

# CHESS: A GUIDE TO SIMPLE STRATEGIES

## OPENING

Since the opening stage of a chess game can be the most crucial, it helps to be armed with strategies.

### Develop Your Pieces

Moving your pieces out from their starting squares is called **development**. Though it may feel safe to bring out just a few, having all your pieces in play gives you the best chance of winning. The player who develops their pieces faster is the one who tends to lead—because having pieces ready first means that you can attack first.

Typically, knights and bishops should come out before queens and rooks. In particular, aim to develop the knight and bishop on the side where you want to castle—before the other pieces—so you can get castled quickly. Try to move all your knights and bishops by your tenth move. In doing so, you are not exposing your side to attack, but activating your army.

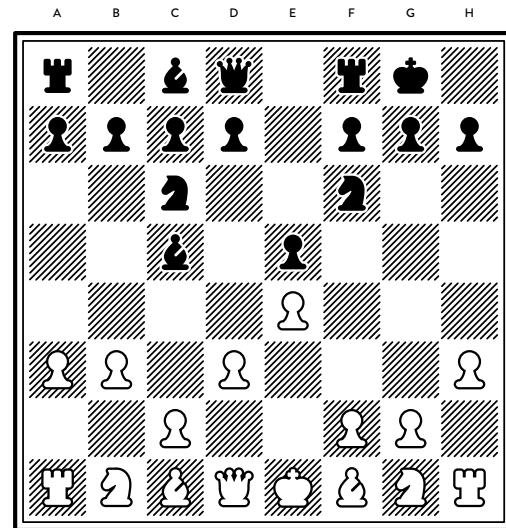


FIGURE 1: EXAMPLE—TOO MANY PAWN MOVES

### Economize Your Pawn Moves

You must develop a few pawns in order to let your other pieces out. Ideally, start by moving a middle

pawn out two squares. Doing so with the king's pawn, for instance, opens up lines for both the queen and the kingside bishop. That type of development helps you more than making excessive pawn moves. For example, see **Figure 1**: Five white pawns have been moved, while all the white knights and bishops are still on their starting squares. In contrast, the opposing side has already developed three minor pieces and castled—with such a big lead in development, it can start attacking soon.

### Don't Bring Out the Queen

Although developing your pieces is key, remember that the queen—besides the king—is the most valuable piece and must be protected. If you bring out your queen too early, your opponent can develop their pieces while attacking your queen. Instead of developing your other pieces, you would then end up wasting moves trying to protect it.

### Don't Move a Piece Twice

Once you get a piece out, keep developing your other pieces. Avoid moving just one piece around the board while keeping your other pieces on their starting squares. The only time you should move a piece twice is in order to capture an opposing piece—preferably not a pawn. In essence, focus on developing your pieces and avoid capturing pawns.

### Castle Early

Once your pieces start coming out, your king becomes more vulnerable to checkmate. That is the reason for castling early in the game—ideally before your tenth move. Castling also brings a rook to the middle of the board, in preparation for attacking your opponent's king, if they have not yet done the same.

### Develop Toward the Center

The center of the board—comprising D4, E4, D5, E5—is the most important area. See the white side's ideal opening moves in **Figure 2** (not taking into account any possible challenge from the opposing side). All those pieces, in all those positions, are helping to control the center. Aim for that type of development.

### Connect Your Rooks

Clear the space between your rooks so they can protect each other. By moving freely along the back rank, they can offer both offense and defense.

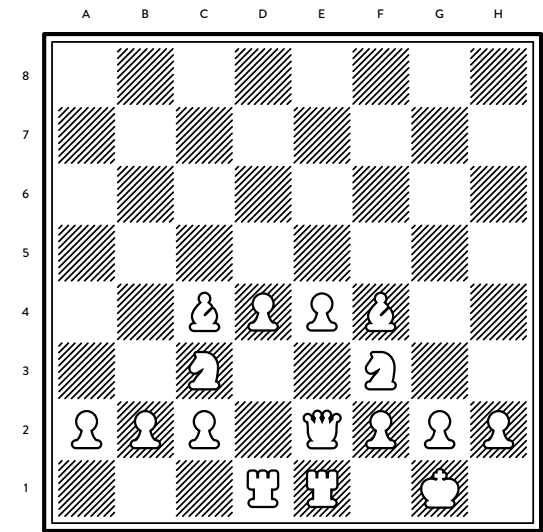


FIGURE 2: IDEAL FIRST 10 MOVES

In **Figure 2**, see how their ideal position is in the center of the rank—potentially opposite the other player's queen or king, serving as a threat even if other pieces stand in the way.

## MIDDLE GAME

Once your pieces are developed, while your king remains safe, you are in the middle of the game. Here are six strategies to keep in mind as you proceed—three strategies to pursue, and three to avoid.

### Make Threats

Most capturing tends to take place during the middle game. By putting as much pressure as possible on your opponent, you are forcing them to deal with that threat instead of making their own plans. The best defense is a good offense. Being on the offensive also increases the odds that your opponent will make a mistake, allowing you to gain captures, including favorable exchanges.

### Keep Developing

When you are not capturing, work on ensuring your passive pieces become active. In **Figure 3** (see next page), for instance, the rook at F1 is passive—neither attacking nor offering protection. If you slide that

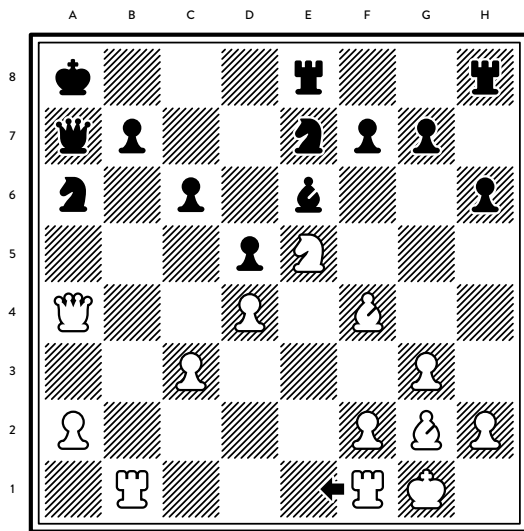


FIGURE 3: MAKING A PASSIVE PIECE ACTIVE

rook over to E1, you change its contribution to the game. Now the rook is helping to defend the knight while threatening the vital board center. The more active your pieces are, the more opportunities you will have to make threats.

### Chase Away Your Opponent

Actively try to keep your opponent at a distance. If their pieces start getting too close, do your best to chase them away—because once a piece enters your side of the board, it is likely to become active and harder to neutralize. Try to foresee the future positions of any piece that enters your territory. Sometimes it may be easier to neutralize an opposing piece by making an early sacrificial exchange, than to waste time trying to chase it down later—after it's already done damage.

### Avoid Exchanging Active for Passive

Just because you can take a piece does not mean that you should. When capturing comes at the expense of an exchange, be sure to evaluate the current position of each piece. For example, if you have a well-positioned knight in the center of the board, is it worth using it as an exchange to capture an opponent's passive bishop, currently blocked in by its own pawn? Given their current positions, that exchange would be unwise.

### Avoid Moving Your King's Pawns

Avoid moving any pawns that protect your king until the endgame. Remember that once they are moved forward, they cannot be moved back.

### Avoid Waiting Moves

Try not to waste any moves. If you aren't sure how to proceed, avoid making a passive or "waiting" move just to see what your opponent does next. Instead, can you make a passive piece more active? Can you threaten your opponent?

## ENDGAME

You played a great opening and kept the pressure up through the middle game. Now just a few pieces remain on both sides. What can you do to give yourself the upper hand?

### Put Your King on Offense

After being protected from checkmate for most of the game, the endgame is where the king can finally shine. Since kings are useful in capturing pawns, the more centralized your king is, the better your chance of winning. Remember that timing is critical. The right time to strike is when there are few pieces left on the board. If there are too many pieces, an attack on your king is more likely to happen.

### Make Some Exchanges

Pawns are some of the best pieces to retain for endgames, as their significance increases during the final stages of the game. If you hold the material advantage in the game—by having more pieces on the board—one of the most productive endgame tactics to use is the active exchange of pieces. Now is the time to strategically sacrifice some of your pieces to further dwindle the options available to your opponent. Don't exchange too many pawns. As you advance further into the game, having a few pawns available for promotion (or underpromotion) can be vital.

### Keep Your Pawns Close

The more you can keep your pawns together, the better your endgame will be. An isolated or secluded pawn can be extremely difficult to protect. The same is true for **doubled pawns**—two pawns that end up on the same file due to one of them being used in a capture. Keeping your pawns together requires a great deal of

planning, especially during the opening and/or middle game. Position them early, with an eye on the endgame.

### Don't Let Up

Upon seeing the board empty out, you may feel like you can spend less time calculating your moves. But fewer pieces does not mean fewer threats. Making calculated moves becomes even more crucial when you have few pieces left on the board. You must not only respond to your opponent's moves, but also come up with your own strategies on how to use your remaining pieces to maneuver your opponent into checkmate.

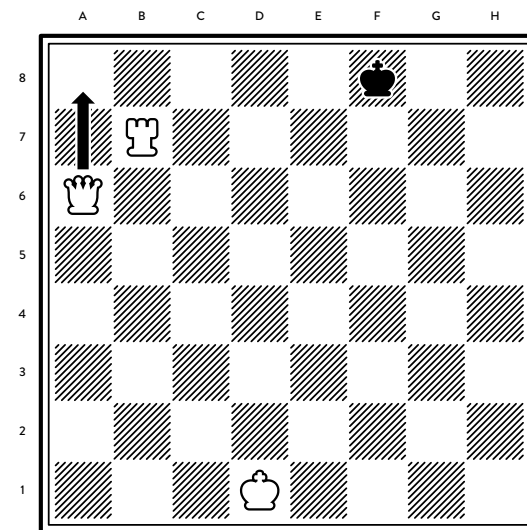


FIGURE 4: EXAMPLE—QUEEN AND ROOK CHECKMATE

### The Basic Checkmate: Queen and Rook

A lone king against the edge of the board is an easy checkmate for any two major pieces—such as the rook and queen in **Figure 4**. While one piece prevents the king from moving away from the edge, the other can move to the king's same rank (or file, depending on the edge) to deliver a checkmate. Notice how the white rook is on the seventh rank, already preventing the black king from advancing forward. By moving the queen to A8, the king is easily in checkmate, its option to move to any other square effectively eliminated. Call out "Checkmate" here and you win.