

The Ten-Move Game

A game of chess may have three phases: the “opening” (where players develop their pieces and seek control of the center), the “middle-game” (where strategy and tactics predominate), and the “end-game” (when many pieces have already been lost and the emphasis may shift to promoting a pawn or creating a mate). Checkmate, or resignation, may occur during any of these phases.

However, over the years it has become clear that with students rated under Level 6 (USCF or Club-rating 600) a majority of games are actually “lost” in the first ten moves, that is, during the “opening.” What do I mean? I mean that one player makes a mistake(s) serious enough to allow the other player to achieve a material advantage of 3 points or more. Even though the game may continue for many more moves before checkmate occurs, such an imbalance should give one player a permanent handicap and the other a permanent advantage (even if no further serious errors are made).

The reason for this happening is simple. Most players at these levels lack a clear understanding of opening principles and also move too fast. To aide in overcoming these faults we teach the opening principles embodied in our guide “*Seven Things to Do in the First Ten Moves*,” and also the errors discussed in the guide “*The Ten Bad Moves*.” Both of these are available as downloads on our website.

With the above observations in mind I developed the simple idea of a “Ten-move game” as a classroom technique to begin introducing the basic concepts of “game analysis” and the importance of “opening theory.”

A “ten-move game” may be the start of a regular ladder game, or a self-contained unit. It is *always* written down, both to keep track of the number of moves and for the analysis of the opening moves. The term “ten-move game” is actually not quite accurate as it may last a little longer or shorter (see below). Its main purpose is to focus the student on the “opening” phase of the game and its rules are the rules of chess with these simple additions:

1. If, at the end of ten moves, one player is clearly ahead by five points, or more, he wins (with one half of the normal rating value).

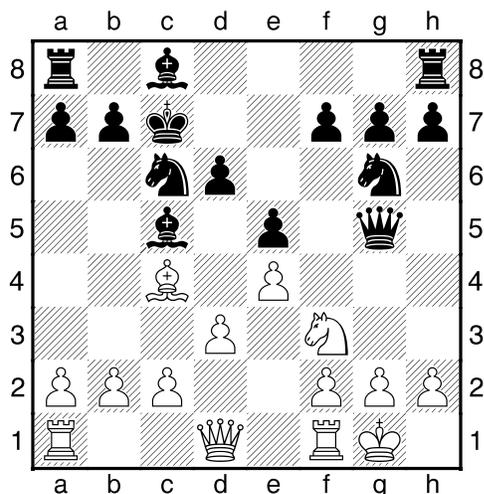
2. If a player is ahead by three or four points the player on the weaker side may decide to resign or elect to play on (again with one half of the normal rating value).

3. If the position is equal, or neither player is more than two points ahead, the game should continue as a regular game.

The above point spreads should be less for players rated 600 or higher.

Ten moves is an arbitrary number chosen because it is the number used in our opening guide “*Seven Things To Do in the First Ten Moves*.” In practice the game may be a little longer (or shorter). For example, if, after exactly ten moves, the following position is reached, counting the points reveals that Black is ahead by exactly five points (Black has captured a

Knight and a Bishop while White has captured only a Pawn).



After 10...Qxg5. White to move.

However it does not take a grandmaster to notice that White may capture Black's Queen on the next move (11.Nxg5), thereby putting White ahead by four points. In this case (following rule two) Black may elect to resign (losing only half the normal points), or play on for another ten moves if he so wishes (as a regular game).

The game may be checked by the players in this fashion every ten moves, or so, (especially if time is short). For players of level 6 or higher a good rule of thumb for the weaker side is "...if you have played ten moves with a deficit of five points, or more, or if you can see no way to recover the material you have lost, you should resign". However, if you can see an opportunity to regain material, or to complicate the position with threats and attacks, you should probably not resign. The option of resigning is always the choice of the individual player except in the first ten moves as stated above.

A ten-move game may be used as a "warm-up" with any opponent before class when one's scheduled opponent is not

there. Unfinished games of less than ten moves will not count.

Every regularly scheduled game contains a "ten-move game" within it. While not counting as a whole game, players may find it useful to reinforce the importance of the three strategic goals in the opening: 1) piece development; 2) King safety; and 3) control of the center.

Experienced tournament players often mark their scoresheets in ten move intervals to help them use their time wisely. For example: knowing that an average game lasts from forty to sixty moves, a player with 30 minutes on his clock may want to take a whole 5 minutes (or more) for his first 10 moves. Since the game becomes more complex after a successful opening, many players want to allow more time for the next ten.

As a general rule you are better off if you use more time early (entering the middle- or end-game with a material advantage but less time) than having more time later but a material disadvantage. From the use of ten-move games you will develop the habit of careful play in the opening and maybe improve your time-management skills as well.

An interesting exercise is to look at the first ten moves of master games and see if anyone had an advantage. In most cases the answer will be no! If someone did, see if that is who eventually won the game. Then do the same kind of analysis of your own games. When someone is ahead after ten moves can you spot the error(s) that allowed the advantage. Remember: "When you lose, it's *always* because you made an error."