

## Chess Notation and Jargon

**Always set up the board with the White pieces on ranks 1 and 2... the Black pieces on ranks 7 and 8. The Queens go on their own color, and h1 is White's King Rook.**

When describing a series of chess moves we use abbreviations. Those abbreviations are known in chess as *notation*. The most common form used is "algebraic" notation employed in most chess books. Despite the unpleasant label, it's very easy to understand. Here's how it works:

1. Squares are named by their coordinates—a4, e5, h8, etc.; these should be self explanatory, since every diagram includes numbers running up the side of the board and letters along the bottom. The numbered horizontal rows are called *ranks*. The vertical columns named by letters are called *files*.
2. Pieces are named by their first letter. Q = queen; R = rook; etc. The only exception is the knight, which is referred to as "N" to distinguish it from the King ("K"). Pawns are named by their squares, so that "d4-d5" means the pawn on d4 moves to d5. Usually, a pawn move is described without bothering to name the square it came from: one simply says "1. d5," and everyone understands this means that the pawn on the d-file moves to d5.
3. Captures are described with an "x" between the names of the pieces capturing and being captured. Algebraic notation describes a capture by just referring to the square where it occurs. Thus, if White's queen takes Black's rook on the f6 square, most chess books would say "Qxf6"; The real benefit of naming captures by the squares where they occur come when describing long sequences.
4. Turning back to the notation rules, *castling* is indicated by writing 0-0 (if it's on the side of the board where the king starts) or 0-0-0 (if it's on the queenside: long castling, as it is called).
5. Now a couple of minor points that don't come up often; you probably don't need to worry about them, but for the sake of completeness: if a capture is made *en passant*, that's indicated by writing "ep" afterwards. Second, if one of your pawns reaches the opponent's back rank, it gets promoted to some other more powerful piece of your choice—usually the queen, though occasionally, an under promotion works better. We indicate promotion with an equal sign: f7-f8=Q means the pawn on f7 moves to f8 and becomes a queen.

Finally, if more than one piece could be indicated by a description (in other words, if there are two rooks on the board and it's not obvious which one is meant), sometimes the coordinate of the piece will be given as well. So Rc8xN means the rook on c8 (not some other rook) captures the opponent's knight. Occasionally this approach also will be used just for clarity's sake even if there is no technical reason for confusion.

6. Sequences of moves are described in pairs, with the White move first. Thus a game might begin 1. e2-e4, e7-e5 [again, this *could* have been written "1. e4, e5"]; 2. Nf3, Nc6; 3. Bb5, a6; 4. BxNc6, d7xBc6. This means that White started by moving his e-pawn forward two squares, and that Black then did the same; then on White's second turn he moved his knight to f3, and then Black moved his knight to c6 to defend his e5 pawn. White brought out his bishop. Black chased it with his pawn on the a-file. White replied by taking Black's knight. Black recaptured with the d-pawn on c6.

When we look at positions from the middle of a game (as we generally will) we will describe White's first move in that position with the numeral "1" (as something like "1. Nf5," for example). We call it "1" because it's the first move in the pictured position, even though it's not the first move in the game.

If we want to start by describing a move of Black's, we do it by saying something like: "Black can play 1...Nf5." The "1" followed by the three dots indicates that we're looking at the first pair of moves in the position but that we're starting with the second *half* of the pair: in other words, with Black's move.

7. A plus sign after a move (like this: Rh8+) means that the move checks the enemy king. A "#" sign after a move (like this: Rh8#) means that the move is checkmate (or simply "mate," as we more commonly say).

8. It often happens that a player can sacrifice a knight or bishop to win an enemy rook. Since rooks are more valuable than knights or bishops, a player who does this is said to have "won the exchange." If we reach a stage of the game where I have, say, a bishop and a rook and you have a bishop and a knight, I am said to be "ahead the exchange."

9. A piece is said to be "loose" if it has no defenders. It is "hanging" if it is exposed to capture; you *hang* your queen if you leave it where your opponent can take it for free. This also is known as leaving a piece *en prise*.

10. It's very important to record the moves of your games as soon as you learn notation. Even your practice games (skittles). The reason is that recording your moves is a requirement in tournament games. Another benefit is you will be able to go over your game afterwards... to see if you missed any opportunities, or if better moves were available. Analyzing our games is one of the best improvement tools we can use.

A sample game score: Ruy Lopez Opening

1.e4 e5

2.Nf3 Nc6

3.Bb5 a6

4.Ba4 Nf6

5.0-0 Nxe4

6.Re1 Nc5

7.Nc3 Nxa4

8.Nxe5 Nxe5

9.Rxe5+ Be7

10.Nd5! 0-0

11.Nxe7+ Kh8

12.Qh5 d6?

13.Qxh7+ Kxh7

14.Rh5# 1-0