

**chapter**

**1**

# **An Introduction to Chess**

Welcome to the game of chess. Like most games, chess has some very basic rules. Once you learn and understand those basics, you will be able to play against others, and you will be able to play through and enjoy the great matches that chess masters have played through time. In this chapter, I introduce the chessboard, how to set it up to start a game, how each piece moves, and how to begin play. I also give you the basics on chess notation, showing you the “shorthand” used in the chess world (and in this book) to indicate each move a player makes.

A background image showing various chess pieces (king, queen, rook, bishop, knight, pawn) on a chessboard, rendered in a light, semi-transparent style.

<b>Getting Started</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Viewing the Chessboard</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Introducing the Pieces</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Setting Up the Board</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>How the King Moves and Captures</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>How Rooks Move and Capture</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>How Bishops Move and Capture</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>How the Queen Moves and Captures</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>How Knights Move and Capture</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>How Pawns Move and Capture</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Chess Notation</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Protect Your Pieces</b> .....	<b>19</b>

# Getting Started

Chess is an ancient game of war first invented and played in China or India more than 1,000 years ago. Over time, the rules have changed, but chess remains a game of strategy and skill that continues to excite players young and old. The names of the pieces bring to mind the origins of the game—a battle. Imagine soldiers on foot with the pawns leading the charge. Imagine the cavalry on horseback; the Knights jumping into battle. Imagine the general or the King with the Queen at his side. In many battles of yore, when the King died the battle would end. And so it is in the game of chess.

Chess is played between two players who sit on opposite sides of a “chessboard.” Each player takes command of a “white” or “black” army of 16 units always arranged in the same way at the start of the game. By rule, the player with the white pieces always begins the game. The players alternate moves until one player attacks the enemy King in such a way that the King cannot escape. We call that checkmate.

Many people believe that you have to be a genius to be good at chess. Being really smart helps at most things, but success in chess requires familiarity with the rules and some basic strategy, as well as practice. This book will help you to get started and to feel comfortable sitting down and playing a real game. Know that everyone starts out as a beginner.

To get the most out of this book and your chess experiences, I recommend that you buy or borrow a chessboard and a chess set to play along as you read this book. Many people have very artistic sets. Those are fine for display, but when you review the material in this book and when you play, you will want to have a standard set much like the one depicted in this book. They are not very expensive and easy to find in stores and on the Internet. If you are having trouble finding a standard set, go to the U.S. Chess Federation’s website at [www.uschess.org](http://www.uschess.org).



Chess is played on a board with 64 squares. To make it easier to view the board and move the pieces, the board has alternating light and dark squares. As you will see, it is useful to think of the board in terms of its *ranks*, *files*, and *diagonals*.

### The Chessboard Setup

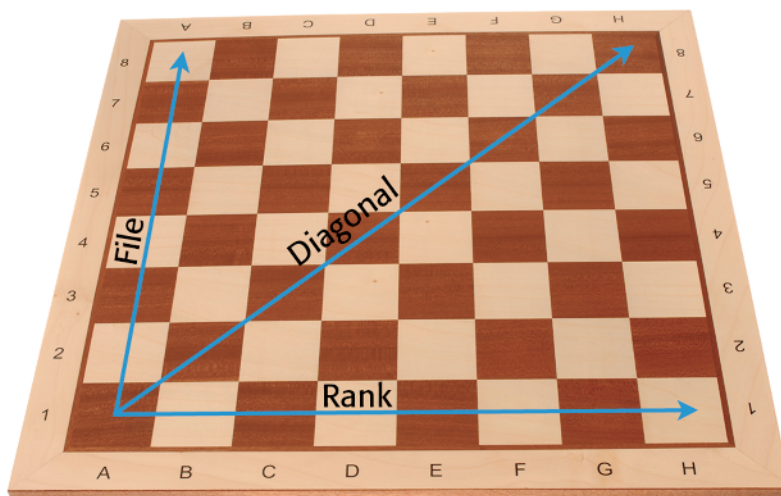
This chessboard is typical of those on which you will play. To set up the board correctly, place it so that a dark square is in the lower-left corner. Or, as chess players like to say, "It's white on the right."

Some boards are labeled with letters (a–h) and numbers (1–8) in the margins. Others are blank. It is perfectly fine to play with a board that does not have these letters and numbers in the margins. They are there to help you talk about the board, to name each square, and to emphasize certain features. In this book, we use a labeled board so you can easily identify the pieces and moves discussed.

For example, every board has eight *ranks* (rows) and eight *files* (columns). The 1st rank consists of the eight squares directly in front of you. The 8th rank contains the eight squares that are farthest from you. As you can see, ranks are horizontal. Try to visualize each rank in turn: the 2nd rank, the 3rd rank, and so on.

Files are vertical. The eight squares on the left side of the board are called the *a-file*. The eight squares on the right side of the board are called the *h-file*.

The alternating colors of the squares are another wonderful visual aid. For the moment, simply note that there are alternating light and dark squares and light and dark diagonals. As you will soon see, some pieces move along the ranks and files, while others move diagonally.





# Introducing the Pieces

Your chess “team” is made up of five types of pieces: one King, one Queen, two Bishops, two Knights, and two Rooks. Each player also has eight pawns. The pieces can look different from chess set to chess set, but you will always be playing with these same chessmen.



## The Five Types of Pieces

The King is truly the most important piece because you lose the game if your King is attacked and cannot escape. Kings are abbreviated with the letter K.



The Queen is considered the most powerful piece in terms of its ability to move around the board. Each player has one at the beginning of the game, though you will see, it's possible to get more! Queens are abbreviated with the letter Q.



Bishops usually have a nice, tapered appearance. At the beginning of the game, each player starts with two Bishops. They are abbreviated with the letter B.



Knights, like the cavalry, can jump into action. Each player starts with two Knights. They are abbreviated with the letter N.



Rooks are sometimes called towers or castles because they resemble the tower of a castle. Each player starts with two of them. They are abbreviated with the letter R.

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# Introducing the Pieces *(continued)*

## The Pawns

The pawns are the smallest unit on the chessboard. They can seem small and unimportant, but they are often very useful in helping to control territory and to launch attacks on your opponent.



Pieces and Pawns at a Glance			
<i>Pieces and Pawns</i>		<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>How They Move</i>
King	 	K	One square in any direction, but never into a square controlled by an enemy piece.
Queen	 	Q	One or more squares in any direction.
Rook	 	R	One or more squares horizontally or vertically.
Bishop	 	B	One or more squares along the diagonals.
Knight	 	N	Like the letter L. The Knight is the only piece that can “jump” over other pieces and pawns.
Pawns	 	—	Forward, one square at a time. Pawns capture diagonally ahead one square. Pawns that have never moved have the option of moving forward two squares.

The chessboard setup for the start of a game is always the same. In fact, one of the great charms of chess is that you start from the same position as others have done for centuries.

### Where to Place the Pieces

The Rooks begin the game in the corners. The Knights (many beginning players call them horses) are next. The Bishops start the game next to the Knights. Finally, the Queen and King fill in the remaining squares on the 1st and 8th ranks. The Queen will always start on its own color. Note that the white Queen is on a white square. The black Queen is on a dark square.

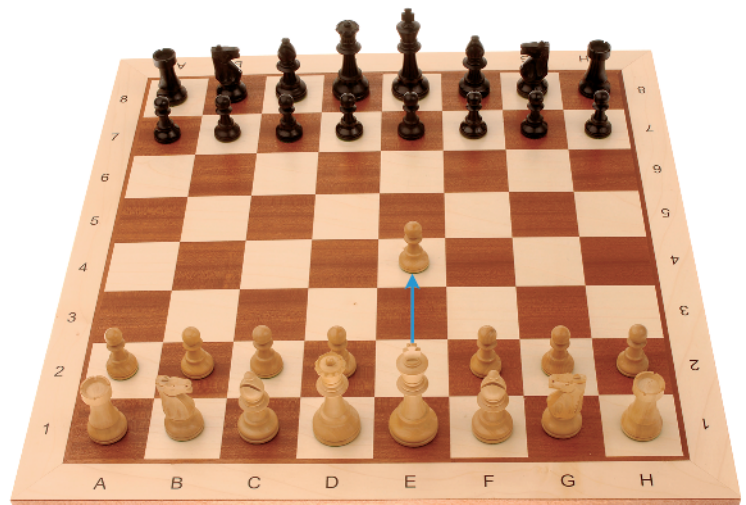
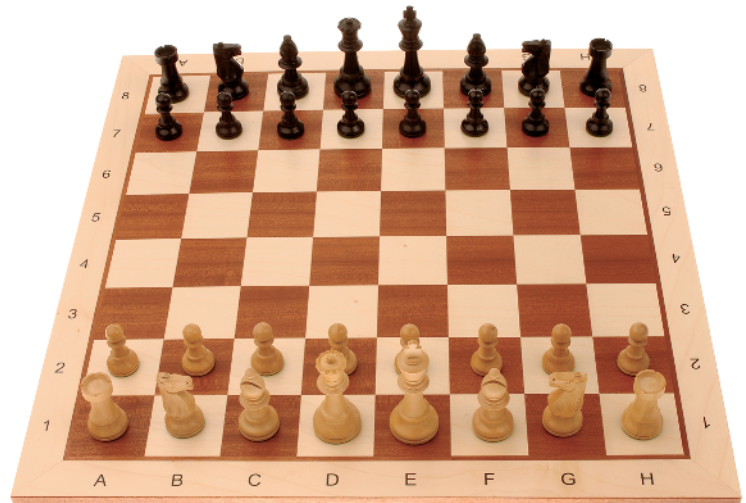
Don't forget the pawns; all eight of them are ready to start the charge. At the beginning of the game, the eight white and eight black pawns form a line just in front of the white and black pieces, across the 2nd and 7th ranks, respectively.

**Note:** In this book, the black side is always represented assuming a starting position at the “top” of the board on ranks 8 and 7, and white at a starting position at the “bottom” on ranks 1 and 2.

Chess is played between two players, one in control of the white pieces and one in control of the black pieces. White always has the first move.

To decide who gets white and who gets black, it is customary for one player to hide a white and black pawn in each hand. The other player then picks a hand. Whoever picks or is left with the white pawn will get the white pieces and will move first.

In the second diagram, white is advancing one of its pawns by moving it forward two squares. As you will soon see, this pawn move helps control the key squares in the very center of the chessboard and permits one of white's Bishops as well as the white Queen to move out.



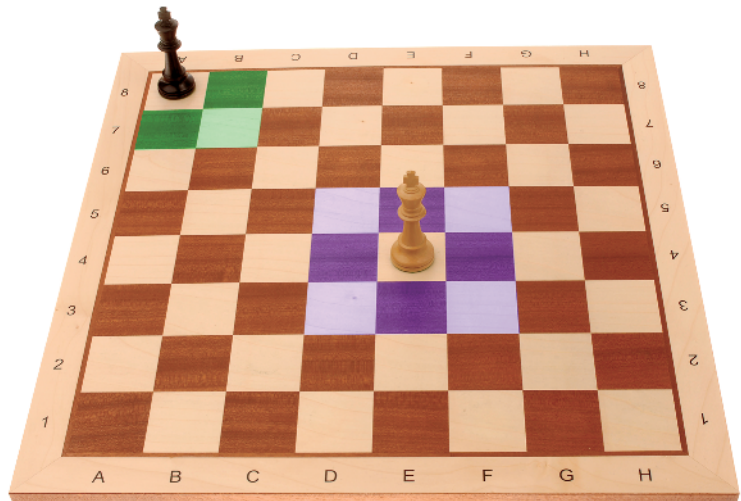


# How the King Moves and Captures

The King can move one square in any direction, horizontally, vertically, or diagonally. It can move forward and then back, but only one square at a time. The King can also capture any opponent's piece if it is on one of those squares. However, the King is not permitted to move into an attack. If you make a mistake and move your King into an attack, you will be required to take back your move. In other words, the King is not permitted to move so that it could then itself be captured on the next move.

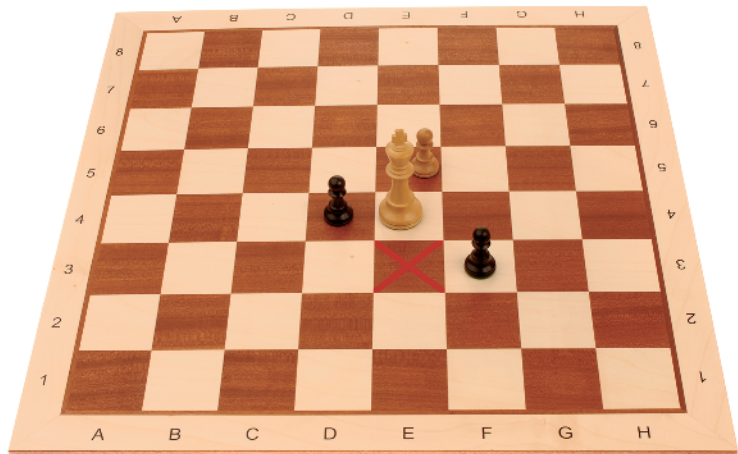
## How to Move the King

In this position, the white King can move legally to any of the squares highlighted in purple. A King in the center of the board can therefore move to a total of eight different squares, assuming that your opponent does not control any of those squares. By contrast, the black King in the corner can move to only three squares, those highlighted in green.

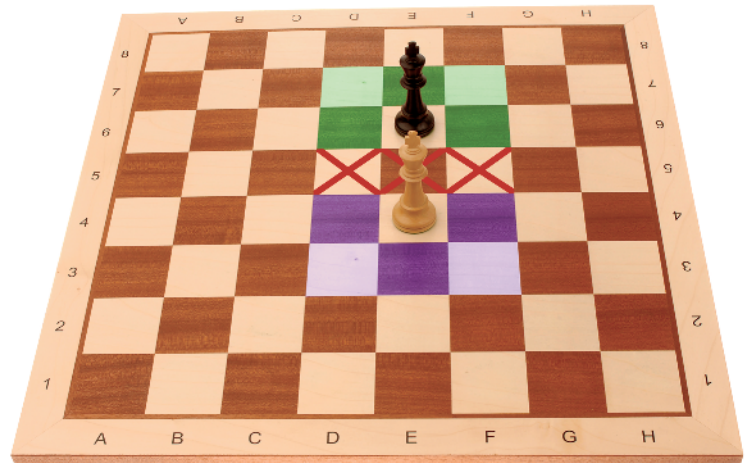


Here, only two squares are forbidden to the white King. The King cannot move to a square already occupied by its own pawn, and the King cannot move to the square marked with a red X. The white King is not permitted to move there because one of the black pawns controls that square (see page 16 to learn how the pawns move and capture).

White has several interesting options. White can capture either black pawn (to capture, white would simply remove the pawn from the board, placing the King on the square that the pawn occupied). It's fun to practice such captures. Masters have become adept at moving and snatching a piece in one fluid motion.



In this position, both Kings are facing each other. The white King can move to any of the squares highlighted in purple, and the black King can move to any of the squares highlighted in green. But neither King can move next to the other King. Simply put, a King may never move next to another King. To do so would be illegal because the other King controls those squares. It's an important point. Both Kings "control" the same three squares!

**FAQ****Is a checkerboard the same as a chessboard?**

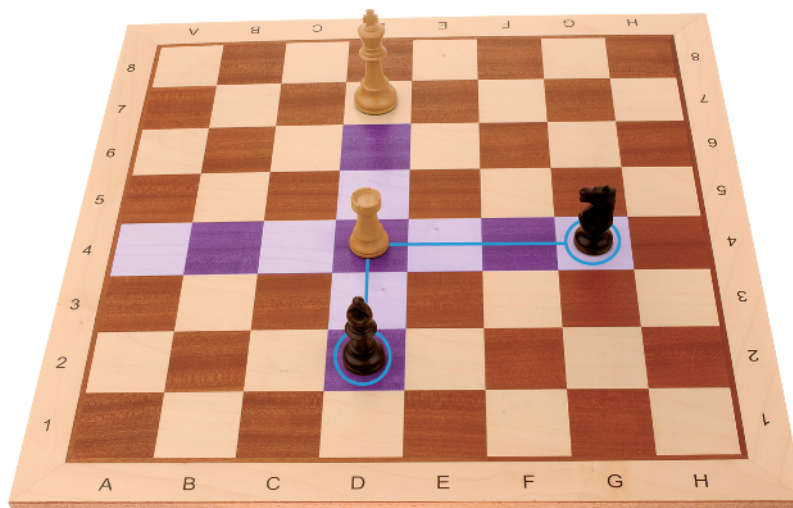
It sure is! Both contain 64 alternating-color squares situated in the eight rank/eight file format. You can use a checkerboard in a pinch if you don't mind the checkerboard's traditional red squares instead of the white used for chess. In fact, you can purchase chess/checkerboard sets, which contain just one board, along with a set of checkers and a set of chessmen.

# How Rooks Move and Capture

Unlike the King, a Rook can move more than one square at a time. A Rook can move any number of squares in a straight line, either horizontally or vertically, but only in one direction at a time per move. Note that a Rook cannot jump a piece of either color.

## How to Move a Rook

In this position, the white Rook can move legally to any of the squares highlighted in purple. For example, it can move toward the black Knight or capture it by replacing the Knight on the square on which the Knight stood. Similarly, you might decide to capture the black Bishop, again simply by taking the Rook and placing it on the square that the Bishop occupied, being sure to remove the Bishop from the board as part of the move. A Rook is not permitted to jump either white or black pieces, so it cannot move on the other side of the white King.

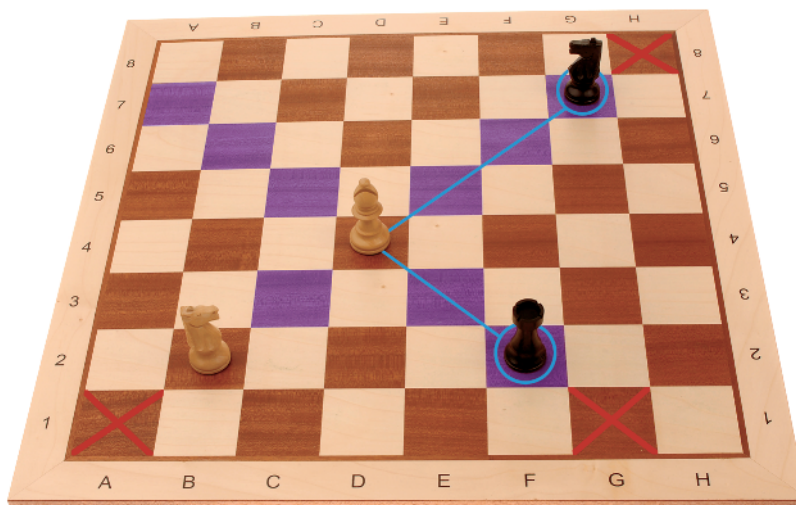


# How Bishops Move and Capture

Like a Rook, a Bishop can move more than one square at a time. As opposed to a Rook, which always moves in straight lines, a Bishop can move any number of squares diagonally. A Bishop will therefore always remain on a square of the same color on which it started the game. Like a Rook, a Bishop can move forward or backward, but in only one direction at a time per move.

## How to Move a Bishop

In this position, the white Bishop can move to any of the squares highlighted in purple. For example, it can move toward the black Knight or capture it. Similarly, you might decide here to capture the black Rook, again simply by replacing the black Rook with the white Bishop. The white Bishop is not permitted to jump either the white or black pieces.



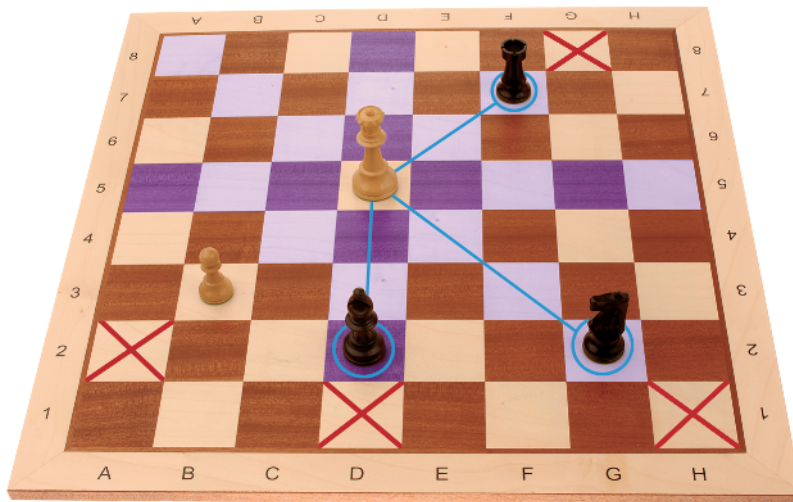


# How the Queen Moves and Captures

The Queen is a very powerful chess piece. It combines the powers of both a Rook and a Bishop. As such, the Queen can move horizontally, vertically, *and* diagonally. Like the King, it can move in any direction. Unlike the King, however, it can move far in one direction if there are no pieces in its path. As you might expect, the Queen cannot jump another piece.

## How to Move the Queen

In this position, the white Queen can move legally to any of the squares highlighted in purple. The power of the Queen becomes obvious when you observe all of the purple squares. Clearly the Queen has many, many options. For example, the Queen can move toward or capture the black Knight. Similarly, you might decide here to capture the black Rook or the black Bishop. The Queen is not permitted to jump either the white or black pieces.

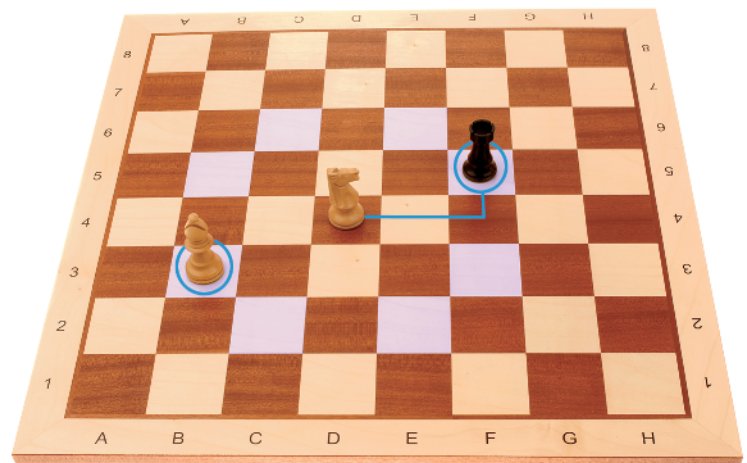


# How Knights Move and Capture

A Knight is the *only* piece that can jump over other pieces. Some players visualize the Knight moving in an L-shape—two squares horizontally and then one square vertically (or two squares vertically and then one square horizontally). More experienced players understand the move is a straight line from the starting square to the destination. As you practice your Knight moves, notice that a Knight starting on a dark square will land on a light square. And of course, a Knight starting on a light square will land on a dark square.

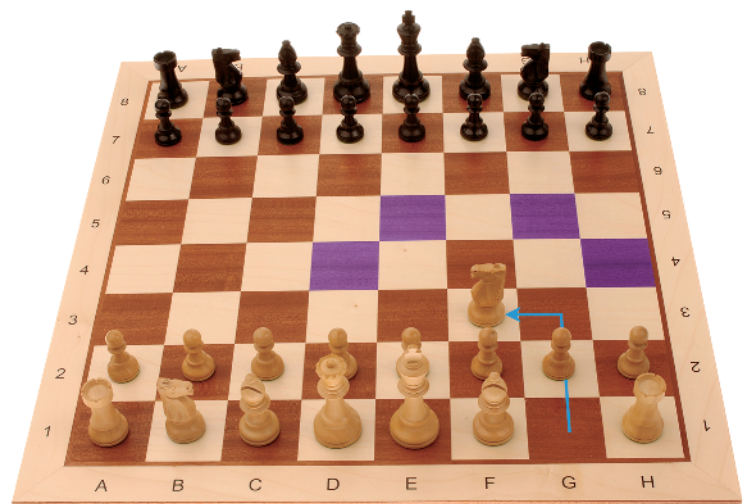
## How to Move a Knight

In this position, the white Knight can move legally to any of the squares highlighted in purple. As you can see, it can capture the black Rook but cannot occupy the same square as the white Bishop. Remember, two pieces can never occupy the same square. Some players have some difficulty with a Knight's movement. Keep in mind that a Knight on a dark square, as in this diagram, will only be able to move to light squares. And of course, a Knight on a light square will only be able to move to dark squares.



## KNIGHTS CAN JUMP

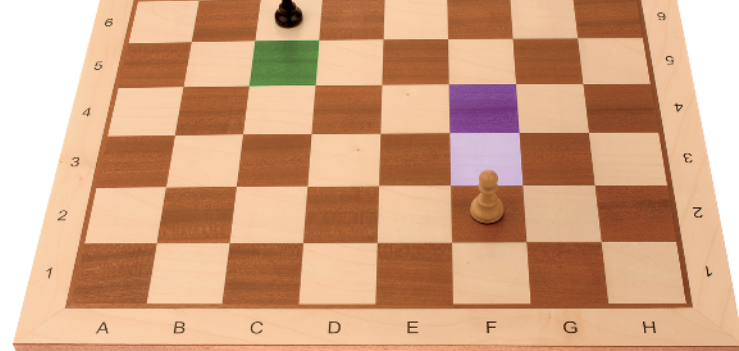
A Knight is the only chess piece permitted to jump over other pieces. In this position, the white Knight has just made the first move in the game. As you can see, it has jumped over the white pawns. Note again that the Knight, which started on a dark square, has arrived on a light square. From its new position, the Knight now has access to four new dark squares, indicated in purple.



moved. It does not matter how many moves have been played. A pawn that has never moved will have the additional option to move ahead two squares on its first move.

By contrast, the black pawn has already moved. It therefore has only one option, to advance a single square (highlighted in green).

**Note:** Experienced players never refer to pawns as "pieces." Pawns are pawns. Knights, Bishops, Rooks, Queens, and Kings are considered pieces.

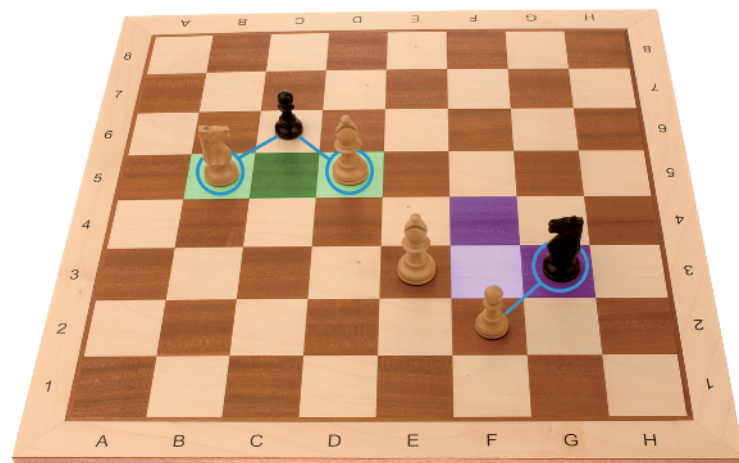


## HOW PAWNS CAPTURE

A pawn is the only chessman that captures differently from how it moves. It captures diagonally *only* one square ahead, as if it were fighting on its side with a short sword.

In this position, the white pawn can advance one or two squares, but it also has the opportunity to capture the black Knight. To bring about the capture, simply move the pawn diagonally one square, replacing the black Knight.

The black pawn has three options. It can advance a single square, but it can also capture either the white Knight or the white Bishop.

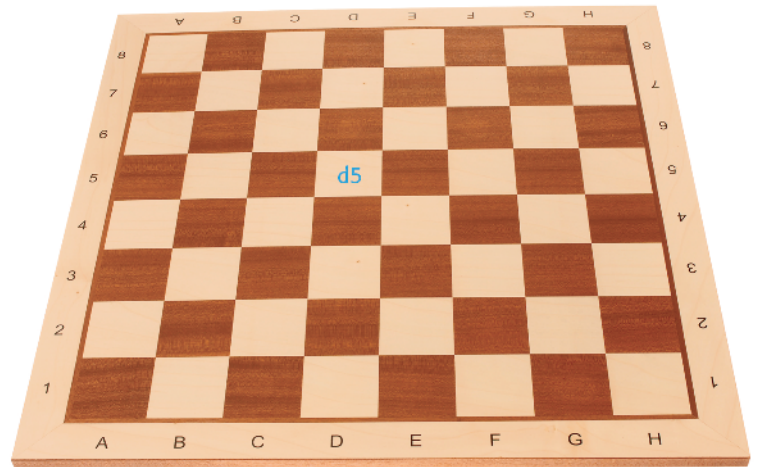


In order to discuss and write about chess, chess players have invented a written language that, as languages go, is the easiest language you will ever learn.

### Reading and Writing Chess Moves

Just as each piece has a name, so too does every square. In each chess diagram, you will notice that there are eight letters along the top and bottom of every board (a–h) and eight numbers along each side (1–8). To identify any square, locate its letter and then its number.

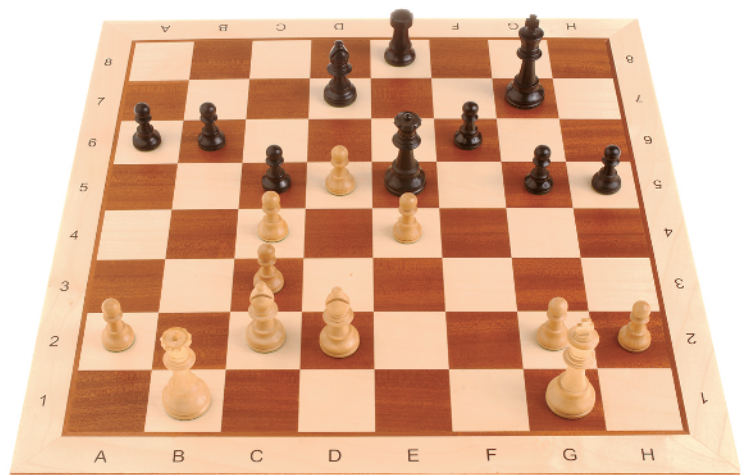
For example, the square in the bottom left corner is a1. The square in the upper-right corner is h8. The square indicated is d5.



Using the names of the squares helps us to discuss the board in a very simple, clear manner. For example, in this position, the white Queen is on b1, the black Queen is on e5, and a black Bishop is on d7. White has pawns on c3 and c4. Take a moment to locate them. As you will see, it's very easy.

A numeral and period at the beginning of a notation indicates the move number. For example, in the game shown here, white's first move was pawn e2 to e4. This is notated 1.e2-e4. You will see this type of notation starting in Chapter 8, "Opening Strategy."

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# Chess Notation

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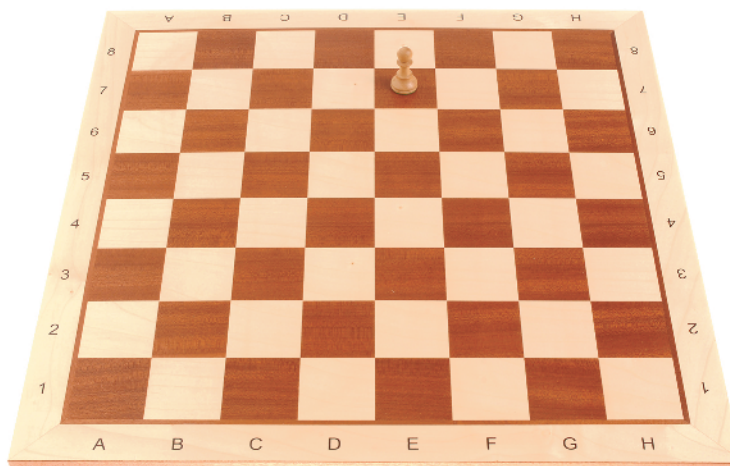
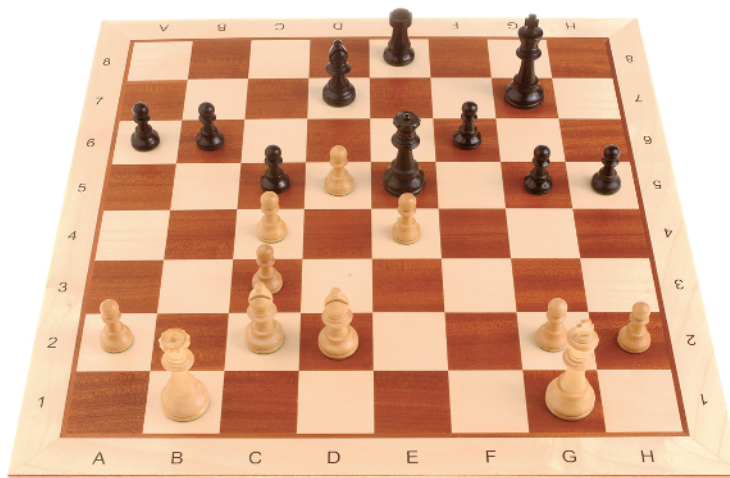
Notation also permits us to talk about the movement of pieces. Remember, pieces are abbreviated as follows: K for King, Q for Queen, B for Bishop, N for Knight, and R for Rook (there isn't an abbreviation for pawn). For a refresher on these abbreviations, see "Pieces and Pawns at a Glance" on page 8. In this position, white has just moved the Queen from d1 to b1. In this book, I use the long form of the notation, "Qd1-b1," but many chess players abbreviate the move with "Qb1." As a result of white's move, the white Queen on b1 is suddenly attacking the black pawn on b6. As you can see, it's not very hard to find the black b6-pawn. To defend the b6-pawn, black might now play Re8-b8, moving the black Rook from the e8-square to b8.

Captures are simply recorded with an "x." And so in this position, if black were to move the black Queen on e5 to capture the white pawn on e4, you would write: Qe5xe4. Of course, that awful Queen move would result in losing the black Queen to the white Bishop (Bc2xe4).

When a move results in check, an attack on the enemy King, this is indicated with a "+" at the end of the notation. When a move results in checkmate, this is indicated with a "#" at the end of the move.

In this second position, white is about to promote a pawn. Promoting the e7-pawn to a Queen on e8 would be written e7-e8=Q or simply e8=Q.

**Note:** If a pawn makes it all the way to the 8th rank on the other side of the board, you get to promote it to a more valuable piece, meaning you get to trade in this pawn for a Queen, Rook, Knight, or Bishop (most often players promote to a Queen because of its versatility). For more on promoting pawns, see "Promoting (and Under-Promoting) Your Pawns" in Chapter 2.

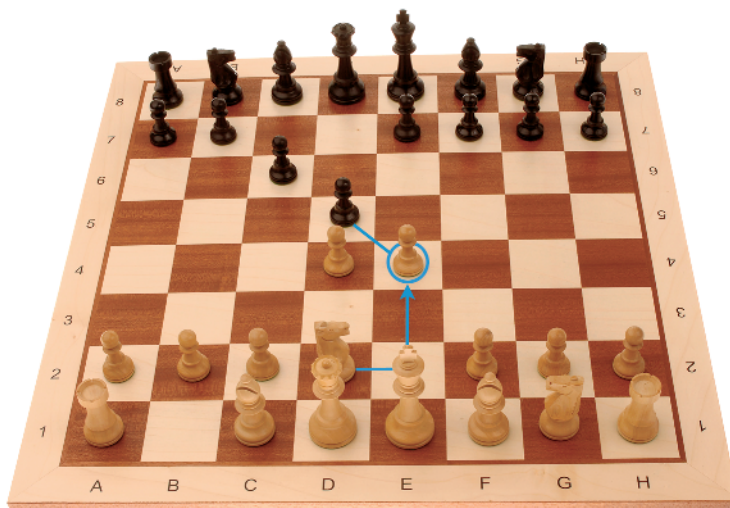


Many beginners make the same simple mistake. After their opponent captures a piece or a pawn, they fail to recapture or “take back.” A good rule of thumb is if your opponent captures one of your pieces, try to recapture a piece of equal or greater value. Generally speaking, if one side has more material than the other, they will have the advantage and will be more likely to win the game.

### Protection Strategies

#### BE SURE TO RECAPTURE

In this example, recapturing is illustrated with pawns. Black is about to move the pawn on d5 to capture the white pawn on e4. Not to fear. As long as white is alert, black will not “win” the pawn. Rather, white can simply move the Knight to e4 (following the arrow) to recapture the pawn.



#### PRESERVE THE BALANCE

In this position, the situation is more complicated because more pieces have moved, but the idea of recapturing is the same. Black moves the Knight on a5 to capture the white Bishop on c4. White could respond with many moves, but white should recapture with the white pawn on d3. If white fails to recapture, black will simply move the Knight back to safety and will have taken the white Bishop without losing a thing. It may be hard to believe, but good players will almost always win the game if you give them the advantage of an extra Knight or Bishop.

**Note:** If an illegal move has been played in an informal game between friends, you would simply point out the illegal move and your opponent would have another chance to move. In a tournament, that's still the case except that the opponent who touched a piece would still have to move it, albeit in a legal manner. There's also often a time penalty . . . extra time for you or less for your opponent.

