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7 THINGS TO DO IN THE FIRST 10 MOVES

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A chess game is loosely divided into three sections, known to chess players as the “opening,” the “middle-game,” and the “end-game” (often written as one word). This lesson is concerned with the “opening,” or beginning, of the game.

The starting chess board set-up represents two opposing armies facing each other across the field of battle. To begin with neither side can attack the other. As in a real battle, *the first order of business for both sides is to rapidly “deploy,” or activate, their forces* (I often tell students that their forces start out “asleep” and have to be “awakened”).

The *three main objectives* of this opening deployment are:

(1) *to develop the pieces*, particularly the minor pieces (Knights & Bishops)

(2) *to dominate and control the center* and

(3) *to protect the king* (usually by castling).

In addition players should try to threaten the enemy and to co-ordinate the minor pieces so that they work effectively together. This “opening” stage of the game usually takes about 10 to 15 moves.

More has been written about “*opening theory*,” or opening ideas, than any other phase of the game. Many of these “*openings*” have names and classification numbers (like the “*Sicilian Defense*” [B20]) that you may see when games are published for the enjoyment and study of others. These names and numbers enable players to easily identify published games that begin in the same

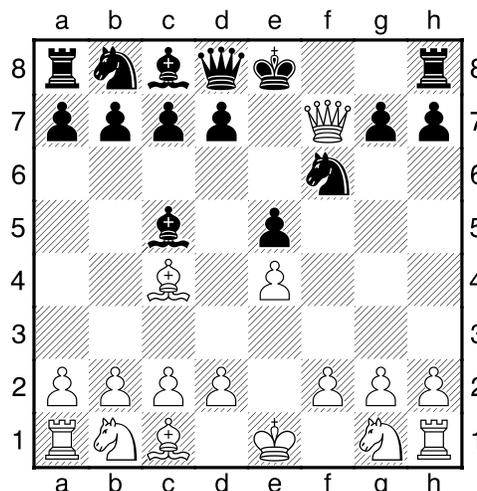
way. Many players spend a lot of their time studying and memorizing various “*opening lines*,” or sequences of moves, but for the beginning player that is not very useful.

Here is a brief game that beginners always want to memorize. It is one of several ways that players can try to get a quick checkmate against a “*novice*,” or beginner.

Scholar’s Mate

[C23] Bishop’s Opening

1.e4 e5 2.Bc4 Bc5 3.Qh5 Nf6?? 4.Qxf7#



Four Move Checkmate

Students often become attached to ideas such as the “four move checkmate” and other “quick wins.” There are a wide variety of “traps” and other interesting opening ideas which can lead the novice player to such an early win against other beginners. The trouble is they all depend on an opponent making bad mistakes in the first few moves and the moves which set the stage may, themselves, be very weak. Players should learn these openings mainly to avoid falling for them and, also, to learn to recognize the mistakes that are involved. It is especially useful to become familiar with “*The 10 Bad Moves*.”

All the standard “good” openings have certain ideas in common. While their underlying strategies do vary, understanding the common elements, or “*principles*,” is essential if one is to get through the opening successfully. They are all part of a well coordinated plan and these are the ideas that beginners should learn well, or even memorize. Recognizing when principles are being

ignored, or violated, is as important to winning as finding the “right” move. It is with this in mind that I discuss these objectives.

They are presented to you, here, as seven “developing moves,” but they are not “specific” moves to memorize. Rather, in each new game they must be seen within the wider picture, or “context,” of the entire board and the opening strategy, or plan, selected by the player. In other words, **“you have to examine your opponent’s moves as well as your own.”** Failure to do so can lead to a rapid deterioration of one’s position and loss of the game. If at the end of ten moves you have not achieved all of these goals they are usually still very important.

In brief the “7 Things...” are:

- Develop both center pawns (2)**
- Develop both knights (2)**
- Develop both bishops (2)**
- Castle (1)**

As with many “maxims,” or guidelines, “the devil is in the details.” With this in mind I will elaborate, briefly, on these developmental objectives. I will also give you several cautionary additions to these “7 Things...”

The first of these is that **“the order in which you make these moves is variable.”** This means that there is no “right order,” or that it may change with each game. However, there are lots of individual “bad moves” and the “order of moves” may be very important.

The second is that *every* chess maxim, or general principle, that you hear carries an unspoken “addendum” (something “added on” but usually unstated) **“...unless there is a good reason to do otherwise!”** That is the importance of understanding “context” (the “big picture”).

DEVELOP BOTH CENTER PAWNS!

In the first chapter of his classic book *Ideas Behind the Chess Openings*, the famous master and teacher, Reuben Fine, gives ten practical rules for opening play. The first of these is “Open with either the King’s Pawn or the Queen’s Pawn.” This is sound advice, and for inexperienced players I would add, “When playing the white pieces pick either of these and for several months

use only that opening (1. e4 or 1. d4).”

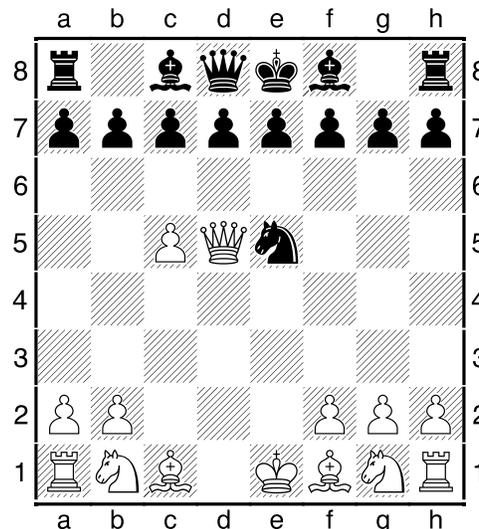
There are several reasons for this. Opening with a center pawn in this way immediately occupies one of the four center squares and controls two others. It also releases a Bishop and the Queen for future development. **Using the same opening for a long period allows you to really explore its strengths and weaknesses in depth.**

Opening with the King’s Pawn, or e-pawn, allows castling as early as the fourth move (after 2. Nf3 and 3. B-moves) and is considered the most aggressive opening move for White. The two most popular responses to 1. e4 for Black are 1. ... e5 and 1. ... c5 (the “Sicilian Defense” group), but there are others as well. I recommend picking one particular response for 1.e4 and one for 1. d4 when you are playing the black pieces for the reason given above. Opening with the d-pawn, or Queen’s Pawn, is also very popular for White and is often followed by the c-pawn as in the popular “Queen’s Gambit” opening (1. d4 d5 2. c4 ...).

The following moves from a student game demonstrate what can happen if one player ignores the early Pawn moves and the other does not (I suggest setting up a board and making the moves to really understand what happened).

Student Game [B02] Alekhine’s Defense

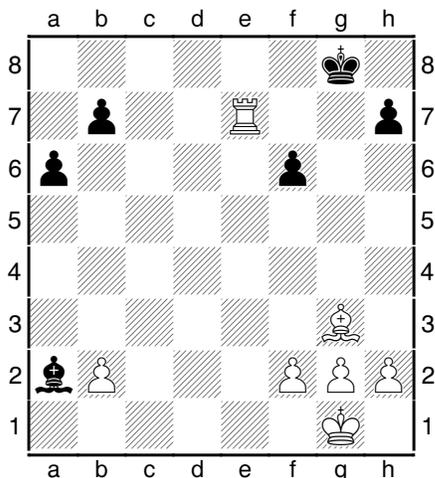
1.e4 Nf6? 2.e5 Nd5 3.c4 Nb6 4.d4 Nc6?? 5.d5 Nxe5 6.c5 Nxd5 7.Qxd5



After 7.Qxd5

Here White is ahead in both material (having captured a Knight for only two Pawns) and development (Bishops ready to go and the Queen active). Also Black has yet to move anything other than Knights.

The game continued **7...Ng6 8.Nf3 e6 9.Qd4 Qe7 10.Be3 e5 11.Qe4 Nf4??** This allows White to increase his material lead while trading pieces and moving ever closer to the endgame. **12.Qxe5 Qxe5 13.Nxe5 Nd5 14.Bd4 Be7 15.Bc4 c6? 16.Bxd5 cxd5 17.Nc3 d6 18.cxd6 Bxd6 19.Nxd5 Be6 20.Nc3 0-0 21.0-0** At last both players have castled, but White's lead is too great and continues to grow. **Rae8 22.Rfe1 Bxe5 23.Rxe5 a6 24.Bc5 f6 25.Re3 Rf7 26.Rae1 Rc7 27.Bd6 Rd7 28.Bg3 Rde7 29.Ne4 Bxa2 30.Nxf6+ gxf6 31.Rxe7 Rxe7 32.Rxe7** ...and Black's last Major piece is gone while White is ahead by a whole Rook.



After 32.Rxe7

Black resigned after a few more moves, but the game was really lost in the first seven moves. Black's weakness in the opening, particularly his failure to develop either of the two center Pawns, hurt him for the rest of the game.

Moves such as c4 in the Queen's Gambit, c5 in the Sicilian Defense, and g3 or b3 (or the corresponding Black moves) in order to place a Bishop on g2 or b2 ("*fianchetto*" the Bishop) are normal and popular. That is why ten moves are allowed for in the achievement of the seven things. The "ideal" center has pawns at d4 and e4 for white (or d5 and e5 for black) supported by the Knights and other pieces. This is also known as

the "*big center.*" You can't always get this, of course, and the middle-game often has the struggle to advance a second pawn safely to the center as part of its strategic and tactical elements.

DEVELOP BOTH KNIGHTS!

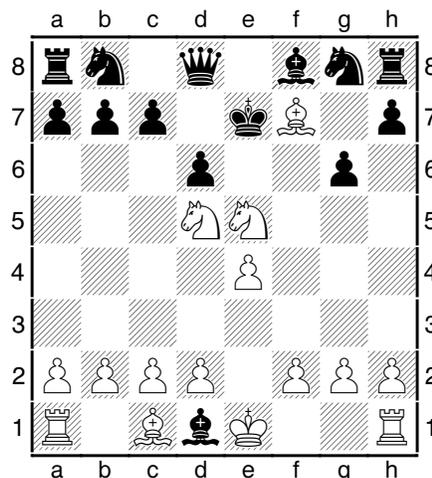
...preferably to their "best" squares, c3, f3, c6, and f6. The "center" of the board, as I use the term, consists of 16 squares. The squares d4, d5, e4, and e5 are known as "the four critical squares" (critical in this context means "most important") and they are the "heart" of the center. The twelve squares that surround them are also part of "the center."

In the following classic game Black's failure to develop his Knights and control his share of the center is one reason he lost so quickly.

Legal's Mate

[C41] Philidor's Defense

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 d6 3.Nc3 Bg4 4.Bc4 g6? 5.Nxe5 Bxd1?? 6.Bxf7+ Ke7 7.Nd5#



Legal's Mate

Controlling the center is important for two main reasons. First: through the center is often the most direct route to attack the enemy. Second: pieces which occupy the center are often made more powerful by their location. The Knights are a great example of this fact.

A piece's strength is partly a function of how many squares it "covers" (this means not just squares to which it may move, but squares which it guards or attacks as well). Knights, as the only pieces which can jump over others, are also the only pieces besides Pawns which can make the

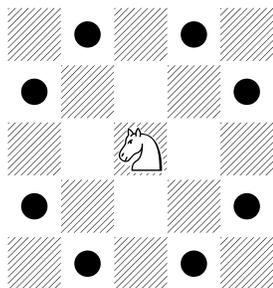
initial move of a game. At the start of the game each Knight “covers” three squares (for example the White Knight on g1 covers e2, f3, and h3).

If that Knight develops by moving to h3 it will cover four squares, an increase of one square. If it develops to e2 (after the e-Pawn has moved) it will cover six squares (c1, c3 d4, f4, g3 and g1), doubling its original coverage. But if it develops to f3 it will cover eight squares (including d4 and d5, two of the four critical squares) which is the maximum for a Knight. Therefore the f3 square is the “best” square for that Knight’s first development.

Because they *do* have a “best square” it is usually good to develop Knights before Bishops (the third of Reuben Fine's ten practical rules). It also takes a Knight more turns than a bishop to cross from one side of the board to the other so being in the center early gives him some help. Knights are also natural support pieces for pawns and others in the center.

In some positions there may be a reason to develop a Knight to a square where it supports the other Knight (such as Nbd2 to support f3), but the squares on the edge of the board are usually to be avoided like the plague. An old chess maxim says, “*A Knight on the rim is grim! His prospects are very dim!*” This is due to its much more limited scope in that position.

Most beginners are used to visualizing the Knight’s move as an L-shape. But it is more useful to “see” the entire range at once.



In the above diagram each of the black dots shows one of the eight squares to which the Knight may move. To help visualize them when looking at an actual board, you may find it helpful to think of “T”s or “Y”s (radiating north, east, south, and west). The Knight is at the base and two dots are at the outer ends of each “T” or “Y.” When located anywhere in the center of the board a Knight controls its maximum of eight squares.

As the Knight moves outside the center this number goes down until, in the corners, it is reduced to only two.

To help impress this in your mind you may place a Knight on an empty board, within the center, and place a penny on every square to which that Knight can move. While each move may indeed be described as an “L,” it is the total pattern (like a big circle around the Knight) that is important here. As you move the Knight (and the pennies) notice how the pattern changes and the Knight’s influence is diminished as he leaves the center and moves to the edge and then the corner.

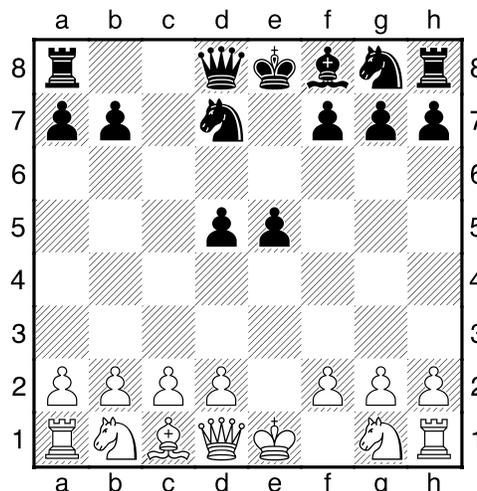
DEVELOP BOTH BISHOPS!

Bishops, unlike Knights, do not have a “best square”. The most appropriate place for a Bishop must usually be determined during the course of play. It is always a question of context. If you “*fianchetto*” your Bishop (develop to the flank squares b2, g2, b7, or g7), an additional pawn move is also required.

Notice that the center is still important, however. In its initial position a Bishop only covers two squares and is totally blocked from moving. After White moves 1.e4 the King’s Bishop, or f-Bishop, has increased its coverage from two squares to six. If it moves to c4 (in the center) it will cover ten squares.

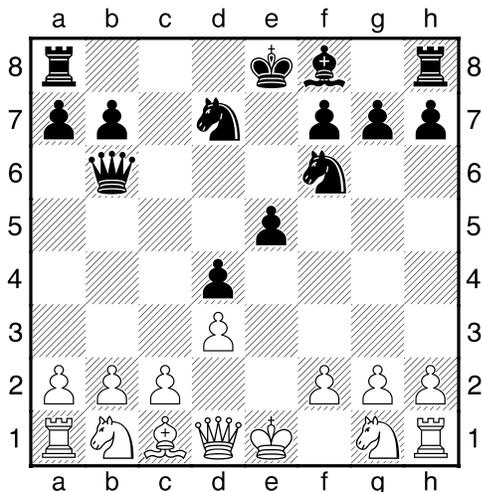
Student v. Student [C20]

- 1.e4 e5 2.Bb5? c6 3.Bc4 d5 4.exd5 cxd5
5.Bb5+ Bd7 6.Bxd7+ Nxd7



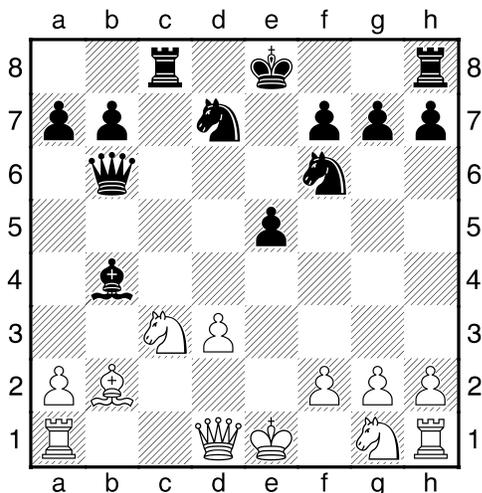
After 6...Nxd7

Black already has control in the center because of White's premature Bishop advance (2.Bb5?). He has also gained time, or "*tempos*," by developing while White has moved the same Bishop four times. **7.d3 Ngf6 8.Be3? d4 9.Bd2 Qb6 10.Bc1**



After 10.Bc1

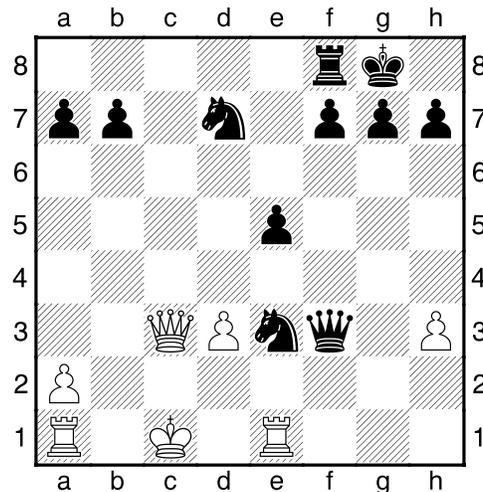
White has now moved the second Bishop three times and it is back on the same square it started from. Meanwhile Black has developed his second Knight and his Queen and advanced his center some. **10...Rc8 11.c3 Bc5 12.b4 Bd6 13.Bb2 dxc3 14.Nxc3 Bxb4**



After 14...Bxc4

White still has not developed both Knights or castled while Black is putting great pressure on the Queenside and the center, especially with his Rook on the open c-file. He is also ready to castle

when necessary. **15.Qc2?? Ng4 16.h3 Bxc3+ 17.Bxc3 Rxc3! 18.Qxc3 Qxf2+** At this point White's resistance has crumbled. Black's Queen has invaded while White's King is totally exposed. **19.Kd1** (forced) **Ne3+ 20.Kc1 0-0 21.Nf3 Qxg2 22.Re1 Qxf3** White resigned here, totally overwhelmed.



After 22...Qxf3
White Resigned

Bishops are often the first pieces to attack the King and may try to "pin" the opponent's Knights, severely limiting their capabilities. But they may also make a convenient target for your opponent to attack, particularly if they are deployed too soon or too far out. Most experienced players consider Bishops to be slightly stronger than Knights (especially *two* Bishops as opposed to two Knights in an endgame). They may be willing to trade a Knight for a Bishop in an instant but are reluctant to give up their Bishop without a really good reason.

CASTLE!

Castling is the last of the "7 Things..." It is the King's main protection in the opening. It removes him from exposure in the center and simultaneously develops one of the Rooks, preparing for the "middlegame" where players struggle to gain further advantage and bring their "major" pieces (Rooks and Queen) into play.

In the previous game, among other things, White failed to castle in a timely manor. This exposure of the King helped to hasten his demise.

However, as one of my teachers used to tell him, “Castle because you *want* to, or because you *have* to... but *not just because you can!*” There *are* times when castling may be delayed *for a reason*.

One thing to remember is “*just because you have castled doesn’t mean you no longer have to be concerned with the King’s safety.*” Once you have castled the enemy still knows where to attack. Most of the time players castle on the Kingside. It is quicker (four moves minimum) and usually more secure. When castled on the Queenside it is often necessary to move the King again in order to protect the Rook’s Pawn (“a-Pawn”). No matter which side a player castles on his opponent must eventually stage an attack, either directly or by way of the back rank, if he is to have any hope of winning.

It is more important to castle early in an “*open game*” (where center pawns have been traded creating “*open files*” for Rooks or the Queen to occupy for purposes of attack). In a “*closed game*” (where the center pawns block the files) castling may be delayed for a while but is, usually, still advisable. When castling has not taken place the Rooks are more difficult to “*connect*” (place on squares where they protect each other) and coordinate. Cooperation between Queen and Rooks may also be more difficult when castling has not taken place. Developing and connecting the Rooks may be thought of as the “8th thing.”

SOME ADDITIONAL GENERAL OPENING PRINCIPALS

There are a number of other general principles involved in the opening of a chess game. The following opening principles are well known and have been condensed from many sources:

- Develop quickly, and with a plan. There are many possible plans. Even a bad plan is often better than no plan at all. Experience will help you to create better plans as you progress. Play over master games and try to figure out what their plans were.
- Develop to get control of the center. This is the first step in many plans. If you can increase the power of your pieces by putting them on center squares where they will be

more active than your opponent’s you make it easier to launch an attack and harder for your opponent to do the same. Remember, your opponent will be trying to do the same.

- Try to develop with threats. When you threaten your opponent he may be forced onto the defensive. This may limit his good moves and allow you to increase your own power or advantage.
- Initially (at first) White has a *very slight* advantage because he moves first. This means that he can often make the first threats or attacks, forcing Black into a defensive position. When you are attacking you frequently have more choices for moves while your opponent has fewer choices. This is called having the “initiative” (you can “initiate,” or start, an attack).
- White’s opening problem is to develop and increase his advantage. White has the “initiative” by default (because he makes the first move). That is an advantage but it is not enough to win. A good chess player always seeks to increase an advantage, no matter how small it may be. The bigger the advantage, the easier it is to finally win.
- Black’s opening problem is to develop and achieve equality. Just as White seeks to increase his advantage, Black seeks to deny him that increase, and even to gain an advantage himself. At the very least Black must try to achieve and maintain positional and material equality. Positional equality usually has to do with early development (the “7 Things...”). “Material” means “the pieces and pawns.
- Try to develop with threats. If you can develop *and* attack an enemy pawn or piece at the same time that is better than “just developing” a pawn or piece. It may also limit your opponent’s development as he needs to defend against your threats.
- Two threats are better than one, three are better than two, etc. The more threats there are, the harder it is for an opponent to defend against them all. This is why “tactics” such as “forks,” “skewers,” and “discovered attacks,” are so powerful.

- Seize, or maintain the “initiative” by the use of threats. Having the initiative may be compared to being on “offense” in a sports competition. It is usually the team which is on offense that has an opportunity to score. In sports such as basketball, football, and soccer the team which is on offense may change in an instant as the ball is intercepted when passed, or even dropped, or “fumbled,” by a player. In chess the threat of a strong move, capture, or check/checkmate may produce a change in who has the initiative, or keep the “offense” going longer.
- Don't develop your Queen too early (“Bad Move # 2”). What is *too* early?. For a more complete discussion of this see the lesson on the “10 Bad Moves.”
- Become aware of “tempo.” In music, tempo is the “beat.” In chess it's the alternation of turns and moves (like a beat... tick, tock, White moves, Black moves). It's very important in the opening when pieces are being rapidly developed (awakened) and time is important. In the student game back on page 4 of this lesson Black was able to get an early lead by his ability to “steal” tempos from White. Tempo is also extremely important in many endgame positions.
- Don't move the same piece twice in the opening (“Bad Move # 3”), if you can help it. This may result in a loss of tempo. It can happen because an error of placement allows your opponent to chase, or “kick,” your piece (forcing a second move), or because you don't really know where you want your piece in the first place. For a more complete discussion of this see the lesson on the “10 Bad Moves.”
- Don't make too many pawn moves, or useless pawn moves (“Bad Move # 3”). While it may not fully qualify as losing a tempo it does mean neglecting the “7 Things...” For a more complete discussion of this see the lesson on the “10 Bad Moves.”
- Don't exchange without a good reason (“Bad Move # 9”). What *are* some good reasons? If you must exchange, try to develop a piece. For a more complete discussion of this see the lesson on the “10 Bad Moves.” Don't rely on

traps but be aware of them. Opening traps often rely on an opponent's making a bad move in response to an otherwise weak move by the person setting the trap. If the opponent knows the trap, or finds a good response, the trap may backfire.

- Always assume your opponent will find the best reply. If he doesn't, by all means take advantage of his mistake. But never make a weak move hoping for a bad response that will let you win. That's an invitation to disaster.
- In open positions King safety is “paramount” (the most important thing). An “*open game*” is where center pawns have been traded creating “*open files*” (which are like highways across the board) for Rooks and the Queen to occupy for purposes of attack.
- Your main task in the opening *is to reach a playable middlegame*. It is *not* to “win,” although if your opponent gives you a chance, by all means take it. Remember: “Any disadvantage you suffer in the opening may continue throughout the rest of the game.”

Relative Strengths/Values of the Pieces:

	Pawn = 1 pawn	
	Knight = 3 pawns	   = 
	Bishop = 3 pawns	   = 
	Rook = 5 pawns	     =    =   
	Queen = 9	         =    =    , etc.
	King = 2	  in strength, but <u>everything</u> in terms of “value.”

Players use these values to help determine which side is stronger and whether an “exchange,” or trade, of two pieces is good. Many experienced players believe that a Knight is worth “just a bit” more than three pawns (3+) and that a Bishop is also just a bit more than a Knight (3++). There are many reasons for this but it is not something for beginners to be concerned about.

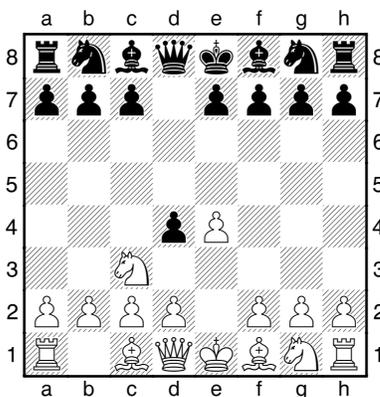
It is not enough to memorize the values given above, but it is a good start. As players gain

experience they become aware of other things that affect, or change, the strength or “value” of a piece. Some players just “like” one piece better than another and don’t want to give it up (even for a more valuable piece). Things that can affect the strength or value of a pawn or piece include its good or poor placement (affecting coverage), mobility (how easily it can move), cooperation with other pieces, etc. Part of the challenge in chess is to make moves which increase the power of your own pieces while decreasing the power of your opponent’s pieces. Exchanging your less powerful piece for an opponent’s more powerful piece can help you win by increasing the relative strength of your total army when compared to that of your opponent.

Here is a game illustrating some elementary opening mistakes:

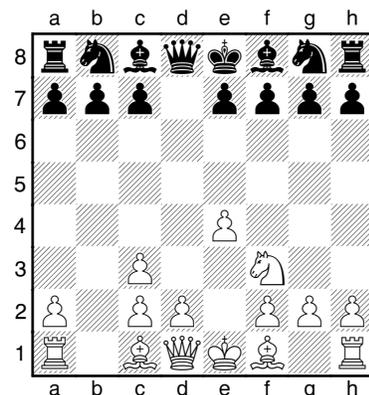
Student v. Coach [A00] 2002

1.Nc3? Although technically one of the "7 Things..." this development is rarely seen on the first move except in beginner play. **1...d5** Protected by Black's Queen, this center pawn controls the center, releases the Queen's Bishop, and threatens to attack the White Knight. **2.e4?** Order of moves is important! This would have been a terrific first move but now it is a mistake which allows Black to go on offense and gain the initiative. [Best would be 2.d4 blocking Black's pawn and controlling the center.] **2...d4 (Diagram)** Black "kicks" the White Knight.

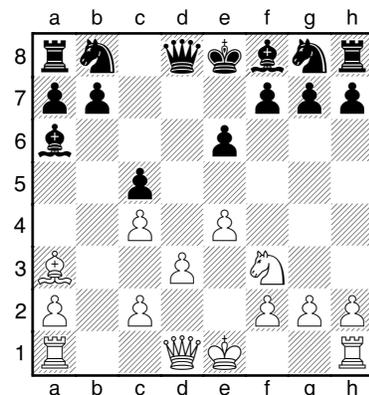


3.Nf3?? Moving too fast and ignoring the threat! [Best is 3.Nce2 e5=] **3...dxc3 4.bxc3 (Diagram)** and, despite White's advantage in

development, Black has a winning material advantage already.

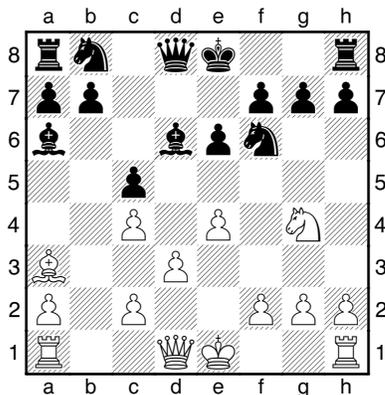


4...c5 Seeking some control in the center. **5.Bb5+?** A "useless" check with no follow-up. [5.Bc4 would be more solid.] **5...Bd7** Black is willing, or eager, to trade pieces due to his advantage. **6.Ba3??** Another blunder that loses a piece. [Stronger is 6.Qe2 but Black remains ahead.] **6...Bxb5 7.d3?** [Better is 7.Bxc5 Qc7 8.Be3 e5 but Black is still winning, and developing!] **7...e6** controlling the center and releasing the dark-squared Bishop to develop and protect c5. **8.c4?** Black's Bishop is not a threat here. [Strongest is 8.0-0 Qa5 9.Bb2 c4 10.d4 but Black's advantage is already too great.] **8...Ba6 (Diagram)** [Even better is the sacrifice offer 8...Bxc4 9.0-0 (NOT 9.dxc4 Qa5+ 10.Qd2 Qxa3) 9...Ba6—+ Picking up another pawn.]

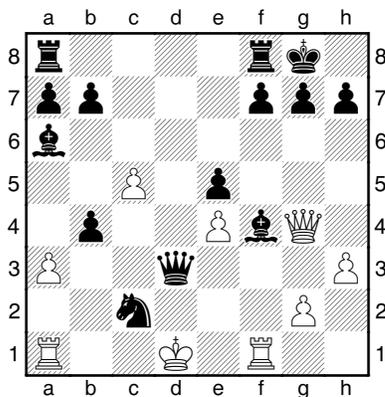


9.Ne5?? A useless gesture that should lose more material. [Best is 9.0-0 protecting the King and removing the threat of ...Qa5+ (forking the Bishop).] **9...Bd6?** Black moves too fast, missing a chance. [Best is 9...Qa5+

10.Qd2 Qxa3 11.0–0 Bd6] **10.Ng4?** [10.Bb2
Tries to solve two problems at once, but can't
overcome Black's advantage. 10...Qf6 11.f4
Qxf4–+] **10...Nf6? (Diagram)** Black, focusing
on development, misses the best move again.
[10...Qa5+ etc.]



11.f4? [11.0–0] **11...Bxf4?** [11...Qa5+ etc.]
12.Bb4?? [12.0–0] **12...cxb4** **13.c5?** [13.0–0]
13...Nc6 **14.Rf1** White's repeated failure to
castle now brings the game to a rapid close.
[14.0–0] **14...e5** [14...Nxc4 15.Rxf4 Ne3
16.Qd2–+] **15.a3 0–0** No longer necessary.
[15...Nxc4 16.Qxc4 Qd4] **16.h3??** The game
is lost anyway. [16.Nxf6+ gxf6 17.g3–+]
16...Bg3+ 17.Kd2 Nxc4 In the heat of battle
Black misses the pinned d-pawn. [17...Nxe4+
18.Kc1 Qd4 19.Nf6+ Nxf6 20.Rb1 bxa3 21.c3
Qxc5] **18.Qxc4 Bf4+ 19.Ke2 Nd4+ 20.Ke1
Nxc2+ 21.Kd1 Qxd3# (Diagram) 0–1**



Although, technically, the game lasted 21
moves, in actuality it was lost after the first three
moves and by the sixth move, barring some major
mistake by Black, there was no way for White to

recover. White's failure to castle also contributed
to the quickness of the checkmate.

How to Learn an Opening (the C&O Way)

After teaching for just a few years I realized
that most beginner and intermediate players go
about trying to learn an opening by memorizing
moves, a way that is not very useful. It was at that
time I began to develop the approach that has led
to the present "7 Things To Do in the First 10
Moves." This method relies on learning general
principles rather than specific moves.

It has served its purpose well for thirty years,
reaching its published form almost a decade ago.
However, at some point many students still want
to "learn" an opening. To this end I have, in the
last few years, tried to develop an approach that is
both fun and interesting, and avoids having to
study books of endless dry variations and the
"memorizing" of hundreds of "lines."

Here are some important points to remember
about playing, or learning, an opening:

The purpose of the opening is NOT "*to win!*"

The *purpose* of the opening is *to get to the
middle-game without being at a disadvantage!*

However,... IF your opponent makes a
mistake in the opening, then of course you should
take advantage to the fullest!

*When you lose it's ALWAYS because you
made a mistake (usually more than one)!*

*When you win it's ALWAYS because your
opponent made a mistake and you took
advantage!*

It's important to learn essential opening
strategy and tactics in order to do them, *but
equally important to learn the common mistakes
in order to avoid them and to recognize them
when made by others!*

The first step toward "learning" a specific
opening (for advanced beginners and intermediate
players) is to make sure that you can read and
write chess notation well. Then determine what

openings you actually use by recording several games and researching their names. This can be done by consulting one of the many general opening books, such as MCO (Modern Chess Openings) or ECO (Encyclopedia of Chess Openings), by searching online chess sites like www.chessville.com, or by asking an experienced player to look at your first few moves and tell you the name of your opening.

Next get hold of some short master games (25 moves or less) using that opening and start playing over them. I recommend short games at first because you are primarily interested in learning the opening moves and short games usually have identifiable mistakes that help you learn what *not* to do as well as what *to* do. You may collect such games from a number of sources. Computer programs such as Chessmaster and Fritz contain large databases which can be searched and from which games may be downloaded and copied. Many internet sites do as well. Chess books and magazines also contain a wealth of games although it may take a little longer to find them. At C&O we have prepared a number of individual “opening study” sheets for student use.

Play over a lot of the games once or twice at first. You will begin to see which moves are common to the opening (and that there are variations within every opening). Then, as you play the games over a third and fourth time, begin to ask: “Why did White (or Black) make that particular move?” “What is Black’s (or White’s) plan?” “Whose plan do I like better?” “Would I be comfortable playing White’s or Black’s position?”

It is important to develop openings with which you are comfortable. When you find one (and there may be different ones depending on whether you are playing the White or Black side) begin to build a collection of such games for study. It is also important to record as many of your own games using that opening as possible. Now begin to compare your moves to those found in your collected games and in a general opening book (MCO, ECO, etc.). Where they differ, try to figure out if, and why, the “book” move is better (if you think it really is).

With experience you will begin to understand why some moves are better than others. As your games last longer you will also discover that the different openings lead to different types of

middle-game and endgame positions. You may want to study individual books on an opening that you feel really drawn to. That is fine, but don’t neglect to play over games using other openings just because they’re new to you.

There are some excellent books for beginners that survey a variety of openings to try. For the more advanced student Reuben Fine’s *The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings* is a good general introduction.

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