it's located. A pawn guarding your king is obviously worth more than a pawn sitting on the far side of the board. In the endgame, the value of a pawn, which might march all the way across the board and turn into a queen, is much higher.

So don't be surprised when your opponent offers you a pawn or even a knight or bishop in sacrifice. In many cases, the plan will be to recover the sacrifice as quickly as possible. In others, the sacrifice is an investment, used to achieve specific strategic or tactical goals. I have included quite a number of opening strategies that involve sacrifices, so that as you play, you will come to understand a bit of the complicated world of chess pawns and pieces.