

# Getting Started with Chess

The objective of this guide is to provide the basic information you need to be able to begin to play chess. The guide covers the many essential pieces of information that you need to be aware of before playing your first game but it does not attempt to teach you how to play chess. However it is a first step that prepares you for learning and playing one of the world's oldest and most challenging games.

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# Understanding the Chess Board and Pieces

## Chess Pieces

There are 6 different chess pieces on each side. The pieces are covered below the picture of them, from left to right.



### The King

The King is both the most important and the most vulnerable piece on the board as it is at the heart of every game of chess with everything revolving around its safety.

Its purpose isn't to attack or dominate the board but to survive by not being checkmated as the game ends the moment this occurs. Checkmate is the position in chess where a king is under attack and has no legal move to escape the attack

In the opening play the focus is invariably on protecting the king so it can stay safe while other pieces fight for control. In the endgame, though, the King can transform from a fragile target into an active, powerful piece that helps secure key squares and

support pawn promotion. In short, the King defines the objective of chess: protect your own while hunting down your opponent's.

### The Queen

The most powerful and versatile piece in chess is the Queen. Her purpose is to dominate the board through her strengths of moving any number of squares in any direction (horizontally, vertically and diagonally).

The Queen is used to control key lines, support tactical combinations, and pressure the opponent's King or weak points. Use the Queen wisely as despite her strength losing the Queen is a major setback and bringing her out too early can make her a target. In essence, the Queen is the engine of a player's strategy, capable of turning small advantages into decisive victories.

### Rooks

The Rook brings strength, structure, and long-range power to a player's position and thrive on open files and ranks, where they can exert pressure across the board and support major strategic plans.

Early in the game they often stay quiet in the corners, but once the centre opens, they are essential for controlling key lines, defending weaknesses, and coordinating attacks. Rooks are especially powerful in the endgame, where their ability to cut off the enemy king or escort a passed pawn can decide the outcome. When two rooks work together, they form one of the most dominant forces in chess, capable of overwhelming almost any defence.

### The Bishops

Bishops control the board's diagonals with speed and precision. Each side has 2 bishops, one for each colour set of squares on the board for the entire game, this means they work best as a pair, covering complementary lines and creating powerful pressure across the board.

Their ability to influence distant squares makes them valuable in open positions where pawn structures don't block their paths. Bishops excel at slicing through the centre, supporting attacks on the king, and restricting the opponent's movement. When used well, a bishop can quietly dominate key diagonals and become a decisive force in both strategy and tactics.

### Knights

Knights bring a unique kind of power to chess because they move in ways no other piece can. Their L-shaped jumps let them hop over obstacles, slip into tight spaces, and create threats that are often hard to spot, making them especially dangerous in tactical positions.

A Knight's purpose is to control key central squares, support attacks, and exploit weaknesses that sliding pieces might overlook. They excel in closed positions where pawns block long-range pieces, weaving through the board while others get stuck. When used well, a Knight is a tricky, unpredictable force that can fork multiple pieces, defend critical points, and turn a quiet position into a sudden opportunity.

### Pawns

Pawns are the quiet workers of chess, but their purpose is far more important than their small size suggests. From the very first move they can shape the structure of the game, creating space for the stronger pieces and define pathways where battles can unfold.

Pawns move slowly and cannot move backwards. This means that every pawn move is a commitment that influences the strategy played out in the game. Whether defending key squares, supporting attacks or forming chains they are powerful influences in a game.

The Pawn's super power is when it has advanced to the last rank of the board and is promoted into a more powerful piece, such as a Queen.

Pawns may seem humble, but they are the foundation on which every plan in chess is built.

### Number of Pieces per Side

Each side starts with the same number of pieces. They are:

- 1 King
- 1 Queen
- 6 Pawns
- 2 Bishops
- 2 Knights
- 2 Rooks

### Chess Piece Values

With the exception of the King, each chess piece carries a relative value:

- Queen - 9
- Pawn - 1
- Bishop - 3
- Knights - 3
- Rooks - 5

These values provide a standard point system that helps when judging whether a trade of pieces gains or loses material as it is a comparison of how much total piece value each player has on the board. This makes it easier when determining whether trades, sacrifices, or captures lead to an advantage or a disadvantage.

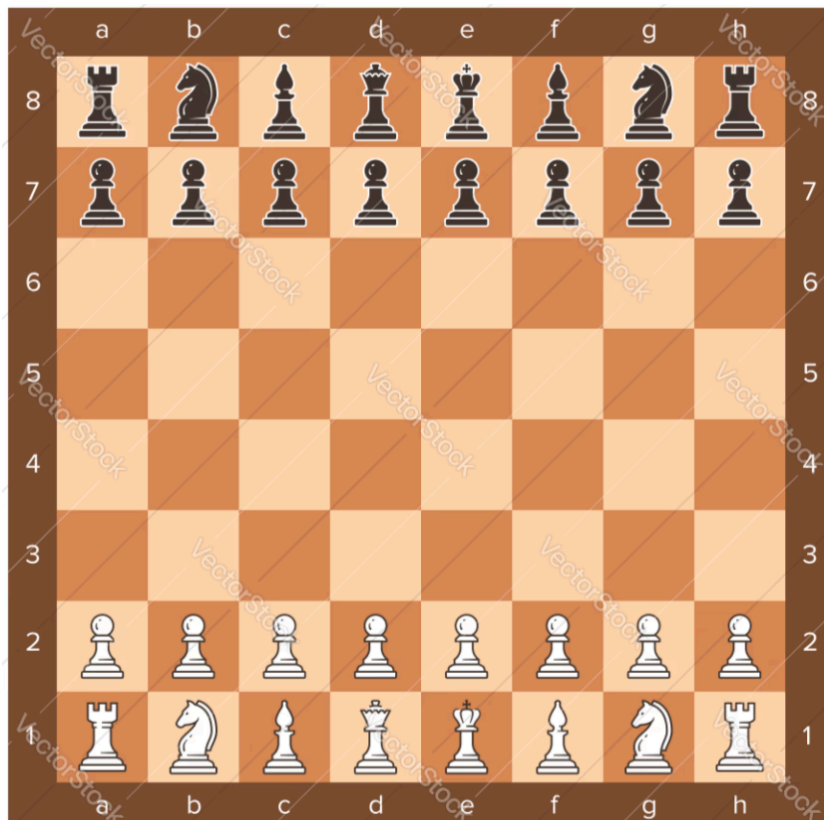
Bishops and Knights are both valued at 3 points as they offer roughly equal overall strength, even though they excel in different types of positions. A Knight is powerful in closed, cramped positions where its ability to jump over pieces gives it unique tactical reach, while a Bishop shines in open positions where its long-range diagonal movement can dominate large sections of the board. Their advantages and limitations tend to balance out, which is why they share the same base value in standard piece valuation.

The 5 point rating of a Rook is due to its long-range movement along ranks and files which in practical play can control open lines, support passed pawns, and dominate endgames.

## The Chess Board

A chess board is an 8×8 grid of alternating light and dark squares used as the battlefield for the game of chess.

It provides the structured layout of files and ranks that determine how every piece moves and how positions are recorded.



## Setting Up the Chess Board

To set up a chessboard correctly, place it so that the light-coloured square, normally white, is in the bottom-right corner from each player's perspective.

Each side's pieces fill the two rows closest to them: The back rank holds the major pieces and to ensure they mirror each other they are placed in the following order from left to right:

- White pieces  
Rook, Knight, Bishop, Queen, King, Bishop, Knight, Rook.  
The Queen always starts on the white square.
- Black pieces  
Rook, Knight, Bishop, King, Queen, Bishop, Knight, Rook.  
The Queen always starts on the black square.

The front rank is filled entirely with pawns.

### Chess Board Notation

Chess board notation is the system players use to record and communicate moves with precision. Using the chess board's horizontal and vertical characteristics any square on the board can be referenced. The board structure is defined using File and Rank.

A File is a vertical column on the chessboard, labelled from a to h.

A Rank is a horizontal row on the chessboard, numbered from 1 to 8.

Each file is labelled with a letter *a–h* and each rank with a number *1–8*. This creates a unique coordinate for every square, such as e4 or a1, making it easy to track positions, analyse games, and replay famous matches.

Pieces are identified by initials, moves are written using their destination squares, and special actions like castling or captures have their own symbols.

The use of Algebraic notation has become the universal language of chess as it is compact, clear, and works the same for players everywhere.

## How Chess Pieces Move

The table provides an overview of the way each chess piece moves on the board.

Piece	Movement rules
King	The King can move one square in any direction, forward, backward, sideways, or diagonally, as long as the destination square is not under attack.
Queen	The Queen can move any number of squares in a straight line horizontally, vertically, or diagonally, giving her the greatest range and power of any piece on the board.
Pawns	A Pawn moves forward one square at a time (or two squares on its first move), captures diagonally, and can promote to a stronger piece upon reaching the farthest rank.
Bishops	A Bishop moves any number of squares diagonally, staying on the same colour for the entire game.
Knights	A Knight moves in an L-shape, two squares in one direction and then one square perpendicular, jumping over any pieces in its path.
Rooks	A Rook moves any number of squares in a straight line horizontally or vertically, making it a powerful controller of open files and ranks.

## Terminology

There are several terms used in Chess, here are some of them.

### Check

Check is a situation where a king is directly threatened by an opposing piece and must respond to avoid capture.

It requires the player in check to make a legal move that removes the threat, either by moving the king, blocking the attack, or capturing the attacking piece.

## Checkmate

Checkmate is a position where a king is under attack and has no legal move to escape the threat.

It immediately ends the game, with the attacking player declared the winner.

## Stalemate

Stalemate is a position where the player to move has no legal moves, yet their King is not in check.

When this happens, the game ends immediately in a draw, regardless of how much material one side has or how winning the position might otherwise look.

## Hanging Pawn

A hanging pawn is a pawn left undefended, meaning it can be captured by an opponent without any immediate consequence.

This concept extends to any hanging piece. Whenever a piece of any kind is unprotected and can be taken for free, it is considered “hanging,” creating a tactical weakness your opponent can exploit.

## Castling

Castling is a special move in chess where the King and one Rook move simultaneously to improve the King’s safety and activate the rook.

It works by moving the King two squares toward a Rook and then placing that Rook on the square the King crossed, but it’s only legal if neither piece has moved before, the squares between them are empty, the King is not in check, and the King does not pass through or land on a threatened square.

## Pawn Promotion

Pawn promotion is a special move occurring when a pawn reaches the farthest rank from its starting side, it must be exchanged for a new piece, typically a Queen, but a Rook, Bishop, or Knight are also legal choices.

This transformation instantly upgrades the Pawn's power and often becomes a decisive moment in the game.

### En Passant

En passant is a special Pawn capture that occurs when an opposing Pawn moves two squares forward from its starting rank and lands beside your Pawn. On the very next move only, your Pawn may capture it as if it had moved just one square.

This rule exists to prevent a Pawn from bypassing an enemy Pawn's control by leaping over the square where it could normally have been captured.