

Introduction

So, you want to learn how to play the greatest board game ever invented... an excellent decision! Chess isn't called the Royal game for nothing. It has been around for over 1500 hundred years (although the exact rules that we play by have been around for about 500 years), and will continue to bring joy to millions of people for generations to come.

Sure, computers are now at the point where they can defeat the very best chess players in the world, but who cares? The fact that a boat can go faster than a human being doesn't stop us from having swim meets. Why? Because we want to see how we measure up against other human beings, not machines! And a game of chess allows you to pit your mind against your opponents in a battle of ideas, strategies and tactics. You are a general in charge of your own army on a battlefield of 64 squares. Your mission is to destroy (also known as "check-mate") your opponent's king, before he annihilates yours. And the good news is, if you do get checkmated, you can always set up the pieces again and have another go.

One helpful piece of advice I can give you before we get started is to have patience with yourself. Chess is a challenging game and it takes time to learn many of the basic strategies and tactics. Indeed, while the moves themselves are relatively easy to learn, you can spend a lifetime trying to master the game (many grandmasters have!). However, let me assure you that the rewards you will gain in learning to understand the beauty and mystery that is chess are well worth the effort. And I will be right by your side every step of the way to help you on your way to becoming a successful chess player.

By the way, I want to mention that besides providing hours of enjoyment, playing chess offers another added benefit... a stronger and healthier mind! Recent studies have shown a link between brain activity and the staving off of Alzheimer's disease. That is, the more you use your brain, the stronger it becomes and the less susceptible it is to breaking down. And that's good news, because chess is the ultimate brain game!

*-Michael Jeffreys
Los Angeles*

The Chessboard

64 Squares

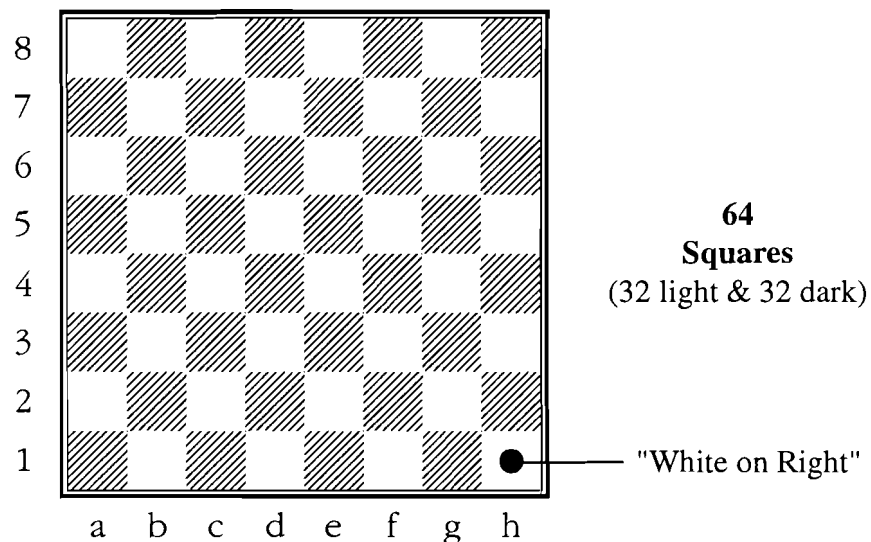
One evening I was home watching the show "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?", and one of the contestants was asked, "How many squares are there on a chessboard?" And you know what? He gave the wrong answer! Imagine, someone not knowing that there are **64** squares!

32 of the squares are "*light*" and 32 are "*dark*." (Note: boards come in many different colors. Some are red and black, others are white and green... the variations are endless. It doesn't much matter what the colors are as long as you can tell the light squares from the dark ones.)

"White on Right!"

The first thing you need to know is that whenever you set up a chessboard, there must be a **WHITE** (light) square in the bottom right hand corner. It's helpful to remember the saying, "*White on right!*" Few things irk a chess player more than seeing a chess board in an ad or movie that is set up illegally, i.e., with a dark square in the bottom right corner. I was once given a framed color photo of a real cat and mouse playing chess. (How they got the two animals, natural born enemies, to pose long enough for the photo is beyond me.) However, because the board had been set up wrong, and there was a dark square in the bottom right corner, every time I looked at the picture I would get annoyed. So much so, that eventually I had to throw it out!

Here is a correctly laid out chessboard:



The Pieces

16 White and 16 Black

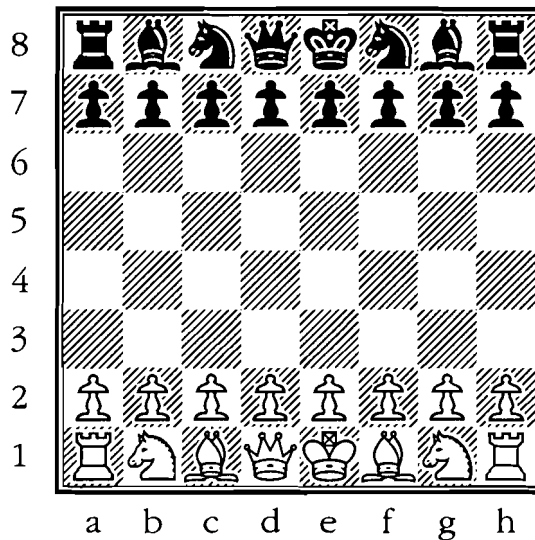
The game of chess is played with 32 pieces: 16 White and 16 Black. Both sides start off with the same exact set (the only difference being color). Here are the pieces followed by the number per side.

	King	(one)
	Queen	(one)
	Rook	(two)
	Bishop	(two)
	Knight	(two)
	Pawn	(eight)

Like the board, chess pieces come in a variety of colors and shapes. For example, there is *The Simpson's* chess set with the pieces resembling characters from the TV show. There is also the *Mets vs. Yankees* baseball chess set, the *Coca-Cola Polar bears* chess set, the *Lord of the Rings* chess set and others. While collectors may find these sets interesting, most serious chess players prefer the standard "Staunton chessmen," named after Howard Staunton, the 19th century player from England. The diagrams in this book use the "Staunton design."

Starting Position

Here are the pieces properly set up on the board in their starting position:



The starting position

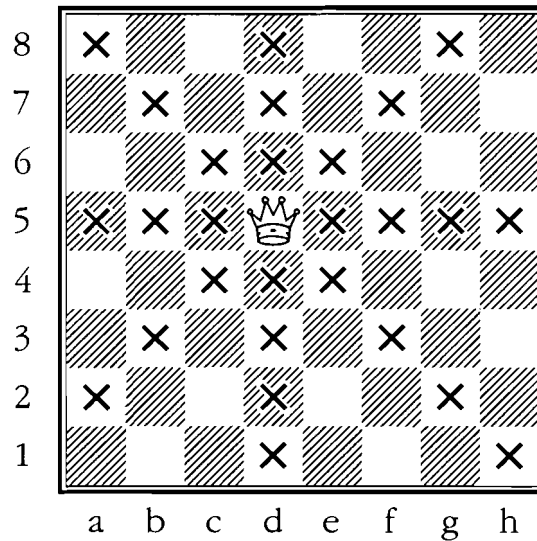
The Queen "takes her color"

Notice that the queens always go on their own color, i.e. the White queen starts on a white square (d1), and the Black queen starts on a black square (d8). To help the students in my class remember this, I sometimes joke, "Remember, her dress must match her shoes!" meaning that a White queen must have white shoes, i.e., stand on a white square and the Black queen must have black shoes, i.e., stand on a black square.

Next to the queen stands the king, they are flanked by the bishops, next come the knights, and finally the rooks hold up the corners. Every game of chess begins with this set up. (Again, notice there is a white square in the right-hand bottom corner of the board. Always check this before setting up your pieces.)

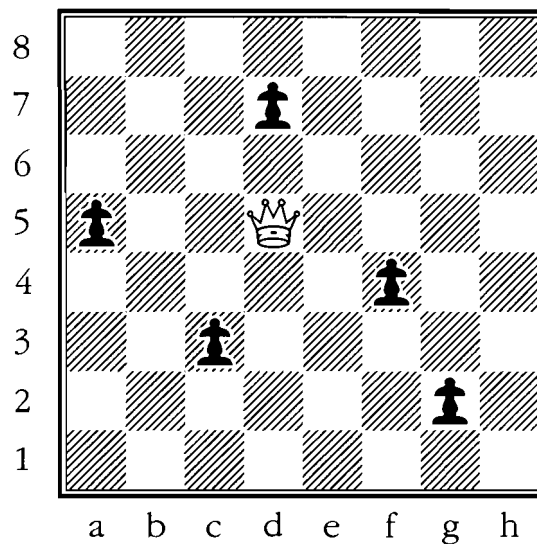
The Queen

The queen is the most powerful piece on the board. She can move as many squares as she wants in any direction. Her only liability is the fact that because she is so valuable, she can be harrassed by lesser pieces, such as knights, bishops and rooks. In the diagram below, there is an **X** on each legal square the queen can move to:



The Queen moves **as many squares as she wants in any direction**

Q: Which of the five pawns can the White Queen legally capture?



A: The pawns on **a5, d7, and g2**

How to Come Up With a Plan

One of the hardest parts of learning how to play chess well is knowing what to do once you've developed your pieces and castled. To help you, I've come up with a simple three-step process which you should use throughout your game. All strong players use some form of this thinking process to come up with their winning plans.

Step 1: Evaluate the Position

You do this by mentally listing the positive and negative features for each side in the position. Whose king is safer? Which side has the better pawn structure? Whose pieces are more mobile. What are the weaknesses in each side's position? By taking the time to list the + and - of each side, you will have a much better feel for the position.

You will not only begin to understand what you should be doing at the board to improve your position, but what your opponent should be doing. The nice part about this is if for some reason your opponent doesn't play according to the needs of the position, you will be able to take advantage of this. (See next step)

Step 2: Pick a key objective

This means using the information you've just collected. If you see an outpost (a square that cannot be attacked by enemy pawns) on **e5**, then your objective would be to get a knight into that square. If you see a pawn that is difficult to defend, your objective would be to attack it, keep ganging up on it, and eventually win it.

If you noticed that a piece is overworked, than your objective would be to see how you could take advantage of this. Perhaps you can win a piece through a combination? If you noticed that the enemy king has very few defenders around him, your objective would be to figure out a way to deliver checkmate. And, if none of these plans were available, your objective could be simply to improve your position by developing a piece off the back rank.