

## A. Basic Scholastic Chess Tournament Rules

*What rules should I know?* Tournament players should understand the following basic rules:

1. **Touch/Move, Touch Take.** If you touch a piece with intent to move it, you must move it. This does not mean if you reach across the board and inadvertently knock over your king with your sleeve, you must move it. If you grab a piece with your fingers, the intent is clear that you mean to move it, and you must. Once you place a piece on a square and let go of it, the move is final and may not be changed. If a piece is not centered on a square, you may say “adjust” and center the piece on the square. If you touch your opponent’s piece and you can legally capture it, you must capture it.
2. **Illegal Moves.** An illegal move occurs when a player moves in a manner inconsistent with the rules of chess, such as when a player moves a pawn backwards, or moves into check. The most common illegal moves involve checks. For example, a player may not castle through check, and if a player is in check, he must either; capture the checking piece, block the check or move out of check. Any other move is an illegal move. Touch move rules apply here as well; if there is a legal move to be made with the illegally moved piece, then it must be made. Castling is considered a king move. Thus, a player who commits an illegal move by attempting to castle through check must make a legal move with his king if possible. Similarly, if the player has made a move and removed his hand from the piece, he cannot change his mind and instead move another piece. The second move would be illegal. *When an illegal move has been made, the opposing player should pause the clock and raise his hand to consult with a tournament official.* If the player is new to the game, the TD will likely explain why the move is illegal. Sometimes a player making an illegal move will lose time off of his clock as a consequence of the illegal move.
3. **No Talking or Distracting Behavior.** Chess is a game of concentration, and all players deserve the opportunity to think quietly. Players may not discuss their game with their opponents, their parents or their coaches while the game is in progress. Most scholastic tournaments require parents and coaches to leave the playing area once the round is set to begin. *Players may not engage in annoying behaviors designed to distract their opponents, such as tapping their pencils or making noises. Badgering one’s opponent with comments such as “Hurry Up” or “Move” is not allowed. Any player who feels his opponent is badgering or distracting him should pause his clock and raise his hand to bring the behavior to the attention of a tournament official.* The official will likely warn the player to cease the annoying behavior or comments. The official may also impose a time penalty or, in extreme cases, cause the perpetrator to forfeit the round.
4. **Disputes.** *If a question or problem arises during the game, players should pause the clock and raise their hands to consult a tournament official. Do not try to resolve disputes directly with your opponent.* While TDs are not perfect, they will do their best to understand and fairly resolve disputes. Accurate notation sheets can greatly aid a TD in making a fair determination. Do not move the pieces from the disputed position or reset the board until the TD has ruled. Young players need lots of reminding not to argue with their opponent or – worse still – accept their opponent’s interpretation of the rules. A player has the right to ask to speak to another TD or the chief TD if he does not understand or agree with the ruling of a TD.
5. **Draw Offers.** When offering a draw to an opponent, a player must first make his move and offer the draw on his own time, that is, before he starts his opponent’s clock. The game is over once both players agree to the draw.
6. **Losing on Time.** A player loses on time if his clock shows no time remaining and the opposing player – only the opposing player—notifies and claims a win on time. The opponent must also have sufficient material remaining to create a checkmate. (If the opponent does not, the outcome is a draw.) If both players run out of time before either player has called it, the game is ruled a draw.
7. **Comings and Goings.** Inform the tournament director – if possible, before the event—if the player is going to arrive late for a round or miss a round entirely. Many tournaments have forms or special requirements for such situations.
8. **Draws.** A chess game can end in three possible outcomes: a win, a loss, or a draw. Players should understand the following types of draws so that they can recognize drawn positions when they arise on the board.
  - a. **Stalemate.** A stalemate occurs when the player who is on move is not presently in check, but cannot make a legal move with any piece, pawn or king without placing himself into check. Because moving into check is an illegal move, the player cannot make a legal move and the game is a stalemate.
  - b. **Insufficient Mating Material.** A king cannot be checkmated by a solo king, or by a king and knight, or by a king and bishop. These pieces are considered insufficient mating material and the game is a draw.
  - c. **Draw by Three-Fold Repetition.** If during the course of the game, all of the pieces are arranged in exactly the same position three times, either player may claim a draw by three fold repetition. If the opposing player disagrees, the tournament director should be summoned and the claim proven by replaying the game from the notation sheet. Where the players do not agree, and there is no notation sheet, the draw claim cannot be proven, and the players must play on.

- d. **50 Moves Without Progress.** A player who is on move may claim a draw when each player has made 50 moves without capturing a piece or moving a pawn. Once again, an accurate notation sheet may need to be consulted to prove this claim if the players do not agree.
- e. **Insufficient Losing Chances.** A player who has a clearly won or drawn position but is low on time (less than five minutes) can request a draw based on insufficient losing chances. This is frequently a difficult calculation requiring a tournament director.
- f. **Both Players “Flag.”** If both players run out of time on their clocks before either player notices and calls out, the game is a draw.
- g. **Draw By Agreement.** At any time during the match, either player may offer a draw. The proper way to do this is to make your move, say “I offer a draw,” then press the time clock. The opposing player then either accepts or declines the offer. He can decline by simply making his move, thus continuing to play on.

## B. Chess Notation

*Why notate?* As scholastic players gain familiarity with the game, they should learn to take chess notation, in which they record the moves made in their chess games. Notation enables a player to replay their game and thus learn from it. It is also a record that can be shown to a tournament official to help resolve a dispute with an opponent during the round. A player’s ability to make certain claims, such as Draw by Three-Fold Repetition (where the pieces have been in exactly the same position three times during the match), may depend on accurate notation. Learning chess notation also allows a player to read chess books and understand positions.

The standard form used for recording chess moves is called “Algebraic Notation.” In this system, each square on the chess board is identified by a coordinate consisting of both a letter and a number. The letters run across the horizontal portion of the board from A to H, read left to right for white, and the numbers run vertically from 1 to 8 with 1 representing the back rank for white’s pieces. Each move is written according to the piece making the move and the square where the piece lands. For example, if white’s Queen moves one space up the board, the move would be written Qd2. Each piece is identified by its first letter, except for the Knight, which is identified as N to avoid confusion with the King (K). Pawn moves are identified only by the square the pawn lands on. For example, a standard opening pawn move for white would be written as e4. Checks are identified as a +, checkmate as a # or ++, captures as an x, castling king-side as 0-0 and queenside as 0-0-0.

*Most scholastic tournaments require players in grades four and above to take notation.* If the player does not know how to take notation, the tournament director may allow the game to be played but may assess the non-notating player a time penalty, typically 5 minutes for every 30 minutes of time allowed for the game. *If the player knows how to notate but chooses not to, the tournament director may, at his discretion, impose the severe penalty of affording the player only 5 minutes on his clock to complete his entire game.* This should serve as a cautionary tale: be prepared to notate. *Neither player is required to notate once either game clock gets down to five minutes remaining.*

*A player may borrow, on his own time, his opponent’s notation book during the round to correct an error in notation.* Players may also compare notation after the conclusion of the round to correct any mistakes. This kind of consultation should take place outside of the tournament room to avoid distracting players involved in active games.