

## Ten Tips to Winning Chess

By International Grandmaster Arthur Bisguier

Chess is a game of strategy and tactics. Each player commands an army of 16 chess pawns and other pieces (the king, queen, bishops, knights, and rooks).

A well played game has three stages. In the *opening*, the players bring out their forces in preparation for combat. The *middlegame* begins as the players maneuver for position and carry out attacks and counterattacks. The final stage is the *endgame* where, with fewer pawns and pieces left on the board, it is safe for the king to come out and join the battle.

As play proceeds, each player will capture some of the opponent's men; often, the capturing pieces are immediately recaptured. As long as the piece a player gives up is generally equal to the piece he gets in return, we say the players are *exchanging*. If you unintentionally place a piece where it can be captured without getting a piece of equal value in return, we say that you put that piece *en prise*. (This is a French term literally means "in take.") Sometimes a player may place a piece en prise in order to trick an opponent. If the opponent captures the offered man, it may leave him open to attack.

You're Ready to Go!

It is time for you to look at these ten tips to help you learn some simple way to (winning) more games.

1. Look at your opponent's move.
2. Make the best possible move.
3. Have a plan.
4. Know what the pieces are worth.
5. Develop quickly and well.
6. Control the center.
7. Keep your king safe.
8. Know when to trade pieces.
9. Think about the endgame.
10. Always be alert.

### **1. Look at your opponent's move!**

Every time your opponent makes a move, you should think: Why was that move chosen? Is a piece in danger? Are there any threats I should watch out for? What sort of plan does my opponent have in mind?

Only defending against your opponents threats will you be able to successfully carry out your own strategies. Once you figure out what your opponent is attempting to do, you nip those plans in the bud.

## **2. Make the best possible move.**

When you are considering a move, ask yourself these questions:

- a. Will the piece I'm moving go to a better square than the one it's on now?
- b. Can I improve my position even more by increasing the effectiveness of a different piece?
- c. Does this move help defend against my opponent's threats?
- d. Will the piece I move be safe on its new square?
  - i. If it's a pawn, consider: Can I keep it protected from attack?
  - ii. If it's another piece, consider: Can the enemy drive it away, thus making me lose valuable time?

Even if your move has good points, it may not be the best move at that moment. Emanuel Lasker, a former world champion, said: "When you see a good move, wait – look for a better one!" Following this advice is bound to improve your chess.

## **3. Have a plan.**

If you threaten something here in one move, something over there in the next move, and so forth, your opponent will have an easy time defending. Your pieces have to work together to be effective. Just imagine each instrument in an orchestra playing a different tune!

When you develop a plan, your men can work in harmony. For example, you might plan to attack your opponent's king; one piece alone probably wouldn't do too much but the combined strength of several pieces makes a powerful attacking force. Another plan could be taking control of all the squares in a particular area of the board.

The chess men are your "team"; to be a good coach, you have to use all their strengths together.

## **4. Know what your pieces are worth.**

When you are considering giving up some of your pieces for some of your opponent's you should think about the values of the men, and not just how many each player possesses. The player whose men add up to a greater value will usually have the advantage. So a crucial step in making decisions is to add up the material advantage, or value, of each player's men.

The pawn is the least valuable piece, so it is a convenient unit of measure. It moves slowly, and can never go backward.

Knights and bishops are approximately equal, worth about three pawns each. The knight is the only piece that can jump over other men. The bishops are speedier, but each only can reach half the squares.

The rook moves quickly and can reach every square, its value is five pawns. A combination of two minor pieces (knights and bishops) can often subdue a rook.

A queen is worth nine pawns, almost as much as two rooks. It can move to the greatest number of squares in most positions.

The king can be a valuable fighter, too, but we do evaluate its strength because it cannot be traded.

### **5. Develop quickly and well.**

Time is very important element of chess. The player whose men are ready for action sooner will be able to control the course of the game. If you want to be that player, you have to develop your men efficiently to powerful posts.

Many inexperienced players like to move a lot of pawns at the beginning of the game to control space on the chessboard. But you can't win with pawns alone! Since knights, bishops, rooks, and queens can move farther than pawns and threaten more distant targets, it's a good idea to bring them out soon, after you've moved enough pawns to guarantee that your stronger pieces won't be chased back by your opponent's pawns. After all the other pieces are developed, it's easier to see what pawns you should move to fit in with your plans.

It's tempting to bring the queen out very early, because it's the most powerful piece. But your opponent can chase your queen back by threatening it with less valuable pieces.

Instead of just moving pieces out, try to determine the best square for each piece and bring it there in as few moves as possible. This may save you from wasting moves later in the game.

### **6. Control the center.**

In many cases, the person who controls the four squares at the center of the board will have the better game. There are simple reasons for this.

First, a piece in the center controls more of the board than one that is somewhere else. As an example, place one knight on a center square and another in one of the corners of the board; the knight in the center can move to eight squares, while the "cornered" one has only two possible moves!

Second, control of the center provides an avenue for your pieces to travel from one side of the board to the other. To move pieces across the board, you will often have to take it through the center. If your pieces can get to the other side faster than your opponent's pieces, you will often be able to mount a successful attack there before he can bring enough pieces to defend.

### **7. Keep your king safe.**

Everyone knows the object of the game is to checkmate the opponent's king. But sometimes a player thinks about his own plans so much that he forgets that his opponent is also king hunting!

It's generally a good idea to place your king in a safe place by castling early in the game. Once you've castled, you should be very careful about advancing the pawns near your king. They are like bodyguards; the farther away they go, the easier it is for your opponent's pieces to get close to your king. (For this reason, it's often good to try to force your opponent to move the pawns near his king.)

### **8. Know when to trade pieces.**

The best time to trade men is when you can capture men worth more than the ones you're giving up, which is called "winning material". But the opportunity to do this may not arise if your opponent is very careful.

Since you will probably have many chances to exchange men on an "even" basis, it's useful to know when you should or shouldn't do this. There are several important considerations.

As a general rule, if you have the initiative (your pieces are better developed, and you are controlling the game), try not to exchange men unless it increases your advantage in some clear way. The fewer men each player has, the weaker the attacking player's threats become, and the easier it is for the defending side to meet these threats.

Another time not to trade pieces is when your opponent has a cramped position with little space for the pieces to maneuver. It's tough to move a lot of pieces around in a cramped position, but easier to move just a few.

One sort of advantage you can gain by trading pieces is a weakening of your opponent's pawn structure. If, for example, you can capture with a piece that your opponent can only recapture in a way that will give him "doubled pawns", it will often be to your advantage to make that trade.

The player who is ahead in material will usually benefit from trades. It's sort of like basketball or soccer; five players will sometimes have trouble scoring against four opposing players, but take away three from each side and the stronger team will find it easier to score with two players against one.

So to summarize: It's usually good to trade pieces if your opponent has the initiative, you have a cramped position, if you can weaken your opponent's pawn structure, or if you are ahead in material. There are exceptions, of course, but following these rules should bring you considerable success.

### **9. Think about the endgame.**

From the time the game begins, you should remember that every move you make may affect your chances in the endgame. For instance, in the earlier parts of the game, a knight and a bishop are about equally powerful. Toward the end of the game, though, when there are fewer men in the way, the bishop can exert its influence in all parts of the board at once, while the knight still takes a long time to get anywhere. So before you trade a bishop for a knight, think not just about the next few moves but also about the endgame.

Pawn structure is crucial in the endgame. When you capture one of your opponent's men with a pawn, you'll often create an open file that will help your rooks and queen to reach your opponent's side of the board, but you may also get doubled pawns. Since double pawns cannot defend each other, they are a liability in the endgame. If your opponent survives the middlegame, you may have an uphill fight later.

Concentrate on your immediate plans, as well as your opponent's – but always keep the endgame in mind!

### **10. Always be alert.**

There is a tendency for people to relax once they have reached a good position or to up hope if their position is very bad. These attitudes are natural, but both lead to bad results.

Many players – even world champions – have achieved winning positions, only to lose because they relaxed too soon. Even the best position won't win by itself; you have to give it some help! In almost any position, the "losing" player will still be able to make threats. The "winning" player has to be alert enough to prevent these positions.

Advice: If you have a better position, watch out! One careless move could throw away your hard-won advantage. Even as you're carrying out your winning plans, you must watch out for your opponent's threats.

Conversely, if you have a worse position, don't give up! Keep making strong moves, and try to complicate the position as much as possible. If your opponent slips, you may get a chance to make a comeback. Remember: Where there's life, there's hope.

So be alert all the time, no matter what the position is like. A little bit of extra care can pay off in a big way.