

Chess Strategies

Beginner's Chess Strategy

The Pin and the Fork

The Pin and the Fork are two separate strategies which basically rely on the same idea. A clever move places your piece in a situation which not only attacks one of your opponents' unguarded pieces, but two! This places your opponent in quite a predicament, since they must lose something! They only have one move, and so they may only retreat. Pins and forks are quite effective, but one must always keep a close watch on the layout of the board to watch for opportunities.

Some Common Scenarios:

1. Doest thy enemy have two unprotected pieces on a diagonal? Slide a bishop into that diagonal and smite thy enemy.
2. Doest thy enemy have two unprotected pieces on a row? A rook shall help even thy battle.
3. Canst thou send thy knight into battle and pin two of thy opponent's pieces?
4. Especially vile is putting thy opponent's king in check and at the same time attacking another piece. Thy opponent must save their own king, and so thou canst take the other piece most grandly.

Defense: If for some reason you are ever caught in a pin or a fork, all hope is not lost. There are still some evasive maneuvers which are highly effective in destroying any advantage to your opponent.

1. Retreat and Reinforce - One piece retreats from your attacking opponent, but on its retreat, it moves into a position which will protect your other vulnerable piece. This effectively reduces the situation from being advantageous for your opponent to one of an exchange. If he does decide to follow through and attack your other piece, then you will be able to capture his piece, thereby maintaining equality on the board.
2. Take Someone Hostage - This saving technique, which is outlined below, moves the attention somewhere else on the board. You attack one of your opponent's important pieces (protecting yourself, of course) somewhere else on the board. This distracts the opponent, who must retreat or defend their other piece. With a little finesse, you can also slide in a little defense for your attacked pieces and get yourself out of your unfortunate situation.

A Good Beginner Opening Move

Which piece should I move first, the beginner often asks himself? A good beginner opening move is moving forward the pawn in front of the king. You will see this opening played often, even with advanced players. Why? By moving the king's pawn forward, the bishop and the queen are now freed to move as they please. No other opening move frees up two pieces like that. Take a look at the other possible opening moves, and you will see how the king's pawn opening provides the most flexibility. In fact, look at just how effective it is used in the four move checkmate!

Intermediate Chess Strategy

In advancing to intermediate play, one of the important concepts is killing two birds with one stone. That is, each of your moves serves more than just one purpose. For example, you can attack your opponent, while at the same time defending your piece, all in one move. You can block your opponent's pawn with your pawn, while at the same time opening up a path for you queen. By effectively accomplishing multiple goals with one move, you will be building up a foundation for the win.

Holding Pieces Hostage

Holding pieces hostage can be a strategy for getting out of sticky situations. Once in a while, your opponent is going to be attacking one of your guys. Your guy is unprotected, you can't send people to protect him, and you can't tell him to escape. He's done for! You pretty much know that your enemy's next move is to kill your guy. A novice player would throw up his hands in defeat!

But it doesn't have to happen that way! What do you do when you're surrounded by the enemy? You take your opponent's piece hostage! Find one of his other pieces on the board and attack it! Maybe you can slide your bishop up to attack his unprotected rook. Face your opponent and say, "If you kill me, then I will kill you. Your choice." Of course, he may decide to take your piece anyway, at which point you take his. But then again, maybe that rook is important to him. He just might have to use his move to help his rook escape instead of killing your guy. If you moved right, perhaps your bishop is now only one move away from protecting your original guy. You move your bishop, protected your original guy, and your man has been defended! The unprotected piece that your opponent thought he was going to take, he can't take it so easily now!

Invisible Attack (discovered attack)

Do you want to look like a chess champion? Then you need to know about the invisible attack. These attacks can always fake out beginning players, and oftentimes can fake out intermediate and even advanced players because it's so unexpected! Invisible attacks are just that - invisible. They are indirect. They don't happen that often, so players just aren't watching out or defending for them. Let's go over what makes the difference between an invisible vs. a direct attack. Normally, when you want to attack an opponent's piece, you move your attacking piece. In an invisible attack, your attacking piece stays still. The technique requires moving one of your OTHER pieces that has been BLOCKING that piece's attack. Often, your opponent will be looking at what your MOVING piece is doing, totally ignoring the pieces that are STANDING STILL, and whose attacks has just been opened. This is a great way to attack two of your opponent's pieces at the same time (see pin and fork). Your moving piece attacks your opponent, and then the standing still piece also opens an attack.

It's pretty funny if you do an invisible attack on a king. Your unaware opponent starts moving one of their other pieces, and then you say, "Hey man, what are you doing? You're in check!" Chuckle to yourself as they reel in surprise!

So let's go over this concept again. In order to do the invisible attack, you need an attacking piece that is just standing there (i.e. a rook). This piece COULD be attacking your opponent's piece (i.e. king), except that one of your pieces is in the way (i.e. a knight). Now, you move the blocking piece (knight) out of the way, and then your attacking piece (rook) is now attacking your opponent's piece (king). If you just happened to attack the king, by the way, you have just put your opponent in check. He must use his next move to get out of check. This means that you can put your knight in some danger (it attacks an opponent's protected piece), your rook checks the king at the same time, your opponent has to move the king, and then you can bring your rook back into safety. You just got a FREE PIECE. And we all like things that are free, right??

Defense: To defend against the invisible attack, you should be vigilant and reanalyze the ENTIRE board every time your opponent makes a move. Don't just focus on the piece that just moved, because maybe he just opened up an invisible attack! It is also wise to just be aware of possible invisible attacks. They are somewhat hard to see if you're not looking for them. And you will need the advance notice in order to properly defend your pieces.

Exchanging Pieces

What is exchanging pieces? Exchanging pieces is trading one of your pieces for an identically valued piece of your opponents. In terms of pieces, both you and your opponent, have lost an identical amount of firepower.

Now would be a good time to review the values of the chess pieces. In general, the piece rankings are, from highest to lowest, are queen, rook, bishop, knight, pawn. The values of the knight and bishop depend on the stage of the game. Early in the game, the knight is more valuable than the bishop due to the knight's ability to jump over a crowded battlefield. Later in the game, the bishop becomes more important due to his ability to cover the board. Similarly, the rook isn't very useful early in the game, but it becomes deadly in the endgame as the lines clear up. Thus, it is important to remember that a piece's value is not set in stone, but rather changes through the game.

In an exchange, a knight is traded for a knight, bishop for a bishop, etc. Often, trading a bishop for a knight, or a knight for a bishop, can often be considered an exchange of equals. The loss of a rook for knight or bishop, however, is usually not a good exchange.

When playing against beginners, there is a tendency for many beginners to exchange pieces, while more experienced players will often avoid this tendency. With exchanging pieces, it is difficult to whether to do it or not to do it. The best answer, which is often found in life, is that "it depends". It is essential that the decision to exchange pieces takes into account the overall board configuration and flow of the game, not just for the sake of annoying your opponent.

There are many times when it would be advantageous to exchange pieces. If a particular piece is heavily used by your opponent, or you can see that a particular piece forms the foundation for their offense or defensive strategy, then there is good reason to perform an exchange. In doing so, you rob your opponent of a highly valued piece while losing your less valued, while identical, piece.

Exchanging pieces also holds value in accelerating the game. If you hold a numerical or strategic advantage over your opponent, then perhaps it maybe beneficial to take as many pieces off the board as possible towither your opponents army down, while maintaining your advantage.

It is well known that Rooks are more valuable in the end game than the mid game. Exchanging pawns will allow one to open up the board so that there is more room for one's Rooks to maneuver. This is especially beneficial if you hold more Rooks than your opponent.

In some instances, when an opponent offers you an exchange by threatening your (protected) piece with an identically valued piece of theirs, it may be better to retreat. With more pieces at your disposal, you will have an easier time controlling the board, especially if you have the ability to coordinate your pieces such that they are able to protect each other. You also must consider whether taking their piece will disrupt the coordination or protection of your other pieces. Moving one piece can leave many gaps in your defense, and it is imperative that one is aware of these gaps.

The Sacrifice

Is your opponent's bishop sitting on a square that you need in order to secure a checkmate? How about luring him away with a queen sacrifice? The sacrifice is a time honored chess strategy where you purposely put your pieces in harm's way in order to force your opponent's piece to move. Savvy players will recognize the sacrifice, but it may not be so obvious to others. Make sure that you can see all the possible moves towards the end goal, whether it may be a checkmate, or capturing your opponent's queen. It would be foolish to sacrifice your piece for nothing. Good planning is the secret to the sacrifice (how's that for alliteration).

Wasted Moves

Becoming an intermediate chess player isn't just learning about intermediate strategies; it's about developing an Zen-like awareness of chess concepts, such as wasted chess moves. It's important not to waste your moves as an intermediate chess player. What's a wasted move? Any move that does nothing to strengthen your position. Did you just advance that pawn in front of your rook? If that move wasn't helping you out (i.e. opening up your

bishop, defending your piece, or attacking your opponent's piece), then it was a wasted chess move. Another common example of wasting two moves is moving your bishop forward, then moving him back to his previous location in the next move. Even if he was being attacked, and you had to move him back to save him, did you accomplish anything in those two moves? No. Your pieces are now in the same place they were two moves ago, and your opponent probably has more control of the board with that piece that just attacked your bishop. In intermediate play, the player who better controls the board has the advantage. An intermediate player knows that each move counts, and he will use each move to either control more of the board, defend his pieces, or attack your pieces (maybe even all three in one move). Thus, it's essential, especially at the beginning of the game, to not let your opponent have more effective moves than you do. This isn't Uno, where you can make your opponent lose his move, so don't you lose yours.

Controlling Board Center

Why is it that chess grandmasters are able to beat computer opponents again and again? It's certainly not because they can enumerate every possible chess scenario faster than computers can. It's probably because they have elevated chess strategy to a more abstract level, which computers can't do. Rather than thinking, "If I move my rook here, then he could either 1) take my queen, or 2) move his pawn here, or 3) etc...", they think "Let me control board center, this will allow me to control more squares, and prevent my opponent's movement." Computers cannot think at that level, and so grandmasters can beat out the computer using the human mind.

This anecdote illustrates one of the more abstract strategies of chess - Controlling Board Center. This is a concept that you should have in the back of your mind when given a choice of moves for your piece. If you move your piece towards the center of the board, it will be able to attack more squares and have more places to maneuver. If you move it towards the side of the board, it will have problems attacking the center of the board, and you can forget about attacking the other side. Even worse, your piece may even get trapped in the side, as your opponent blocks off your piece with their well-protected pawns. Your piece becomes a sideshow, strategically worthless. Don't let this happen to you. All chess moves are not created equal.

Controlling the center of the board isn't always easy. The center is usually where most of the carnage takes place. Make sure that your pieces are well-protected by your other pieces. A good pawn structure will also help. It's even better if your pawns control the center. How annoying it must be for your opponent when he can't move his bishop cause your pawn is protecting the center squares!

Opening Up Your Pieces Early

Is your Knight still sitting back in his original square sipping tea? Why is your bishop outside washing his car? Did you not give him enough to do? Make good usage of your assets. Move those badboys out, and make them earn their pay! The more pieces you have out on the board, the better your control of the board. Strategically, having your pieces on the back line isn't very worthwhile -- all they're doing is protecting your pawns. Start getting your pieces off the back line and out in the front. The reason is simple, the more pieces you have at your disposal, the more flexible you will be, the more squares you can cover, and when things start heating up, your knight will be right there ready to save your bishop, instead of sitting back at home and too far away to offer any real protection. Thus, early in the game, try to create openings for your pieces, adjust your pawn structure so that your more advanced pieces can get out.

There is a disadvantage to this. It's possible that if your pieces get out too early in the game (especially the queen), they might run right into a wall of your opponents pawns. Then your opponent might start attacking your advanced pieces with his less valuable pawns. It's important to be aware of this. In that case, make sure to respond with your own pawns, since you don't want to lose your more advanced pieces to your opponents pawns. No strategy is foolproof, but opening up your pieces and getting them out on the board has many advantages.