



C&O Family Chess Center

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The “10 BAD MOVES”

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1. Moving Too Fast (Impulsiveness)

This is the single greatest contributor to lost positions. Time after time I have watched kids in tournaments and friendly play, with hands already hovering over the pieces as their opponent makes a move... and zap!, they impulsively reply... only to realize that they have blundered (often fatally).

Strangely enough, “*Moving Too Fast*” has really nothing to do with speed, in terms of time. I have known some “slow” players who moved “*too fast*” and some relatively “quick” movers who, nevertheless, did not move “*too fast*”. It really has to do with taking the time to really *look at the position*... and to *ask yourself (and answer) certain very specific “key questions”*. These include the following...

About your *opponent’s* move:

1. Did it capture, attack, or threaten anything?
2. Did it defend against my threats?
3. Did it improve his position (Space, Mobility, etc.)?

A “*NO!*” answer to these three questions *may mean that he has made a mistake!*

4. Can I safely capture the piece that moved? ...any others?

About your *proposed* move:

1. Will it capture, attack, or threaten anything?

2. Will it defend against my opponent’s threats?

3. Will it improve my position (Space, Mobility, etc.)

A “*NO!*” answer to these questions *may mean that you are about to make a mistake!*

4. Can my opponent safely capture it? ...any other pieces?

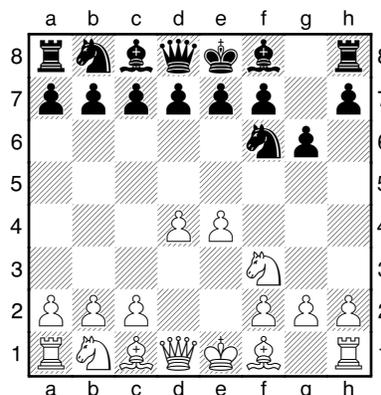
You should always have a plan, a reason for every move you make. Some plans are simple and obvious... others are complex. Remember, however, that even the best plan may have to be revised in light of your opponent’s moves. Sometimes it must be modified often, or completely discarded. That is why *you must ask those questions before every move!*

If your opponent sees an error in your plan he will attempt to show it to you by his move (as you will to him), and that is OK. But many mistakes are only identified later, in “*post-game analysis.*” Such review is *the single best thing you can do to improve your game.*

The following game demonstrates how moving too fast can lead to a quick loss.

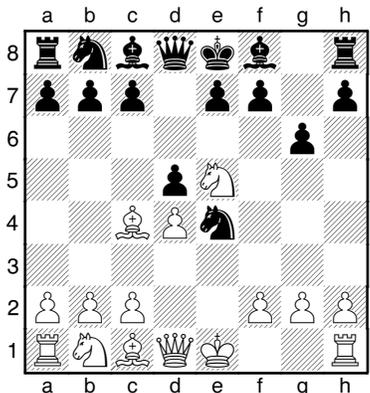
Student v. Coach [A48] 2002

1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 g6 3.e4?? (Diagram)
 Moving too fast! White hangs the pawn!
 [Better is 3.Bg5!?= developing a piece.]

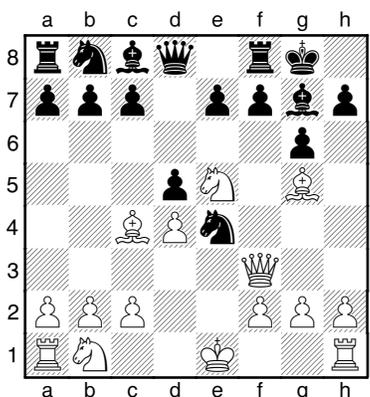


3...Nxe4 4.Bc4 Leaves the Black Knight in a great spot. [Stronger is 4.Bd3 d5 5.0–0]

(...or 5.Nbd2 Nd6 6.0-0)] 4...d5 5.Ne5??
(Diagram) Another impulsive move, ...and moving the same piece twice. [Better is 5.Be2 Bg7]

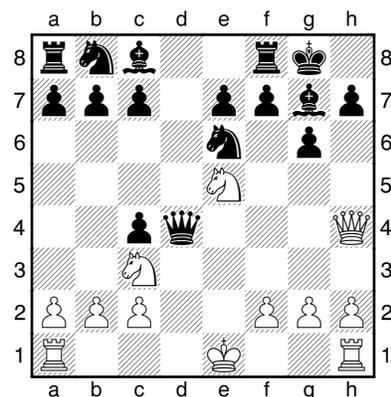


5...Bg7? Now Black moves too fast.
 [Stronger is 5...dxc4 first. 6.Nxc4 c5 7.f3+]
 6.Qf3?? A mating threat that is easily defended against and may put the Queen at risk. [Better is 6.Bb3 retreating the Bishop. 6...0-0] 6...0-0? Playing it safe but missing an opportunity. [More aggressive is 6...f6 blocking the mate and threatening the Knight. 7.Bb5+ c6 8.Nxc6 Nxc6 with a winning advantage.] 7.Bg5?? **(Diagram)** Too fast again. White fails to consider the response and hangs the Bishop. [7.Bb3 is still the best.]

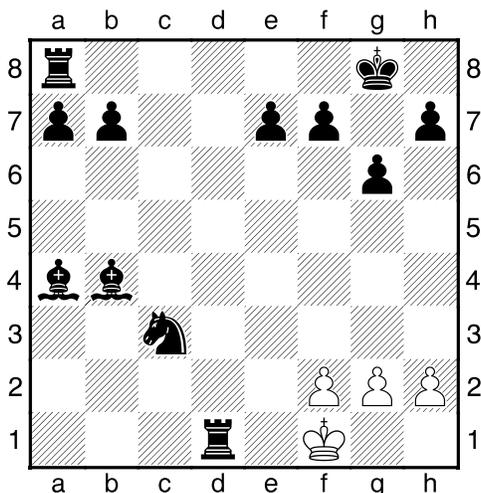


7...Nxc5 Captures the Bishop, and attacks the White Queen. 8.Qf4? Allowing Black to increase his lead with a double attack. [Better is 8.Qxd5 Be6 9.Qxd8 Rxd8

10.Bxe6 Nxe6 11.Nf3 but Black still has a winning position.] 8...Ne6 Threatening the Queen and still attacking the Bishop on c4. 9.Qh4 dxc4 10.Nc3 Attempting to develop but hanging the pawn on d4. [10.c3 Qd5 11.Nf3 c5+] 10...Qxd4 **(Diagram)** Looking to simplify and trade into a won ending. From here on there is nothing that White can really do. [10...Nxd4 11.Nxc4 Nxc2+ 12.Ke2+]]



11.Qxd4 [11.Nf3 Qxh4 12.Nxh4 Rd8+] 11...Nxd4 12.Nxc4 Nxc2+ 13.Kd1 Nxa1 14.b4? [14.Ne3] 14...Bxc3 15.Ke2 Nc2 16.Rc1 Nd4+ 17.Kd1 Bxb4 18.Ne5 Rd8 19.Rxc7? Nb5+ 20.Rd7 Nxd7 21.Nxd7 Bxd7 22.a4 Nc3+ 23.Ke1 Bxa4 24.Kf1 Rd1# 0-1



2.-5. Failure to Develop Rapidly (and Well).

In the lessons “*7 Things To Do in the First 10 Moves*”, some general principles of opening development are outlined. The next four “*Bad Moves*” are all related, in that when they are made during the opening phase of the game... other, good moves, are not made. This is in addition to the specific problems inherent in each of the four.

2. Developing the Queen Too Early, or Exposing the Queen to Attack.

The queen is your most powerful piece, worth almost twice as much as a rook and three times more than the Knights and Bishops. Like a battleship, she often needs the help, support, and protection of other friendly units or she may be outnumbered, surrounded, and destroyed. Losing your queen without adequate compensation is so devastating that it usually means the game is quickly lost as well. This leads to the important question “When *is* it too early to bring her out?” That is difficult to answer without specific positions in mind but we will try.

If the queen may be easily threatened and attacked by your opponent’s developing, or already developed, minor pieces, rooks, or pawns (to the point of losing a lot of time or simply having to retreat), then it’s too early. If, on the other hand, she *must* recapture a piece to maintain equality, or if she can be part of an attack supported by other pieces (see No. 5 below) and winning material or mating the enemy king, then it’s not.

3. Moving the Same Piece Too Many Times, or Making Too Many Pawn Moves in the Opening.

During the opening, this can be particularly devastating. The concept of “tempo” (“A move as a unit of time.” — B. Pandolfini), or the “tick, tock, tick, tock...” of both players’ development, is central here. A brief example:

Look at the moves 1. e4 e5; 2. Nf3 Nc6; 3. Ng1?? (actually taking back a move and losing *two* tempos) Nf6. It is now White’s move but, in effect, he is two moves behind (he has a pawn developed, while Black has a pawn and both knights developed). This example is, of course, extreme. But the same principle holds in other cases as well. Making such extra moves is one of the chief contributing factors in cases of failure to achieve the “*7 Things To Do in the First 10 Moves.*”

4. Failure to Castle, or Exposing the King to Attack.

The king is the most important piece you have. If he is lost the game is lost, therefore “king safety” is *always* an important consideration.

Early in the game, when the field is crowded with enemy pieces, it is usually advantageous to castle. This removes the king from an exposed position in the center to a relatively protected spot behind a wall of pawns on either side of the board. Castling is one of the “*7 Things...*,” primarily for that reason (and also because it develops a rook). A significant portion of chess strategy deals with disrupting, or breaking, the castle to expose the king to attack. If you fail to castle in the first place, or if you unnecessarily disrupt your castled position, you may be making your opponent’s task that much easier for him.

There may come a time, however, when the king no longer has to hide. Indeed, *a major characteristic of many endgames is the transition of the king from hidden refugee to fighting piece.* He may be seeking to control the vital center of the board or guarding a passed pawn on the way to promotion. In many endgames the more active king will be able to force the win or hold a draw against superior force.

5. Attacking Too Soon (Premature Aggression).

The key here, as in Bad Move No. 2, above,

is judging just what is “*too soon.*” Many chess players dream of a quick mate. There are numerous examples of checkmates involving only a couple of pieces. Most of these occur in endgames after long, hard struggles through the middlegame, but they may occur at any time if an opponent overlooks a relatively simple threat.

Novice players are frequently tempted to go for a quick attack or mate by early queen sorties or attempted knight invasions on c7 or f7, often supported only by a lone bishop. Normal development and thoughtful, solid defense by the average opponent will not only survive such premature attacks, but frequently lead to disaster for the attacker, leaving the defender with a material advantage or superior development that may be turned into a winning position. Another example of “too soon” would be attempts to “open up” the game (exchanging center pawns and creating “open” lines of attack across the board) before castling. There are also such brief examples as the “Fool’s Mates” and “Scholar’s Mates” with which every novice should be familiar. The problem with these is they rely on “bad moves” by the opponent in response to an otherwise premature attack.

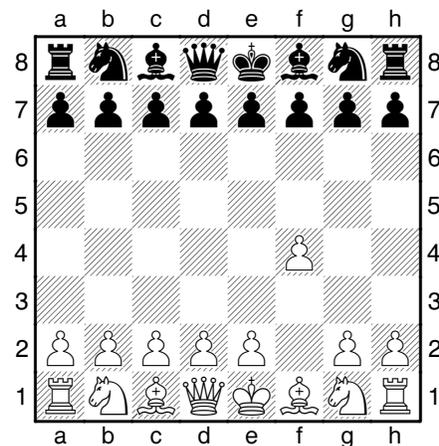
But the lure of the quick mate remains powerful. Therefore, players who wish to engage in early attacks must study and prepare their openings more intensively. They must learn, not only to set traps, but how to analyze tactical variations with great accuracy.

The following game illustrates a number of weak moves in which White fails to achieve any of the three principal strategic opening objectives (i.e.: 1) Developing the pieces, 2) Controlling the center, 3) Making the King safe). These may be grouped together under “Failure to Develop Rapidly (and Well).”

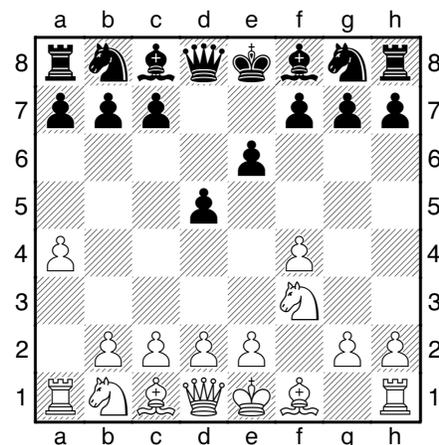
Student v. Student [A03] 2002

1.f4? (Diagram) This is “Bird’s Opening,” rarely played by experienced players. Not one of the “7 Things...,” this move weakens

the Kingside and exposes the King along the e1–h4 diagonal. [For inexperienced players best is 1.e4 ; ...or 1.d4]

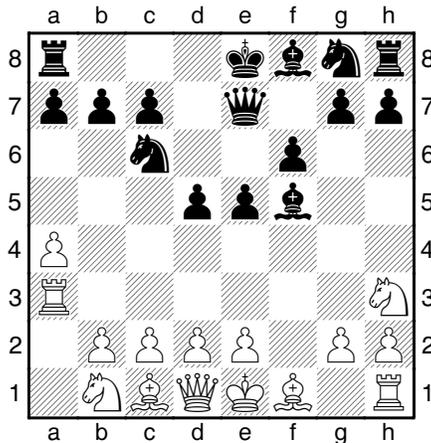


1...d5 2.Nf3 e6 3.a4? (Diagram) Another weak pawn move. No piece development, no center control, no help protecting the King. [3.e3 would be normal in Bird’s Opening.]

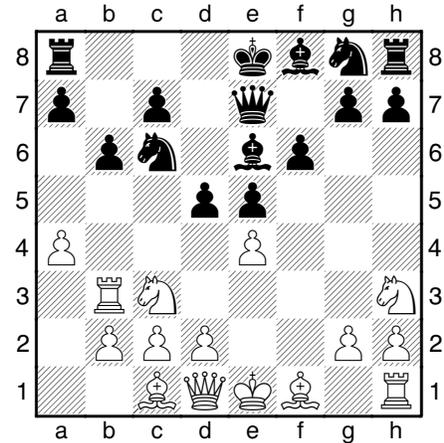


3...Nc6 4.Ng5? Moving the Knight a second time with no apparent purpose (“Bad Move No. 3). [Still best is 4.e3 further controlling the center, protecting f4, and releasing the King’s Bishop. 4...Bd6=] **4...Qe7?** Bad Move No. 2. The Queen has no support, no attack, and blocks the dark-squared Bishop. [Better is 4...e5 taking advantage of White’s weak move to get control in the

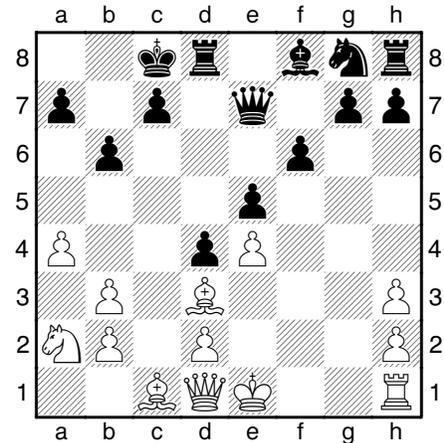
center. 5.e3 exf4 6.exf4 Qe7+] **5.Ra3?** White misses a chance to increase control in the center. [5.d4 Bd7=] **5...f6?** Not the best way to "kick" the Knight, and weakening of Black's Kingside. [Best is still 5...e5 6.e3μ] **6.Nh3** Not the Knight's best square. **6...e5** Increasing pressure on the center. **7.f5??** This gives Black a winning edge. [Better is 7.Rg3!?!] **7...Bxf5** (Diagram)



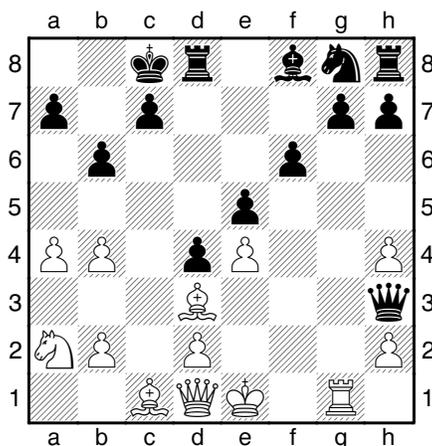
After only seven moves White has a strong center and a winning advantage. Black's two developed pieces are poorly placed and he has no influence in the center. **8.Nc3?** Aiming at d5 but blocking the Rook. [Stronger is 8.Rg3 h5—+] **8...Be6?** Too timid. [More aggressive is 8...Nb4 threatening a fork on c2! 9.d3 Qc5 preparing for ...d4!] **9.Rb3?** Still ignoring Black's strong center. [Stronger is 9.e4 dxe4 10.Nxe4 0–0–0 11.Bb5 gaining some development but still losing.] **9...b6?** Again too timid! [A double attack with 9...d4!? 10.Nb5 Bxb3 11.cxb3 wins the exchange, increasing Black's advantage.] **10.e4?** (Diagram) Too little, too late! [Only slightly better is 10.Nb1 f5—+]



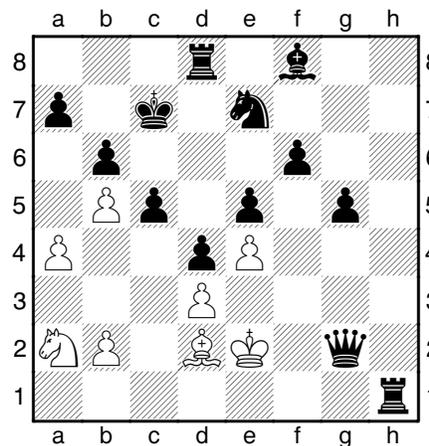
10...Nd4? Now Black moves too fast. [Better is 10...dxe4 11.Bb5 Qd7 protecting the Knight and trapping the Rook on b3. 12.Nxe4 Bxb3 13.cxb3—+] **11.Bd3?** [Better would be 11.Nxd5 Bxd5 12.exd5 Nxb3 13.Bb5+ Kd8 14.cxb3 but Black still leads.] **11...Nxb3 12.cxb3 d4 13.Na2 Bxh3?** Trading an active Bishop for a poorly placed Knight is "Bad Move No. 9." [Better is 13...a6 preparing for ...b5. 14.Bc4 b5—+] **14.gxh3?** Doubles the pawns on the weak h-file. [14.Qh5+ g6 15.Qxh3 but Black is still ahead.] **14...0–0–0** (Diagram) White's Kingside is totally open and his pieces poorly placed. Black should begin an attack here with a "pawn-storm," development of the remaining minor pieces, and activation of the Rooks.



15.h4? Another useless pawn move. [15.Qf3 Kb8 16.Bc4] **15...Qe6?** [Stronger is 15...f5 challenging the center, freeing the Knight, and attacking the h4 pawn. 16.0-0 f4 17.Qg4+ Kb8 18.Kh1] **16.Rg1?** Allowing Black's Queen to penetrate. [A slightly better defense is 16.Qf3 Qd6+] **16...Qh3** **17.b4??** Leaving the Bishop on d3 hanging. [Better is 17.Qg4+ forcing the exchange of Queens.]



17...Qxh4+? Moving too fast! However, Black still has a winning edge. A series of rapid moves and minor mistakes now plagues both sides for the next ten moves, or so, until White makes a final, fatal, blunder. [Strongest is 17...Qxd3] **18.Kf1** [18.Rg3 Qxh2 19.Qg4+ Kb7+] **18...Qxh2?** [18...Qh3+!? 19.Ke2 Qxh2+ 20.Kf1 Qh3+ 21.Ke2+] **19.Qf3 Qf4** **20.Be2** [20.Qxf4 exf4 21.Bc4 g5+] **20...g5** [20...d3 21.Bd1+] **21.d3 Qxf3+** **22.Bxf3 c5** [22...h5] **23.b5** [23.bxc5 bxc5 24.Rh1 Kc7+] **23...Ne7** **24.Bd2 h5** **25.Rg2** [25.Rh1 h4+] **25...h4** [25...g4!?] **26.Bg4+ Kc7** **27.Rg3??** White hangs the Rook, a major blunder! Minor errors on either side no longer matter as Black quickly penetrates the White defense for the win. [27.Rf2 h3 28.Kg1+] **27...hgx3** **28.Be1 Rh1+** **29.Ke2 g2** **30.Bf3 g1Q** **31.Bd2 Qh2+** [31...Qf1#] **32.Bg2 Qxg2#** (Diagram) 0-1



6. Ignoring a Pin, or Failing to Relieve a Pin.

The pin is number one of the five basic tactical weapons (pins, forks, skewers, discovered attacks, and undermining). By definition a pin is an attack on a piece or pawn which screens a more valuable piece from attack. There are two kinds of pins, “absolute” and “relative.” If the screened piece is the king then it is illegal to move the pinned piece (exposing the king to check) and the pin is “absolute.” With any other screened piece the pinned piece may legally move (though it might be a bad idea) and the pin is “relative.” Due partly to the initial arrangement of pieces on the board pins occur more often than any other tactical theme.

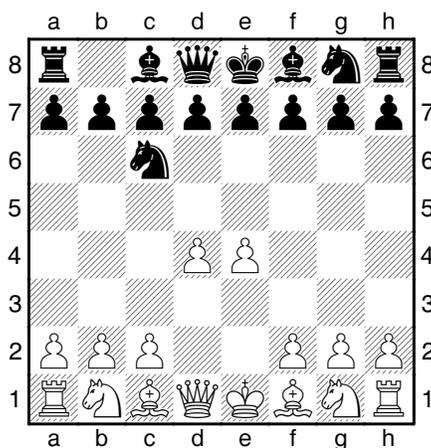
Pins are often misunderstood and underestimated by novice and intermediate players because the true threats are not always obvious. A pinned piece is temporarily immobilized, threatened with capture, and usually neutralized both as an attacker and a defender. While it remains pinned it is subject to further attacks which may lead, ultimately, to its loss, or the loss of the piece it protects. Therefore, allowing an enemy pin to remain in place can cripple both your offense and your defense, sometimes fatally.

The options for dealing with a pin include blocking it (interposing an additional defender

between the pinned man and the screened piece), moving the screened piece, driving away or capturing the attacking piece, and, in the case of a threatened pin, prevention. As with any move, it is important to examine all of the existing options before choosing your move.

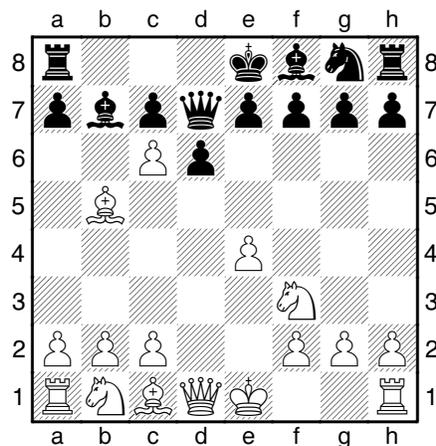
Coach (simul) v. Student [B00] 2003

1.e4 Nc6? Not technically a mistake, this move requires accurate play if White is aggressive (as follows). [Best for beginners is 1...e5] **2.d4 (Diagram)** Threatening 3.d5 to "kick" the Knight.

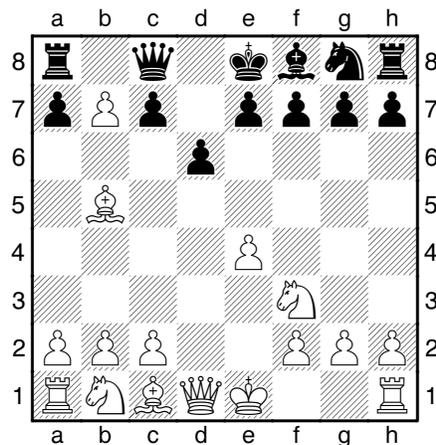


2...b5?? Not one of the "7 Things...", this gives away the pawn for no compensation. [Required is 2...d5 blocking the advance.] **3.Bxb5 Bb7** [Worth looking at is 3...e5 challenging the center and providing a flight square for the Knight.] **4.Nf3 d6??** Not only creating a pin on the Knight, but allowing an immediate second attack by the d-pawn. [Better is preventing the pin by 4...a6 pressing the Bishop; ...or 4...e6 protecting the center square d5 and providing an escape for the Knight, who is not yet pinned.] **5.d5** Now White will win at least a piece. **5...Qd7??** Black not only fails to resolve the pin, he makes it worse. [Best is still 5...a6 forcing the issue. 6.dxc6 axb5 7.cxb7 Rb8] **6.dxc6? (Diagram)** White actually misses the strongest continuation.

"When you have a good move, stop! Look for an even better one!" [By adding an attacker with 6.Nd4 White could gain even more material. 6...Qc8 7.Nxc6 Bxc6 (Not as good is 7...Ba6 8.Nxa7+ Bxb5 9.Nxc8) 8.Bxc6+ Kd8 9.Bxa8]



6...Qc8?? The wrong time to retreat!! This loses the Queen and/or the game. [Best for Black here is 6...Bxc6 with the least damage done.] **7.cxb7+ (Diagram)**



and although it took White longer than it should have to find the mate, there are no more good moves for Black. **7...Qd7 8.Bxd7+?** [8.bxa8Q#] **8...Kxd7 9.bxa8Q** [9.Ne5+ Ke6 10.Qd5+ Kf6 11.Nd7+ Kg6 12.Qg5#] **9...e6 10.Qxf8** [10.Bg5 f6 11.Ne5+ fxe5 12.c3 Nf6 13.Qa4+ Ke7 14.Q8e8#] **10...e5 11.Qd5** [11.Nxe5+ Ke6

12.Qd5+ Kf6 13.Qxf7#] 11...a6 12.Qdxf7+ [12.Nxe5#] 12...Kc6 13.Qa8+ [13.Qd5+ Kb6 14.Qb8#] 13...Kb5 14.Qfd5+ [14.Qb3+ Kc5 15.Qad5#] 14...c5 15.Qac6+ Ka5 16.Bd2# [16.Qd2#] 1-0

7. Ignoring a Threat, or Failing to Guard Against Captures (Poor Analysis / Visualization).

“There are no *hidden* moves in chess!” I always tell my students when they complain that they cannot find a good move, or that they didn’t see a particular capture or threat. The key is “visualization,” or the ability to imagine what the board will look like after a move (or series of moves). Visualization is a learned “skill” that one may practice and develop. It is the heart of accurate analysis.

After the first few moves, potential captures and threats will exist all over the board, but they must be “looked for.” This condition will usually continue until most of the pieces have been eliminated, well into the endgame. Some captures signify a turning point by seizing the initiative, gaining an advantage in material, or creating a superior position. It is essential to be aware of the direct threat of a capture, even the ones which seem foolish and well guarded.

Direct captures are usually the most obvious threats and the easiest to detect. Many other threats...

...“are harder to see than captures. Some moves threaten checkmate, some threaten captures, some involve a general improvement in position. Some threats are crude, brutal, obvious. Others are unbelievably subtle in their intentions, refined in their execution. Some threats are sound and directed toward winning the game. Others are based on a foolish idea and will prove disastrous for the player who has devised them. Some threats are

irresistible, others can be topped by a stronger threat.”

-- Fred Reinfeld, *The Complete Chess Course*, 1953

Even when possible captures are reduced, simple and complex threats may still be plentiful. Of course when your opponent makes what looks like an error you must check it out thoroughly. Do not “outsmart yourself” by assuming that a seeming blunder is a trap. If you cannot “detect” the trap you *must* try to exploit the mistake. If it *is* a trap you will find out (and get a chess lesson)... but, if it *is not* and you *don't* take advantage, it may be too late.

Let us look at a relatively simple example (get out your board if you can’t visualize very well yet) known as Legall’s Mate:

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 d6 (Philidor’s Defense)
3.Bc4 Bg4 pinning White’s Knight 4.Nc3 g6?
5.Nxe5! Bxd1?? 6.Bxf7+! Ke7 (forced)
7.Nd5#!!

A beautiful example of a “relative” pin (see No. 6, above), poor visualization and faulty analysis. How did it happen? After Black pinned the knight on f3, a rather routine move, he falsely assumed that it was immobilized and he ignored its threat to capture the pawn on e5 with a double attack on the pawn at f7. Even after White captured the pawn Black didn’t pause to assess the threat and ask himself the key questions (see No. 1, above). If he had, he might have played 5. ... dxe5 (capturing the knight) and only have been down a pawn (after 6. Qxg4).

8. Thoughtless, or Impulsive, Pawn Snatching.

Since a material advantage is usually the deciding factor in a game of chess, you should always keep your eyes out for undefended pieces and pawns. However, the seemingly unprotected, or “hanging,” pawn may be “poisoned.”

“A pawn offered as bait, the capture of which leads to trouble either because of a hidden trap or the time wasted capturing it... To capture a poisoned pawn a player often has to [1] position a capturing unit, [2] play a second move taking the pawn, then [3] play another move or two to extricate the capturing unit (possibly the queen) for consolidation. The loss of three or four tempi often leads to an untimely end.”

-- Bruce Pandolfini, *Chess Thinking*, 1995

There are other ways that pawn grabbing could be a mistake. They are often related to earlier “bad moves” discussed here that neglect development. For example, development of the queen too early in order to capture a pawn or two (Nos. 2 & 5). Capturing pawns who’s absence opens up files or diagonal lines of attack for your opponent (Nos. 4 & 7) can also be bad, whether opening the center before you have castled or opening the files and diagonals that lead to your king after castling.

9. Useless, or Weakening, Exchanges.

In a normal game there are many opportunities to make even exchanges of pawns or pieces. How do you tell the difference between an exchange that is useful, or necessary, and one that is not? This is often a problem with players of intermediate strength, as well as with beginners. There are some exchanges which are particularly harmful and yet quite common with beginners. Initiating the exchange of a well developed bishop for the enemy knight which it pins (or threatens to pin) is a good example. This often allows your opponent to recapture with development, while reducing the number of your active pieces. International Grandmaster Arthur Bisguier has addressed this subject very well in his pamphlet “Ten Tips To Winning Chess” (1984)

“As a general rule, if material is even and if you have the *“initiative”*

(your pieces are better developed, and you're controlling the game), try not to exchange men *unless it increases your advantage in some clear way* [emphasis added]. On the other hand, if your opponent has the initiative even exchanges of his attacking forces might take the pressure off. The fewer men each player has, the weaker the attacking player's threats become, and the easier it is for the defending side to meet these threats.

Another time not to trade pieces with even material is when your opponent has a cramped position with little space for the pieces to maneuver. It's tough to move a lot of pieces around in a cramped position, but easier to move just a few.”

However if it is *your* position that is cramped, trading may be a way to relieve the congestion. GM Bisguier continues:

“One sort of advantage you can often gain by trading pieces is a weakening of your opponent's pawn structure. If, for example, you can capture [with] a piece that your opponent can only recapture ... in a way that will give him *“doubled pawns,”* [and/or *“isolated pawns,”* or will expose the enemy's castled king,]... it will often be to your advantage to make that trade.

The player who is ahead in material will usually benefit from trades. It's sort of like [a team sport;] five players will sometimes have trouble scoring against four opposing players, but take away three [more] from each side and the stronger team will find it easier to score with two players against one.

So, to summarize: It's usually good to trade pieces if your opponent has the initiative, if you have a cramped position, if you can weaken your opponent's pawn structure, or if you are

ahead in material.”

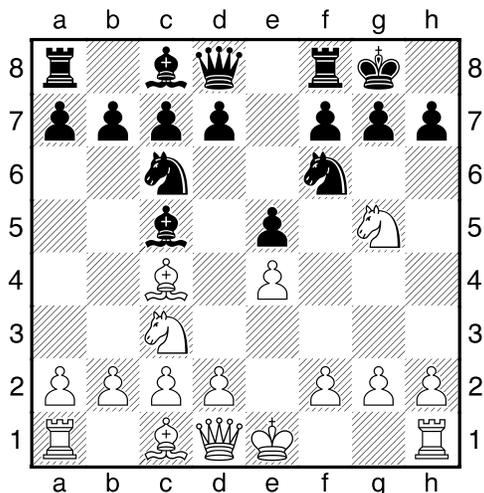
Conversely it's generally “bad” to trade pieces if you have the initiative, if your opponent has a cramped position, if it will weaken your pawn structure, or if you are behind in material.

Similar guidelines may be observed about pawn trades. It is “bad” to exchange center pawns (“opening” the game) if your king is uncastled and exposed in the center. However, it may be good to open the game with such exchanges if your opponent’s king has not yet castled and you have. Pawn trades which allow the un-doubling of your opponent’s pawns, unblocking of his “bad” bishops, or opening of other lines of attack for his pieces are to be avoided (and vice-versa). As always, there will be exceptions to any guidelines, but considering them carefully can bring you increased success.

Here is an example of a useless trade commonly seen in beginners’ games.

Student v. Student [C55] 1998

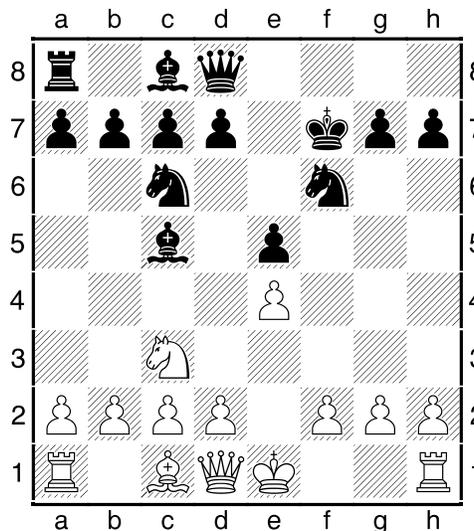
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.Nc3 Nf6 5.Ng5? 0–0 (Diagram)



In this position White has already moved his Knight twice (hoping to capture the f7 pawn and “fork” Black’s Queen and Rook. Black, however, saw the threat and castled preventing the fork.. At this point in the game White has three pieces and a Pawn developed, as does

Black. In addition Black has castled and achieved a slight advantage in development.

6.Bxf7+ Rxf7 7.Nxf7 Kxf7 (Diagram)



After these exchanges White’s development is weakened. He now has only one piece and one pawn developed to Black’s three pieces and a pawn. Black’s superior development gives him a temporary advantage and may lead to eventual victory if he continues correctly.

10. Losing, or Drawing, a “Won Game” (Losing Your Focus / Overconfidence).

“... threats are the most dangerous when they are devised by an opponent who seems to have a lost game. When victory seems within your grasp is just the time when you are most likely to underestimate the other player’s resources. ‘Simple’ positions, too, are the downfall of many a player who feels that the game no longer requires careful scrutiny. Overconfidence is unquestionably the quality that leads many players to overlook their opponents’ threats.”

-- Fred Reinfeld, *The Complete Chess Course*, 1953

“There is a tendency for people to relax once they have reached a good position or to give up hope if their position is very bad. These attitudes are natural, but both lead to bad results.

Many players — even world champions — have achieved winning positions, only to lose because they relaxed too soon. Even the best position won't win by itself; you have to give it some help! In almost any position, the "losing" player will still be able to make threats. The "winning" player has to be alert enough to prevent these positions or neutralize them.

Advice: If you have a better position, watch out! One careless move could throw away your hard-won advantage. Even as you're carrying out your winning plans, you must watch out for your opponent's threats.

Conversely, if you have the worse position, don't give up! Keep making strong moves, and try to complicate the position as much as possible. If your opponent slips, you may get the chance to make a comeback. Remember: Where there's life, there's hope.

So be alert all the time, no matter what the position is like. A little bit of extra care can pay off in a big way.”

-- Arthur Bisguier, “**Ten Tips To Winning Chess**,” 1984

Masters will normally resign if down by a piece against another master. Experienced players have also all played against someone who “doesn't know when to give up.” I would like to suggest that this attitude comes from a mindset that is ill advised and may prove to be self-defeating. Almost as bad as losing a won game is “giving up,” particularly against players of less than master strength, when there may be chances for a draw. There are those who will try to tell you that you “should” resign when you are “down a piece” or in some other “lost” position. That is simply wrong! It is true that

you *may* resign at any time, and resigning to a much stronger player is a mark of respect, but there is *never* an “obligation” to resign, especially in a tournament situation. It is entirely up to the individual players.

Some players actually believe it is rude to keep playing in a hopeless situation. It is not! What *is* rude is to try and pressure an opponent into resigning if he wishes to play on! It is worth observing that a player who is not disciplined enough may sometimes lose his focus or become so frustrated with an opponent who “plays on” in a “hopeless” position that he commits “Bad Move # 10”, blundering into a draw or a loss. That is reason enough not to resign!

There are, of course, many individual mistakes (“bad moves”) made in games between beginning and intermediate players. As you improve you will naturally make fewer mistakes. But this guide (along with the “Key Questions...,” “7 Things...,” and other lessons) can help you improve more easily by allowing you to identify weaknesses in your own, and your opponents’, games. Many of the lessons in my program are based on broad general principles designed to help you analyze and understand positions and think creatively about your moves rather than “memorize” a series of specific positions or moves. It is useful to review these lessons individually, and repeatedly, and reflect on their inter-relation so that you may more easily recall and apply their principles when playing over the board.

As the number of chess “principles” that you learn grows you will find that some of them seem to conflict with others. Part of the analysis process in any position is to determine which, if any, of the principles should be applied. As always, it is assumed that there are exceptions to every chess principle. Remember, every “maxim,” or bit of advice, carries an unstated (but “understood”) addition “...*unless you have a reason to do otherwise!*” Your opponent's response will often demonstrate if your “reason” for violating a principle is unsound.