

RECORDING GAME MOVES (BASICS)

Different systems have been devised for creating a record of a game as it is played by recording the moves that each player makes. While there are several advantages to recording moves, it is nevertheless true that for many beginning players, recording moves is a distraction and nuisance that detracts from their enjoyment of the game. So we want to be very clear about this: it is not necessary that players in the Summer Program record their moves, but we encourage players to do so.

RECORDING GAME MOVES (DETAILS)

Why You Should Record Your Moves

In tournaments recording your moves can be beneficial because it allows you to make certain claims (for example, that your opponent made an illegal move, or that the game is a draw, or that you have a win on time). But there is another and much more important reason to record your moves: it allows you to “analyze” your games, which means to play them over again to see where you went wrong or what you did right or what else you might have done. And the reason for analyzing is this: **It is the best way to improve quickly!** Many players make the same mistakes over and over. If you “replay” your games, you will recognize your typical mistakes faster than if you simply rely on a vague memory of something that seems to have happened to you before. And **improvement comes from eliminating mistakes!**

When you begin recording your moves, you may find later that you’ve made mistakes on your score sheet. Sometimes, you may not be able to play back the whole game because of such mistakes. Don’t worry! It’s still worthwhile recording your moves to develop the habit. After a while, recording your moves becomes “second nature.” Accuracy comes with practice.

How to Record Moves

There are several ways to record chess moves, but we will explain only one here. It is called “algebraic notation” and is the commonest method now in use. When you record a game, you record both your moves and your opponent’s moves in two columns: White’s moves in the first column, and Black’s moves in the second column. An example game record is provided on the last page of this document. The following description explains the method for creating such a record.

Identifying Squares: Each square has a unique name made up of its file (or vertical column) and rank (or horizontal row). The files are labeled with the letters **a, b, c, d, e, f, g** and **h**. The ranks are labeled with the numbers **1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7** and **8**. For example, g6 (“file g/rank 6”) means square number 6 on the g file, which is the same as square number 7 (g being the 7th letter) on the 6th rank. The board illustrated on the next page shows the algebraic name of every square.

a8	b8	c8	d8	e8	f8	g8	h8
a7	b7	c7	d7	e7	f7	g7	h7
a6	b6	c6	d6	e6	f6	g6	h6
a5	b5	c5	d5	e5	f5	g5	h5
a4	b4	c4	d4	e4	f4	g4	h4
a3	b3	c3	d3	e3	f3	g3	h3
a2	b2	c2	d2	e2	f2	g2	h2
a1	b1	c1	d1	e1	f1	g1	h1

Identifying Pieces: Pieces are identified by capital letters: K = king, Q = queen, R = rook, B = bishop, N = knight (because “K” is already used for “king”). Pawns don’t get a capital letter, because it is enough to indicate only the file they are on (a, b, c, etc.).

Indicating Moves: Moves are recorded by identifying the *piece being moved* and the *destination square*. For example, Nf3 means a knight moves to square f3. For pawn moves, only the destination square is recorded: thus, e4 means the e pawn moves to square e4.

In a situation where either of two knights or rooks (or queens — or, yes, even bishops) can move to the same square, either the rank or the file that the piece is leaving is indicated as well as the destination square. Because the two pieces must be either on different files or on different ranks, this makes it clear which piece was moved. For example, when one rook is on a1 and the other is on f1, and they can both move to e1, the move is recorded as Rae1, if the a1 rook is moved, and as Rfe1 if the f1 rook is moved. Similarly if one knight is on f3 and the other is on f5, a knight move to d4 is recorded as either N5d4 or N3d4.

Moves can be written in two ways when both the rank and the file identify the piece moved. In this case it doesn’t make any difference whether the file or rank is used. For example, suppose one rook is on a1 and the other rook is on e5, and they both can move to a5. If the a1 rook is moved, the move could be indicated either as Raa5 or as R1a5. If the e5 rook is moved, the move could be indicated either as Rea5 or as R5a5. (While both notations are correct, it is customary to use the file letter to distinguish which piece, and then to use the rank number if both pieces are on the same file.)

Indicating Captures: Captures are indicated by inserting an “x” before the destination square: for example, Nxf3 means the a knight captured whatever piece was located on the f3 square; Raxe1 means the rook on a1 captured whatever piece was located on the e1 square; N5xd4 means the knight on rank 5 captured whatever piece was located on the d4 square. Note that algebraic notation does not tell you *what* the piece is that is captured, only *where* it is — or was.

Pawn captures are indicated by writing the file the pawn leaves and the destination square. For example, exd5 means the pawn that was on the e file captured whatever piece was on the d5 square. Note that this is true also for en passant capture even though the pawn captured in this situation does not occupy the destination square but the square in front of the destination square. En passant captures are identified by writing “e.p.” after the move. For example, exf6 e.p. means that the pawn on the e file moved to square f6 and in the process captured a pawn that occupied square f5.

Special Moves and Notations: Castling on the kingside (castling short) is written as 0-0; castling on the queenside (castling long) is written as 0-0-0. When a move results in check (including discovered check!), “+” is written after the move; checkmate is indicated by “++” or by “#” (for example, Qa4+, Bxf3+, 0-0+, Nh3+, Rd8#). When a pawn reaches the eighth rank and is promoted, the move is written as any normal pawn move followed by “=” and the letter for the piece the pawn is promoted to: b8=Q, f1=N.

Annotations: “Annotation” refers to comments or symbols that have been added to the game record for publication. Some annotation consists of narrative comments on the game or possible moves that represent alternative lines of play (that is, moves other than the ones actually played in the game). The simplest annotation, however, is the use of a few symbols to express opinions about particular moves. In many chess publications the symbols “!” and “!!!” are used for good and very good moves respectively, while “?” and “??” are used for bad or questionable moves and outright blunders respectively. The symbol “?!” means “a questionable and probably bad move”; while “!?” means something like, “an unusual or uncertain but possibly good move.” You might encounter other symbols in some chess publications, but their meanings are usually self-evident or explained in the publication. (Such symbols are used in any system of chess notation, not just algebraic notation.)

EXAMPLE GAME RECORD

This game record was contrived solely for purposes of illustrating all the elements of algebraic notation. It is definitely *not* an example of how to play good chess, but playing the game through will help you become familiar with this method of recording game moves.

1. e4 e5
2. Nf3 b6
3. Bc4 Bb7
4. 0-0 Nc6
5. d4 exd4
6. e5 f5
7. exf6ep. Nxf6
8. Bg5 h6
9. Bxf6 Qxf6
10. Nbd2 Be7
11. Nb3 0-0-0
12. Nfxd4 Rhf8
13. Kh1 Qh4
14. g3 Nxd4+
15. Kg1 Qh5
16. Qxh5 Nf3+
17. Kg2 Ne1+
18. Kg1 Bb4
19. c3 Nf3+
20. Qxf3 Bxf3
21. cxb4 Rde8
22. Nd4 Re4
23. Nxf3 Rxc4
24. Ne5 Re4
25. Ng6 Rfe8
26. Rad1 Re2
27. Nf4 Rxb2
28. Nd3 Rxa2

29. Rfe1 Rxe1
30. Rxe1 Ra3
31. Rd1 a5
32. bxa5 Rxa5
33. Kg2 Rd5
34. Nb2 Rxd1
35. Nxd1 c5
36. Nc3 Kc7
37. Kf3 Kc6
38. Ke4 b5
39. Nb1 b4
40. Kd3 Kb5
41. f4 c4+
42. Kc2 b3+

43.	Kb2	Kb4
44.	Nc3	Kc5
45.	h4	d5
46.	g4	d4
47.	h5	dxc3+
48.	Kc1	b2+
49.	Kc2	Kb4
50.	Kd1	b1=Q+
51.	Ke2	Qe4+
52.	Kf2	Qxf4+
53.	Ke1	c2
54.	Ke2	c1=Q
55.	g5	

Note that Black's 14th move produces a *discovered* check, but this does not need to be indicated explicitly in the notation. And, for the *coup de grâce*, Black can checkmate with any one of four moves, and each of these moves can be written in either of two ways. So the last recorded move of the game might be any one of the following:

55.	...	Qcd2# or Q1d2#
55.	...	Qfe3# or Q4e3#
55.	...	Qcf1# or Q1f1#
55.	...	Qff1# or Q4f1#

By the way, notice above how an ellipsis (...) is used in place of White's move when the first move indicated is by Black. In this instance the game record was interrupted after White's 55th move to insert a comment. Since White's 55th move was printed before the interruption, it is not repeated when the game record is resumed.