

Introduction to Chess

Chess is a two-player strategy game played on an 8×8 checkered board. Each player controls 16 pieces of one color (White or Black) and alternates moves, with White moving first ¹. The objective is to **checkmate** the opponent's king – that is, place it under attack ("check") such that no legal move by the opponent can remove the threat ². Checkmate immediately ends the game in a win for the attacker ³. A player may also win if the opponent resigns.

Board Setup

The chessboard has 64 squares, alternating light and dark, arranged so that each player's rightmost corner is light-colored ⁴. White's pieces occupy the first and second ranks, Black's pieces occupy the seventh and eighth ranks ⁵ ⁶. Specifically, on each side: two Rooks, two Knights, two Bishops, one Queen and one King line up on the back rank, with eight Pawns on the rank in front. Typically, the Queen starts on her own color (white Queen on a light square d1, black Queen on a dark square d8).

Moves of the Pieces

Each type of piece has its own movement rules ⁷ ⁸. Pieces cannot jump over others except as noted below. Captures occur by moving onto an opponent's piece. Key moves are:

- **Pawn:** Moves one square forward if unoccupied, or two squares on its first move if both squares are empty ⁹. A pawn captures by moving one square diagonally forward onto an opposing piece ¹⁰.
Special pawn rules:
 - **En Passant:** If a pawn moves two squares and lands adjacent to an enemy pawn, that opposing pawn may capture it *en passant* (as if it had moved only one square) on the immediately following move ¹¹.
- **Promotion:** When a pawn reaches the furthest rank, it immediately promotes: the player replaces it with a Queen, Rook, Bishop, or Knight of the same color (choice is unrestricted by pieces on board) ¹². The new piece takes effect at once.
- **Rook:** Moves any number of vacant squares along its rank or file ¹³.
- **Bishop:** Moves any number of vacant squares along a diagonal ¹⁴.
- **Queen:** Combines Rook and Bishop moves: any number of vacant squares along rank, file or diagonal ¹⁵.
- **Knight:** Moves in an "L" shape: two squares in one direction (rank or file) and then one square perpendicular ¹⁶. Knights are the only pieces that can jump over intervening pieces.

- **King:** Moves one square in any direction (rank, file, or diagonal) ¹⁷ .
- **Castling:** A special king move involving a Rook. To castle, the king moves two squares toward one of its own unmoved Rooks, then that Rook moves to the square the king crossed ¹⁸ . Castling is permitted only if *both* king and chosen rook have never moved, no pieces stand between them, the king is not in check, and the squares the king passes over (and lands on) are not under attack ¹⁹ . (Castling does not move the king into, out of, or through check.)

Check, Checkmate, Stalemate, and Draws

- **Check:** A king is in check if one or more opposing pieces attack the square it occupies ²⁰ . A player may not make a move that leaves or places their own king in check ²¹ .
- **Checkmate:** If the king is in check and there is **no legal move** that relieves it (no block, capture of the checking piece, or king move is possible), the position is checkmate. The checking player wins ³ .
- **Stalemate:** If the player to move has **no legal moves** but their king is *not* in check, the game is **stalemate** and immediately drawn ²² .
- **Dead Position:** If neither side has sufficient material or means to checkmate (for example, lone kings, or king and bishop vs king), the game is a draw by *dead position* ²³ .
- **Threefold Repetition:** A player may claim a draw if the same position (same player to move, same possible moves and castling/en passant rights) is about to appear or has just appeared for the third time ²⁴ .
- **Fifty-Move Rule:** A player may claim a draw if 50 consecutive full moves (100 ply) have occurred without any pawn move or capture ²⁵ .
- **Fifefold/Seventy-Five Moves (Automatic Draws):** If the same position occurs five times, or 75 moves pass without a pawn move or capture, the game is automatically drawn by the arbiter ²⁶ .
- **Draw by Agreement:** At any time after each player has made at least one move, they may agree to a draw ²⁷ . (In some events, the arbiter may forbid draws by agreement before a certain number of moves.)
- **Other Draws:** A game is a draw if one player wins by resignation but it is impossible to checkmate the opponent's king by any legal play (then rules specify the result as a draw) ²⁸ . Also, if a player's time runs out but the opponent has no mating material, the result is a draw ²⁹ .

Time Controls

In tournament chess, each player has a clock. Common categories of time control are:

- **Classical (Standard):** Long time controls, typically over 60 minutes per player for all moves (often with additional time increments). Used in professional OTB events ³⁰. Example: World Championship games may use 120 minutes for 40 moves, then additional time thereafter ³⁰.
- **Rapid:** Each player has more than 10 minutes but less than 60 minutes for the entire game (or time + increments equivalent) ³¹. In FIDE terms, any control >10 and <60 minutes per player is rapid ³¹.
- **Blitz:** Each player has 10 minutes or less for the game ³². For example, 5 minutes per side or 3 minutes plus a 2-second increment are common blitz controls ³³.
- **Bullet:** Extremely fast games, typically less than 3 minutes per player. (This term is informal but widely used for e.g. 1|0 or 2|1 minute controls) ³⁴.

Whether classical, rapid, or blitz, time controls may include increments (extra seconds added after each move) or delays. If a player's clock runs out, they lose the game, unless the opponent has no possible way to checkmate ²⁹.

Tournament Rules and Etiquette

In formal play, the FIDE Laws of Chess specify additional rules:

- **Touch-Move Rule:** If the player to move deliberately touches one of their own pieces, they must move that piece if it has any legal move ³⁵. If they touch an opponent's piece, they must capture it if legal. (Saying "j'adoube" or "I adjust" signals only piece-fixing on the board without intent to move ³⁶.)
- **Using One Hand:** Every move must be made with one hand only ³⁷. A player may not use two hands for a single move, nor keep a finger on the clock (sometimes called "hovering") ³⁸.
- **Castling Touch Rule:** If a player touches their king and rook intending to castle, they must castle on that side if it is legal ³⁹. If a rook is touched first, castling that side is forbidden on that move ⁴⁰.
- **Move Completion:** A move (including captures and castling) is considered completed once the moved piece is released on its new square ⁴¹. After that point the move cannot be changed.
- **Clocks:** After making a move on the board, the player must stop their clock (usually by pressing a button) and start the opponent's clock ⁴². This act completes the move. A player must press their clock with the same hand used to move ⁴³. Pressing the clock before completing a move is forbidden ⁴⁴. Improper clock handling (knocking over the clock, etc.) is subject to penalty ⁴⁴.

- **Default Time (Forfeit):** The tournament regulations set a default (grace) period. A player who arrives at the board after the default time automatically loses ⁴⁵, unless the arbiter rules otherwise.
- **Illegal Moves:** If a completed move is found illegal (moving in a forbidden way, leaving own king in check, etc.), the position is reset to before the move, and the player must make a legal move instead ⁴⁶. For the first illegal move by a player, the arbiter adds two minutes to the opponent's clock; the second illegal move by the same player loses the game (unless the opponent cannot possibly mate) ⁴⁷ ⁴⁸.
- **Recording Moves:** In classical tournaments both players must keep a written (or approved electronic) scoresheet of all moves ⁴⁹. This is waived in quick games (rapid/blitz) when time becomes very low, but otherwise scoresheets are used for claims (threefold, 50-move) ⁵⁰ ⁵¹.
- **Draw Offers:** Draw offers must be made on the player's turn after making a move and before pressing the clock ⁵². Offers cannot be conditional, and remain until declined by move or accepted ⁵².
- **Arbiter Role:** An arbiter (referee) supervises the event. The arbiter ensures that the Laws are obeyed, maintains fair play and playing conditions, and may impose penalties for infractions ⁵³. Penalties range from warnings and time penalties to loss of game or expulsion ⁵⁴. The arbiter also handles disputes (clock setting errors, irregularities) according to the Laws ⁵⁵ ⁵³.
- **Conduct and Etiquette:** Players must behave courteously. They **must not** distract or annoy the opponent (for example, by unnecessary talking or noise) ⁵³. No advice, outside information, notes or analysis is allowed during play ⁵⁶. Electronic devices (phones, tablets) must be completely switched off and stored away in the playing venue ⁵⁶ ⁵⁷. A player caught cheating (using an unauthorized aid or device) loses the game. Before play, a respectful handshake is customary, and players should avoid shaking hands prematurely on mate or resignation (only after the game ends).

FIDE Regulations and Online Play

Chess organized under FIDE generally follows the **FIDE Laws of Chess** (the rules above). FIDE also issues specific **Online Chess Regulations** for play over the internet. In online competitions the basic rules (moves, checkmate, etc.) remain the same as over-the-board ⁵⁸. For example, the same conditions for check, checkmate and illegal moves apply, though there is no physical board. Online play uses a virtual board or electronic board (eBoard) with an automatic digital clock ⁵⁹ ⁶⁰. The Laws are adapted: players click to move pieces instead of touching them, and all moves/clocks are recorded automatically ⁶⁰ ⁶¹. Apart from these mechanical differences, touch-move and scoring rules are effectively enforced by the software. Some formalities differ (for instance, board orientation is defined by the interface rather than player), but no special moves beyond the standard laws are introduced online ⁵⁸. In short, online chess follows FIDE rules with modifications for digital play.

Summary

Chess rules cover the board setup, how pieces move and capture, special moves (castling, en passant, promotion), and game conclusion conditions (checkmate, stalemate, draws). In serious play, clocks regulate time, and strict rules govern touching pieces, making moves, and player conduct. FIDE's official laws (and tournament rules) codify these details ² ³⁵ . Players and arbiters are expected to know and apply them fully, ensuring fair competition and sportsmanship in every game ⁵³ ⁵⁶ .

Sources: Authoritative rules are drawn from the FIDE Laws of Chess (2023 edition) ² ³⁵ ⁴² ⁶² and official FIDE regulations, as well as recognized chess resources for time-control definitions ³⁰ ³¹ ³² ³⁴ . All content above is cited accordingly.

¹ ² ³ ⁴ ⁵ ⁶ ⁷ ⁸ ⁹ ¹⁰ ¹¹ ¹² ¹³ ¹⁴ ¹⁵ ¹⁶ ¹⁷ ¹⁸ ¹⁹ ²⁰ ²¹ ²² ²³ ²⁴ ²⁵ ²⁶ ²⁷ ²⁸ ²⁹ ³¹
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FIDE Laws of Chess taking effect from 1 January 2023

<https://handbook.fide.com/chapter/e012023>

³⁰ ³³ ³⁴ Time Controls in chess - Chess Terms - Chess.com

<https://www.chess.com/terms/chess-time-controls>

⁵⁸ ⁵⁹ ⁶⁰ ⁶¹ FIDE Handbook 04. Online Chess Regulations

<https://handbook.fide.com/chapter/OnlineChessRegulations>