



How to Use MCO-14

Quote of the Month: *The average player rated 1600 knows only about 60-100 opening nodes.* – Bookup's Mike Leahy.

One of the most important ideas in chess improvement is to identify mistakes and try to minimize their recurrence. In the opening the concept is simple: after you play a game, ask yourself, "If I reached this same opening position again, where would I differ?"

COLUMNISTS

Novice Nook

Dan Heisman

In theory this concept of looking up your opening is simple, but apparently it is difficult to put into practice, for weaker players often repeatedly make the same opening mistakes. There are many reasons for this, but one stands out: for some players looking up the opening is not fun! If a player has never taken a few minutes to figure out how to use a popular opening book, researching the opening is a chore. This lack of use is ironic, since opening books are always the best sellers. Yet, apparently, they are not often used in this capacity.

If researching a game in a popular opening book is a mystery, it does not have to be: "Anything you know how to do is easy." So let's take one of the most popular opening encyclopedias, *Modern Chess Openings 14*, and demonstrate how to look up some lines.

We will use the following opening sequences:

- 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.O-O Be7 6.Re1 O-O
- 1.d4 d5 2.c4 Nf6
- 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.Nf3
- 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.O-O
- 1.b4 e5 2.Bb2 Nc6 3.a3

Let's consider each:

A) 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.O-O Be7 6.Re1 O-O



White to Play

We'll begin with the generic method you would use to find any line: start with the *Contents* on page ix. (Note: If you know the name of the opening, but not the moves, look in the *Index* on page 727; use the Contents if you know the moves).

The Contents lists 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 as the Ruy Lopez starting on page 40 with the further subdivision *B. Variants on Move 4-6* starting on page 53. How do we know our game's opening was a variant? Because Subdivision C "Main Line" shows the move 6...b5, and in the game 6...O-O was played, so our search will continue on page 53.

On page 53 we see the list contains "Sixth-Move Variants" as the sixth item in the section, but no page number. On page 54 it discusses those variants (referring ahead to columns 37-



42) but no 6...O-O. In columns 37-42 on pages 68-69, we find only White sixth move variants, not Black's. Hence, we go back to page 66, where we find the only Black sixth move variant after 6.Re1 is 6...d6, instead of the normal 6...b5. What gives?

A reasonable step at this point is to give the position to a chess engine (or look in the *Novice Nook* [The Most Common Opening Inaccuracies](#)), it turns out that the reason 6...O-O? is not in the book is because it is a tactical mistake, allowing the removal of the guard capture 7.Bxc6 dxc6 8.Nxe5 winning a pawn. So if you did not play 7.Bxc6 as *white*, next time you are faced with 6...O-O, you will snap off the knight and take the e-pawn. Thanks, Black!

If you played 6...O-O? as *black*, you will never do that again. Instead, you will stop the tactic with the normal (many lines starting on page 79) 6...b5 or the rare 6...d6 (Steinitz Doubly Delayed), which is covered in column 31 on page 66.

B) 1.d4 d5 2.c4 Nf6

First we check the Contents page under "III Double Queen Pawn Openings" and see that this sequence is not given. Then we notice that this sequence could also occur by the "Indian" transposition 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 Nf6, so we also check under "IV Indian Openings" and again it is not there.

We are left with two choices: take our best guess and see if it is a sideline under one or the other, or give it to a chess engine (we could also look in a database, but *looking in a database only tells us what to do, not why good players play this sequence and how good it is*).

So first let's check *MCO*. We start on page 387 (where the overview text begins) and notice that the detailed lines begin on page 391, and range from the most common to least common, so we need to proceed to the back of that section to find a rare variant. Thus, we leaf through quickly from 391 through 433, only checking at the top of the page to see if the notes vary as early as move two, to match our sequence. No luck. Therefore we skip to page 497, the promisingly titled "Queen's Pawn Games and Gambits." Nothing again!

One last shot: Try the Indian section starting on page 509. Look for rare variations at the back. Again no luck: a final strike out. Why did that Heisman say to look up these games? What a waste of time!

At this point you should get the hint that since Black's move order is nowhere to be found it is, similar to example "A," inaccurate. A veteran *Novice Nook* reader might remember that this is the granddaddy of all move order inaccuracies (its amazing how often it is not only played by Black, but not taken advantage of by White!), as chronicled in the [The Most Common Opening Inaccuracies](#). Therefore, it is no accident I included it in this list, to demonstrate how plausible but inaccurate lines may be searched yet not found. The best White move order against this line is 3.cxd5 Nxd5 (3...Qxd5 4.Nc3 Qa5 5.Bd2 – a [Rybka](#) recommendation – again yields what a somewhat better White advantage than normal) 4.Nf3, usually followed by 5.e4, with more than the usual advantage to White. One nice trap mentioned briefly in that article goes 1.d4 d5 2.c4 Nf6 3.cxd5 Nxd5 4.Nf3 Nc6 5.e4 Nf6 6.Nc3 Bg4 7.d5 Ne5?



White to Play and Win

8.Nxe5! Bxd1 9.Bb5+ and no matter how Black twists and turns, he loses material, e.g. 9...c6 10.dxc6 and the double threat of 11.c7+ and 11.cxb7+ will leave White ahead no matter how Black defends. Try it and see!

C) 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.Nf3



Black to Play

Page x, IV gives Indian Openings 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 and then down below ...g6 King's Indian Defense page 580.

On top of page 581 we notice that there is a diagram after 5.Nf3 O-O 6.Be2 Bingo! It says see columns 1-42. It turns out all of these columns contain this move order! Interestingly, many grandmasters reverse the fifth and sixth moves, preferring to play 5.Be2 first, but you could never

tell that by *MCO*. So if I had chosen the common 5.Be2 O-O 6.Nf3 move order, a beginner might be stymied unless he noticed that all forty-two columns transpose to 5.Nf3 O-O 6.Be2. One has to watch for those simple transpositions!

So, while we are here, which page has the “tabiya” – the standard opening moves? Well, a perusal of lines 1-6 versus lines 7-18 versus 19-24 and 25-27 reveals that the common moves in the longest variations all begin 6...e5 7.O-O Nc6 8.d5 Ne7, so we can conclude that these eight moves form the “Main Line Classical King's Indian” tabiya and the White choices start to diverge on move nine.

D) 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.O-O



Black to Play

The first five ply here, thru 3.Bc4, has been dubbed the “Italian Game,” with the three main openings springing from this sequence being 3...Nf6 (Two Knight's Defense), 3...Bc5 (Giouco Piano), and the rarer 3...Be7 (Hungarian Defense) – the latter being somewhat passive. One student told me that the Hungarian is good for avoiding all those book lines that other intermediate players know which just forces White to play chess.

Page ix shows the Giouco Piano (3...Bc5, as above) on page 18, with a special nod to its daring subset, the Evans Gambit (4.b4) on page 26. Since 4.O-O is not 4.b4, we turn to page 18.

Already on page 18 and 19 we notice that there is no mention of the “natural” 4.O-O, so that makes us suspicious. Going through the lines it is not on 1-6, nor 7-12, but aha! – we do find it on line 18 on page 24. Yet it only gives the very narrow 4.O-O Nf6 5.d4 – a

gambit with no note on White's fifth move for non-gambit alternatives like the common 5. d3 or 5.Nc3. What gives?

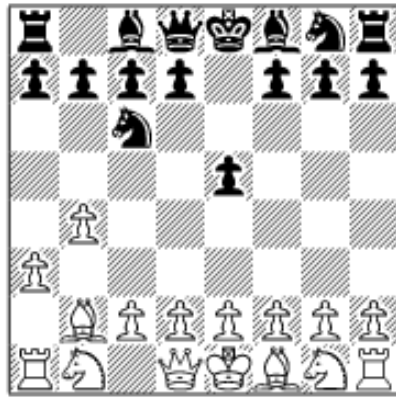
Well, it turns out that the other moves transpose (there's that dirty idea again!) to either variations of the Four Knights Game or, more likely the previous line 17 on page 24, which deviates with 4.d3 first. By the way, the name for the opening when White plays d3, instead of the main c3 followed by d4, is the Giouco Pianissimo. "Pianissimo" is a music term that means to play quietly, and playing d3, instead of the more aggressive c3 and d4, leads to much "quieter" play.

Finally, note that line 17 never contains an early O-O at all! There is a reason for this – castling early in these types of positions is considered inflexible, which is why grandmasters (who rarely play 3.Bc4 anyway) don't play 4.O-O, preferring to go into main lines. And the lines starting on page 118 do not have the bishops on c4 and c5, so they don't transpose perfectly either! We can conclude two things:

- 4.O-O is somewhat inaccurate, and
- 4.O-O either let's Black dictate the tempo (outside the scope of *MCO*), or pretty much forces White to play the speculative line 4...Nf6 5.d4, as in line 18. One doesn't see 5.d4 much in high-level play either.

Result: Beginners play 4.O-O all the time. Grandmasters never do.

E) 1.b4 e5 2.Bb2 Nc6 3.a3



Black to Play

Looking up irregular openings is a common concern. However, we have to approach it like any other opening. Checking the Contents we can't find 1.b4, but on page xi, there are *Miscellaneous Flank Openings* on page 721, so we continue our search there.

1. b4 is mentioned at the bottom of the page (without a line reference), so that means we are in good shape. Flipping the pages, we quickly locate 1. b4 as lines 11-12 on page 724.

1...e5 is line 11, which continues 2.Bb2 f6. Since we are looking for 2...Nc6, we need to look at note (q), which has 2...Bxb4 and 2...d6. But no 2...Nc6. So now we are back in the situation of "B" – the move looks reasonable, but it's not in the book. What do we do next?

At this point, you would most likely give the position to a computer or ask a strong player, but it is more instructive to first examine it yourself. Ask why this move might not normally be played. If you do so with an idea of trying to make the move unplayable/unsafe, one idea should emerge:

A piece that is guarded by another piece which is subject to capture or is removable is not really guarded.

The knight on c6 guards the pawn on e5, but can be driven away by 3.b5. This also saves the pawn on b4 and allows the bishop to guard the pawn on b5. Aha!

So what does Black do after 1.b4 e5 2.Bb2 Nc6 3.b5? Well, he can block the attack on e5 with 3...Nd4. What then? Tactics, tactics, tactics. A skewer with 4.e3 attacks the knight and targets the e5-pawn. Then the knight has no move saving the pawn or counterattack,

especially since the b5-pawn is guarded. Only after doing the work ourselves should we use our computer to double-check, and, yes, [Rybka](#) confirms that 3.b5 is correct.

Since one of the main reasons for using *MCO* is *to do your best to not make the same mistakes twice*, next time White faces this move order, he will play 3.b5.

Reader Question

I am rated about USCF 2000 and I started teaching an eight-year-old who is rated about 500. Like most kids that age he has a problem focusing when I give him something that requires more than a seconds thought. Anything he can't figure out quickly he grows bored with. More importantly, in his games he moves very quickly, playing the first move that looks good. (So he drops lots of pieces.) What can I do to help him slow down and focus?

Answer

Good question and a common problem. There is more than one issue here:

- Does this student have a common problem like Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)?
- Does he just move fast because he is eight?
- What is his natural attention span? If he is attentive for twenty-five minutes during the lesson, but no so much after that, then limit the lesson to twenty-five minutes.
- There has to be a common agreement between instructor, parent, and child as to what is expected. Naturally if someone refuses to take the time to make a move and consider what you have been teaching, then the effect of the lesson is greatly diminished. Sometimes parents understand this and just tell you to do the best you can, and maybe the student will grow into it. Other parents may feel that if their son is not going to apply what you are teaching, maybe he should just play and not take lessons, as the benefit is not worth the cost.
- Sometimes if you put a youngster in a tournament with mostly slow playing adults, they will miraculously slow down their play, as they do not want to be the only one in the room playing fast.
- Finally, sometimes it all comes down to the student – you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. See my Novice Nook [Slowing Down](#).

Hopeless

Almost a decade ago in my first article for [ChessCafe.com](#), [The Secrets of Real Chess](#), I created the term “Hope Chess” to identify the thinking process error where a player makes a move without consistently checking to see whether he can safely meet all replies by the opponent on the *next move*, especially forcing moves (checks, captures, or threats). This was reflected in the [Novice Nook Quiz](#) question:

3. “Hope Chess” is:
- a. When you make a bad move and hope your opponent does not see how to refute it
 - b. Your opponent makes a threat you did not attempt to foresee and you hope you can meet it
 - c. When you make a threat and you hope your opponent does not see it
 - d. All of the above

The correct answer, based upon my consistent use of the term, is “b,” but in the other two answers a player is surely “hoping” as well. I have even gone so far as to call “c” *Hopeful Chess*. (Note: the difference between “a” and “c” is that in “a” your move is purposely bad – you know it is not a good move but are risking the consequences in the hope for a great benefit if your opponent is not able to figure out the correct reply, which you had foreseen. In “c” your move is not necessarily or knowingly bad – it may just be an easily parried threat when you had better moves – but you make the innocuous threat anyway just for the chance that your opponent might miss it).

However, recently I noticed that NM Todd Bardwick, in the April 2007 issue of *Chess Life for Kids*, has identified “c,” a common kids’ mistake, as “Hope Chess”! Therefore, I will

make a somewhat tongue-in-cheek suggestion: Let choice “a” = *Wishful Chess*; “b” = *Hope Chess*, and “c” = *Hopeful Chess*. I am reluctant to relinquish my original narrow definition, but I fear I am swimming against the stream in my own river! Eventually all three may become types of Hope Chess.

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

Yes, I have a question for Dan!



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