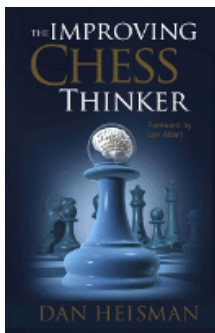




COLUMNISTS

Novice Nook

Dan Heisman



CHESSTHEATRE

Play through and download the games from [ChessCafe.com](#) in the [DGT Game Viewer](#).



What's in a Name?

Quote of the Month: *A rows by any other name would smell rank – or like a file.*

Since almost everyone thinks in language, language is paramount for understanding. In chess we use a special language, but to not understand it fully can be detrimental to your chess thinking. Even thinking the wrong words to yourself often leads to incorrect conclusions and thus erroneous moves.

Bishop-Pair

You often hear of the *bishop-pair*, but it may surprise you to learn that it does *not* mean that you have a pair of bishops. Instead, the term "bishop-pair" is a shortened version of *the advantage of the bishop-pair*. That means *one player has two bishops, but his opponent does not*. So when someone says, "You have the bishop-pair," it really means, "You have the advantage of the bishop-pair." Get it? GM Larry Kaufman used a database of millions of positions to measure the average advantage of the bishop-pair as about 1/2-pawn.

Break Move

The term *break move* is the same as a *pawn break*, since by definition all break moves are by pawns. But when I ask someone who is learning to locate a break move (a move that can break up the opponent's pawn structure), they often look for moves other than by pawns because I am only using the shorthand version of the term. If you want to learn more about pawn break moves, check out [Break Moves: Opening Lines to Increase Mobility](#). By the way, since all pawn moves are obviously moves, we don't always say "break move," just something like "play the *break* ...f5."

Losing the Queen

Sometimes I see players decline to trade queens when it would be advantageous for them to do so. When asked why, the answer is often "I did not want to lose my queen." But to lose your queen would be to trade it for something of less value. You lose your home to foreclosure, but you don't lose your home if you sell it for fair value; similarly, if you trade your queen for your opponent's queen or for two rooks, that is hardly losing your queen. Yes, in these situations your queen is no longer on the board, but in the chess sense you did not lose it. Yet the very act of thinking, "I don't want to lose my queen," when the transaction would simply be a fair trade automatically prejudices you against the trade even if it is advantageous.

Retreating

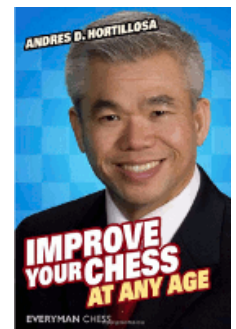
Often the best move for a non-pawn is to go "backwards." There are so many examples of this that it is unnecessary to list any. Yet beginners very often are prejudiced against "retreating," fearing it is cowardly or defensive. What would you do in the following position?

White to Play

Purchases from our [shop](#) help keep [ChessCafe.com](#) freely accessible:

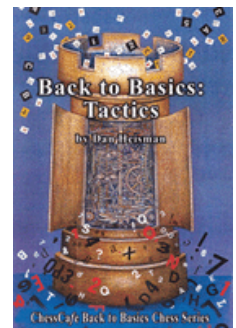


[Chess Informant 106](#)



[Improve Your Chess at Any Age](#)

by Andres D. Hortillosa



[Back to Basics: Tactics](#)

by Dan Heisman



If 1.Nh4?, then simply 1...g5 traps the knight, which is much better than 1...Be7? 2.g3. 1.Re1?, the move played in the game, is based on wishful but faulty thinking, hoping for 1...exf3?? 2.Bxf3+ winning the queen. Black saw the "red flag" of the attacked knight, just shrugged his shoulders, and doused all of White's hopes with 1...Be7 winning the knight because the rook move took away its safe retreat square.

Instead, White should just move 1.Ne1 and later break with d3 (1.c4 and then the same retreat 2.Ne1 is also OK, but that weakens d3 and d4). In the game continuation, White's reluctance to move the knight backward cost him the game. When I give this puzzle to students, some think "I don't want to retreat the knight." Instead of "What are all the moves that make the knight safe?" – retreat or not. The line 1.Nh4 g5 also illustrates the idea that *in determining safety, one should always look for whether a weaker piece can attack a stronger one*, because this removes the defensive possibility of guarding – see [The Five Ways to Make a Piece Safe](#) and thus raises the possibility of trapping the piece or perhaps can "win a tempo" – see [The Three Types of Reasonable Threats](#).

This idea of avoiding retreats can be carried to extremes. I once watched a youngster in the following position consider his move after advancing Nf3-g5 and then seeing his knight challenged with ...h6.

White to Play after 1...h6



He played 2.Nxf7?? and lost the knight after 2...Rxf7. When I asked him why he did not just move 2.Nf3, he said that would not be correct because he just played the knight from f3 to g5 and to retreat to f3 must be bad. I explained that he was correct that the entire two move sequence forcing the knight to return safely was bad, but the harmful move was to play Ng5, not the forced return Nf3. Refusing to admit his error with 2.Nxf7 just compounded the error.

Lose a Rook

I run into the following mistake all the time. Consider the following position; what should Black do?

Black to Play



Many beginners (and, unfortunately even some intermediates) think, "I can let him take the knight or I can let him take the rook" or, similarly, "I can let him win the knight or I can let him win the rook." That makes it sound like it is obvious that you should save the knight, but actually the capture of the rook *allows a recapture of the bishop*, while a capture of the knight allows no recapture. Thus, it is much better to save the knight with 1...Nc6 than to save the "rook" with 1...Rd8??, since the capture on f8 only wins a rook for the bishop rather than giving up an entire piece on a5.

This leads us to the next misunderstood phrase.

Win the Exchange

Suppose you can win a bishop for a pawn, or a rook for a knight, or a queen for a rook. Are all these "winning the exchange"?

No, they are not! We reserve the phrase "winning the exchange" for winning a rook for a bishop or a knight – nothing else. For example, in the previous diagram if Black plays 1...Nc6, then instead of writing "wins a rook for the bishop" (as I purposely did), it would be more expedient to state that *White wins the exchange* with 2.Bxf8. In polling my students, I am flabbergasted how many experienced players confuse this nomenclature. They assume that any time they come out ahead on a trade they are winning the exchange. That misconception would make it rather difficult to understand many standard texts, whose authors almost always assume the readers know the meaning of "winning the exchange" or "being ahead the exchange."

So next time you see a position such as the previous one and have the choice of which to save, ask "Should I save the knight or should I save the exchange?" That will help you find the right answer since *the exchange is only worth about half a piece* (bishop or knight).

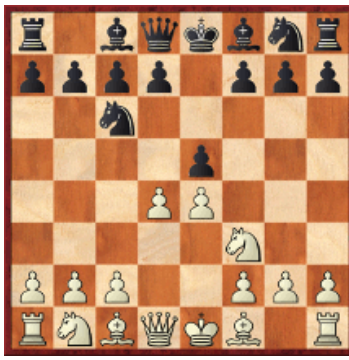
Guard a piece or defend a piece vs. save a piece

Very often when a piece is in danger and I ask a student what they should do, I hear them say, "How can I guard that piece?" or "How can I defend that piece?" rather than the correct "How can I make that piece safe?" There are five ways to make a piece safe (see [The Five Ways to Make a Piece Safe](#)):

- Guard it
- Block the attack
- Move the piece to a safe square
- Capture the attacking piece
- Counterattack

One of the worst ways to make a piece safe is to guard it because that ties up the guarding piece, and allows for further pile-ups or even removal-of-the-guard tactics.

Black to Play after 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4



In this defining position of the Scotch, beginners often think, "How can I guard my e-pawn." Instead of "How can I make my e-pawn safe?" As a result, rather than the correct and simple 3...exd4 ("When your opponent breaks with a center pawn, the correct response is to usually to capture it"), they play the passive 3...d6.

In general, the slower and weaker the piece, the better guard it makes. So pawns and kings make the best guards because, at least early in the game, they are often not going anywhere anyway.

Tournament

Strangely enough, the word "tournament" strikes fear in the hearts of both adult beginners and parents of new scholastic players! I have seen this reaction hundreds of times. The usual response is "I (or Johnny) am not good enough to go to a tournament." While that may be true if you or Johnny just learned how to play chess last week, I usually hear it about players who have been playing for many months if not years. And some players state, "I just want to study until I am good enough that when I go to a tournament I will be one of the better players." As if that is possible. This is somewhat similar to saying you want to play for the Yankees, but Little League is too difficult, so you will just hit in a batting cage.

However, if I ask scholastic parents to attend a *chess festival*, where people can play chess, have fun, and win prizes, the answer is usually "Sure, it sounds like fun." Thus, a chess tournament sounds serious, and for some indicates that it is only for "serious" or "good" players. No one tells them they won't get good unless they consistently play in events such as tournaments.

Many players don't want to go because they think tournaments are elimination events and that they will lose in the first round and have to go home. They do not take the time to investigate that almost all local tournaments are either Swiss-system, where you play all the rounds but only play others who are doing as well as you are, or quads, which are four player round-robins, where you play three games in a day. In any case, no one is eliminated.

Another problem emerges once a player realizes they get to play all the rounds: they don't want to. I often hear "I can't go to tournament X because I have to take my son to his soccer game on Sunday afternoon" or something similar. But this makes the assumption that you have to play all your games, which is not true. Tournaments have "byes," where a player simply tells the tournament director that he can't play a particular round. For example, in the above case of a Sunday afternoon conflict, a player might miss round five of a five-round event on Saturday and Sunday, playing three on Saturday and a fourth Sunday morning. Byes can be for 0, ½, or 1 point, but explaining all the possibilities is outside the scope of this column. Suffice it to say that byes are common – just make sure to tell the director ahead of time or else your non-appearance will not be a bye but a forfeit.

Record vs. Notate

One of the most common misuses of a chess verb is the non-word "notate." In chess if you take notation, then you write down the moves. If you annotate a game, you write notes so others can read its story. But the verb form meaning "to take notation" is "to record," not "to notate." Unfortunately, misusing

"notate" for "record" has become the chess version of "ain't" – it is so common that it is threatening to become correct, as many scholastic players have never been taught that to say "I notated my game" is wrong. My ear had become so accustomed to the correct "record" that now when I hear "notate" my brain gets the same reaction as it does when someone scratches their fingernails across a blackboard!

Unrated vs. Non-rated

In the U.S., the term "unrated" is misused all the time. An unrated player is one without a rating. An unrated section is a section where the games are rated, but participation is restricted to previously unrated players. If a tournament director does not intend to rate a section or a game, that is a "non-rated" event, not an "unrated" one. Unfortunately, many players have not heard of the term "non-rated," so they use "unrated" to mean both. For example, a player on the Internet Chess Club (ICC) was recently asking for a game and wrote "I'll play rated or unrated..." He meant that a prospective opponent did not have to have the game rated by the ICC, but if that was a U. S. Chess Federation event, then he would write "I'll play rated or non-rated..." Writing as he did would mean he would be willing to play a player who has a rating or one who does not.

X, Times, and Captures

When you speak the notation Bxf4, it should come out "bishop takes c4" or "bishop captures c4," but not "B 'ex' c4." It is also important to pronounce the word "bishop" to clarify that it is not a pawn capture (bxc4). Worse yet is "bishop times c4," as if there is some multiplication involved! If you go to a tournament and discuss a game in the skittles room by stating "Maybe he can play bishop times knight," you might get multiple strange stares...

Piece

Another term that depends heavily on context is "piece." There are three chess meanings:

1. "Let's play a game; get the pieces out of the bag." This means all thirty-two pieces
2. "Move every piece once, before you move any piece twice, unless there is a tactic." This refers to the non-pawns.
3. When discussing material "ahead a piece" means an extra bishop or knight. Similarly, "On the average a piece is worth a little more than three pawns" also refers to a bishop or knight.

The term "minor piece" is now synonymous with "piece" and so it has become archaic, which is somewhat less true about its brother term "major piece," meaning rook or queen.

Points vs. Pawns

The average pawn is worth one point, but it is wrong to say, "On the average a knight is worth a little more than three points." Not only do points not exist on a chessboard, but converting material (especially pawns!) to points is extra work! Adding this non-existent concept makes things harder, not easier.

Every piece measure in chess is initially based on average value. We all understand there are good bishops and bad bishops, outpost knights and trapped rooks; pieces vary in value just as pawns do depending on the specific position. But that means using the real concept "pawn" (meaning the average value of a pawn) for the base measure always makes sense *in context*, and the introduction of the extraneous term "points" has no real benefit. If a point is the average value of one pawn, use pawns!

Threefold Repetition and Perpetual Check

There is no draw rule called *perpetual check*, but it is a legitimate concept. The rule that applies is *Threefold Repetition of Position*, which states if the same position (with all dynamic possibilities such as castling) occurs three

times with the same player to move *at any time during the game*, the player making the repetition can claim a draw. In over-the-board play, the claimant should record that move on his scoresheet, stop the clock, and claim a draw by threefold repetition of position to his opponent; if the opponent disagrees, then he should get the tournament director to decide the claim. The moves that created the identical positions do not have to be the same and the position repetitions could occur many moves apart. When one side can check the other indefinitely, the draw will occur when one side can claim threefold repetition (or the players agree earlier), and this situation is called perpetual check.

Fifty-Move Rule Draw

The *draw by fifty-move rule* has nothing to do with one player having just a king (as many believe), nor does it relate to the endgame for that matter. The rule states that if both sides make fifty consecutive moves (e.g., moves 61 thru 110) with no captures or pawn moves, then either side may claim a draw. For example, if the first fifty moves of the game are knight moves with no captures and no threefold repetition of position - which could result in an earlier draw claim - then Black can claim a fifty-move rule draw on his fiftieth move.

Backward pawn

A backward pawn is not the rearmost pawn in a pawn chain, although this pawn may or may not be backward. Refer to [A Positional Primer](#) for a full explanation of this often misunderstood feature. Note: a backward pawn on a semi-open file is usually much weaker than, say, a doubled pawn that is not isolated.

Conclusion

Understanding and using the correct words can not only help others interpret your "chess speak" better, but can also help you play better chess.

Question I really appreciate your *Novice Nook* articles as a supplement to my chess studies. I don't have a rating yet, but my rating against Chessmaster personalities is about 1000. You mention about the importance of determining who's winning, by how much, and why. This e-mail concerns the "how much" part:

Let's say there's a middlegame position (e.g., a puzzle), and I have not yet counted who's ahead in material. Before I develop a bad habit that could slow me down in a real live game situation, is the following technique the most efficient, or should I do something differently?

I generally start by counting how many minor pieces each side has (e.g., white has both knights and bishop and black has two bishops so white is up 3-2 or 3.25 pawns). Then, I factor in any bishop-pair advantage (e.g., since black has the bishop-pair, the score is now $3.25 - 0.5 = 2.75$ pawns). Then, I count how many rooks and queens each side has and change the evaluation accordingly, with rooks valued at 5 and queens at 9.75. Then, I count pawns on each side. I call this my "raw" assessment of the evaluation.

Finally, I use my "raw" assessment and then derive my final assessment of the evaluation by taking in positional factors (e.g., piece placement, pawn structure, king safety, batteries, open/closed game, space mobility, tempo) as well as any tactical considerations (checks, captures, threats, combinations). As it's difficult to derive a way to calculate each of these positional factors quantitatively without a computer, I try to gain a feel about what these factors suggest the final assessment should be as an advantage/disadvantage in number of pawns.

Two more things:

1. Is it generally more efficient to count pawns first or count them last (after minor and heavy pieces)?
2. For pawns, is it generally more efficient to count how many pawns are on each side *or* to count how many files are missing pawns from each

side and then subtract doubled pieces and then take that number and subtract it from eight?

Answer Few good players, if any, count all the pieces, unless it is a deep endgame. Instead, they just look at the imbalance in material. Then they look for other factors such as king safety, bishop-pair, activity of the armies, and pawn structure. That is all static. Dynamically, who is to move may make all the difference in the world. This kind of information is much more helpful in a game than a puzzle. In a puzzle you know there is a solution so, for instance, if there is a mate you don't care about the material!

Question I bought Bain's *Chess Tactics for Students*, and I was a little disappointed. I was planning to do the process where I go through the book several times, limiting my time for each problem to a shorter period each cycle. I was thinking the tactics would be randomly arranged, but they are actually in order by theme. Do you recommend flipping around from theme to theme or practicing many problems from one theme together? If you recommend flipping around, can you share any techniques your students have used to randomize the order? I find that when I try to do it myself, it never seems like I'm hitting all the themes.

Answer Yes, shortening the time is suggested, *a la* "The Seven Circles" in [Rapid Chess Improvement](#).

Many of my students also prefer not to know the motif, so cut out the diagrams and make flashcards with only "White to move." The ones who have done this think it is worthwhile. If you don't cut them out, make sure not to write in the book or doing it multiple times is more difficult!

Since the goal is to know the patterns, it is not as important that you know the motif. If you were just doing them to solve them, then yes, knowing the motif makes it much easier. But you are drilling them to recognize them on sight, not *solve* them, so knowing the theme is helpful, but not as helpful!

In my book [Back to Basics: Tactics](#) I first do each motif in a separate chapter, but then later have a problem set where the motifs are unknown. If you want a book where not only are the motifs unknown, but also the goals, I recommend *Practical Chess Exercises* by Ray Cheng.

Dan welcomes readers' questions; he is a full-time instructor on the ICC as *Phillytutor*.

[Yes, I have a question for Dan!](#)

Comment on this month's column via our [Contact Page](#)! Pertinent responses will be posted below daily.

 [TOP OF PAGE](#)

 [HOME](#)

 [COLUMNS](#)

 [LINKS](#)

 [ARCHIVES](#)

 [ABOUT THE CHESS CAFE](#)

[\[ChessCafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Review\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)
[\[Endgame Study\]](#) [\[The Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)
[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About ChessCafe.com\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

© 2009 BrainGamz, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
"ChessCafe.com®" is a registered trademark of BrainGamz, Inc.