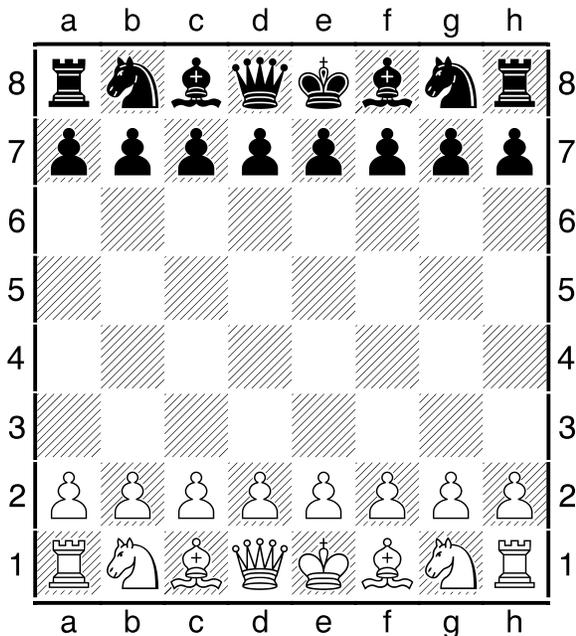


Descriptive Chess Notation

Before there was “algebraic” notation (the “standard” of today), using letter/number coordinates, there was “descriptive” notation. This notation was in general use for many years before algebraic notation became the standard. Many older books and some players still use this notation and it is, therefore, still very useful to know. When a chessboard is initially set up it looks like this (standard algebraic coordinates shown).



With descriptive notation the files are named for the pieces which stand on them at the beginning of the game. The names of the pieces are usually abbreviated like this: K = king; Q = queen; R = rook; B = bishop; and N (or Kt) = knight (N replaced Kt to avoid confusion), and P = pawn. i.e. the “a” file is the queen’s rook (QR) file, “b” file is the queen’s knight (QN) file, and so forth. c = QB file; d = Q file; e = K file; f = KB file; g = KN file; h = KR file.

The ranks are numbered from either side of the board, depending on who’s move it is. White counts from his side as in the following diagram:

8	White’s eighth rank
7	
6	
5	
4	
3	
2	
1	White’s first rank

Black counts from his own side as seen below:

1	Black’s first rank
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	Black’s eighth rank

It is a little more complicated than the standard (algebraic) notation because every square has two names.

The symbols used are mostly the same with a few exceptions. Pawn moves begin with P, and a dash (-) means “moves to.”

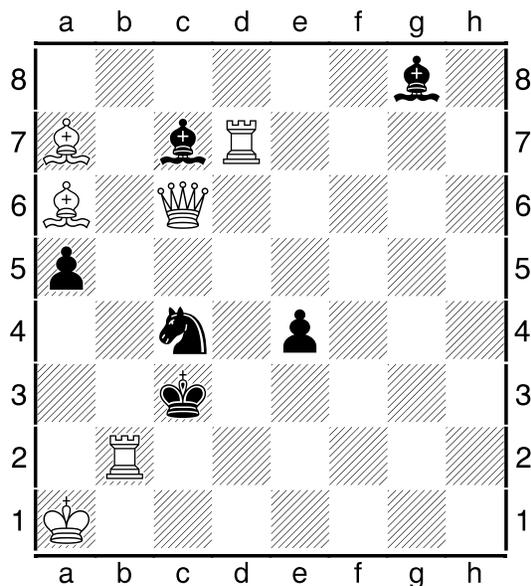
Here is a brief sample game:

- | White | Black |
|----------------------|----------------|
| 1. P-K4 (e4) | P-K4 (e5) |
| 2. Kt-KB3 (Nf3) | P-Q3 (d6) |
| 3. Kt-B3 (Nc3) | B-Kt5 (Bg4) |
| 4. B-B4 (Bc4) | P-KN3? (g6) |
| 5. Kt x P (Nxe5) | B x Q?? (Bxd1) |
| 6. B x P ch (Bxf7+) | K-K2 (Ke7) |
| 7. Kt-Q5 mate (Nd5#) | |

Forsythe Notation

(FEN for PGN computer files)

Forsythe notation is a very handy way to record a board position quickly and accurately. It is extremely useful if you have to adjourn a game and you haven't been recording the moves (or have been but want to verify the actual position). Always remember to indicate whose move it is in the position recorded.



Sample Position
White to Move (Mate in 2)

There are two main ways to write this notation. The first requires eight lines. Here it is shown for the sample position above:

6b1
B1bR4
B1Q5
p7
2n1p3
2k5
1R6
K7

White to move.

The second is called FEN notation (used also for computer recording) which I use in printed situations, as it is more compact (being all on one or two lines). Here is the same position as that given above:

6b1/B1bR4/B1Q5/p7/2n1p3/2k5/1R6/K7
White to move.

Reading/Writing Forsythe notation:

Start from the top (black) side of the board and go one rank at a time with the ranks separated by a slash “/.” From left to right you simply read/record the number of empty squares and pieces, using lower-case letters for black and upper-case (capitals) for white.

In the above example the top rank (rank 8) starts with 6 empty squares, followed by a black bishop (lower-case b), followed by 1 more empty square. A slash “/” starts the next rank (rank 7) with a white Bishop (upper-case B), 1 empty square, a black bishop, a white Rook, then 4 empty squares. ... and so on, for the next 6 ranks. Each rank must total 8 squares.

Sample Position Solution 1. Qb5 (Threatening Qb3#) 1. ... Ne5 (if 1. ... Nb6 2. Qxa5#) (if 1. ... Nd6 2. Qe5#) (if 1. ... Nxb2 2. Qxb2#) 2. Bd4#

Another common way to record a position (also seen in some books to verify the diagram) is to list each piece like this:

White: Ka1 Qc6 Rs d7 b2 Bs a7 a6
Black: Kc3 Bs g8 c7 Nc4 Ps a5 e4
 White to move.

However, it is easy to miss a piece if you don't “read” every rank or file while writing. It also requires more space when the board is crowded. For these reasons I prefer the simpler Forsythe notation for recording most positions.

Figurine Algebraic Notation

Figurine Algebraic Notation (FAN) is used in many international publications where the initials for pieces are different for each country. Here is Legal's Mate in FAN.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 d6 3.♘c3 ♕g4 4.♕c4 g6?
5.♘xe5 ♕xd1?? 6.♕xf7 ♔e7 7.♘d5#