



The Q & A Way is based in large part on readers' questions. Do you have a question about preparation, strategy or tactics? Submit your questions (with you full name and country of residence please) and perhaps Bruce will reply in his next [ChessCafe.com](#) column...

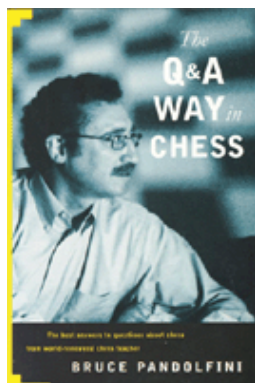
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Let the Games Begin

COLUMNISTS

The Q & A Way

Bruce Pandolfini



Question I have had a standing argument about board games with someone who claims chess and checkers are the same type of game. We have also gotten into similar arguments over backgammon and the Japanese game of *Go*. I was wondering if you could tell me which of the two games, chess or checkers, is the oldest. Is it true that chess is the world's oldest game? Are these four games related, or are they clearly different in type? Also, do you know how many different types of board games there are? Thank you in advance. **Martin Reiss (UK)**

Answer I'm no expert on the history of board games or, for that matter, on anything else. But there are a number of authorities in this arena, and they've written some excellent books on the subject. For the development of chess you might try *A History of Chess*, by H.J.R. Murray, and *A Short History of Chess*, by Henry Davidson. For other ancient games in addition to chess, Edward Falkener's *Games Ancient and Oriental and How to Play Them* and R.C. Bell's *Board and Table Games from Many Civilisations* are worthy of your perusal.

From my limited perspective, let's see if I can address your concerns. Although chess and checkers are very different, to my knowledge they do fall into the same class. They're both war games. As I understand it, a war game is not inevitably what most of us may think it is. That is, it doesn't have to do necessarily with medieval pageantry and war game maneuvers. A board war game is one in which victory is accomplished by capturing or destroying something. In this sense, chess and checkers indeed fall into the same grouping. In chess, one wins by capturing the king (true, you don't actually capture it anymore, but this fact is irrelevant to its classification); in checkers, one wins by capturing other checkers and kings.

Which game is older? Chess is far older than checkers, also known as draughts. There are at least two intriguing and contrasting theories on the origin of chess. One traces it to China, maybe as early as the second century B.C., while the other, generally more popular and widely accepted, takes it back to the Indus Valley and the fifth century A.D. Checkers, in any of its many forms, seems to be a much later development.

Most traditional authorities establish the invention of checkers after the first millennium, possibly 1100 A.D. But you can find contradictory sources taking it back six or seven thousand years. One of the reasons for this wide variance is that translators and interpreters of early data often confuse games and remnants of games that seem to be chess or checkers as if they actually were rudimentary forms of those games. Search long enough and you can find attributions to chess, for example, from Confucius and Aristotle. You can even unearth references claiming that chess was first created by Heraclitus, among other early luminaries. In some cases, it's merely wishful thinking on the part of the translator. In other instances, it's just bad scholarship.

Chess is certainly not the oldest known board game. Playing surfaces have been found more than 7,000 years old, and, of course, there's no evidence they had much to do with chess. The earliest known board games fall into the category of race games, where one has to get somewhere on the board or track before anyone else does, whether movement over the playing surface is achieved by the throw of dice or some other mechanism. In one of its classifications, backgammon is indubitably a race game, but as with any of these classic games, various characteristics may enable them to be placed significantly into several different classes. On the other hand, *Go* is a game of position. Generally, games of position require one to mark off territory, gaining area and any markers (in the case of *Go*, stones) within it.

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

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To be sure, all of these games require an element of strategy, and thus could also be described, sometimes strongly, sometimes less so, as strategy games. A strategy game is any game that taps strategic thinking. A strategic decision is one made in the face of uncertainty, when there is imperfect information, such as in certain card games, with some cards buried in the deck or secreted in the hands of other players.

It could be argued that this definition negates chess as a strategy game, in that everything to be known on the chessboard is right in front of both players. There are no hidden facts, nothing is concealed. Along those lines, chess is therefore a game of perfect information. But there's a practical element that confronts the very teeth of that definition. Although everything on the chessboard can be seen theoretically, the possibilities attendant on some positions are so enormous, that the resulting situations can't be seen precisely at all, and so one does have to rely on sophisticated generalizations and broad-spectrum approaches to move ahead.

Finally, how many different types of board games are there? Surely, accounting for slight differences, there are numerous types. Conventionally, however, board game companies and game authoritarians have relied on six basic types. In addition to the three already discussed, race games, war games, and games of position, there are calculation or math games (some of these do go as far back as Pythagoras and his mystically mathematical reckonings), dice games (exclusive of race games), and Mancala type games, which are especially popular in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. That's about all I have to say on the subject. For more and better, you should go to the experts. For me, it's back to chess.

Question In *Winning Chess* by Chernev and Reinfeld they caution, "If you want to improve, you must use your board and pieces. Set up every position on the board and move the pieces about, as indicated in the explanatory comment." Now I'm in a position to guide my grandson. I have given him Bain's book on tactics and have provided him with the same advice I followed back in the 50s with the Chernev and Reinfeld book, at which he rebels. Too much trouble! Where do you stand on this? **Harry Smith (USA)**

Answer The ostensible advice in Chernev and Reinfeld runs counter to what most teachers recommend. Rather than moving pieces about, chess instructors encourage developing players to do things in their heads. You have to be able to look ahead in chess to see future possibilities, goals, etc. But it's possible the two chess literary standouts meant something else. It could be that they were striving to get players to see different contingencies by simply shuffling the forces, since rearranging elements is an aspect of creativity. But they're no longer with us, so we can't ask them for clarification.

Naturally, it's good to stimulate creativity, and whatever can be done to bring about innovative impulses should be exploited. But in chess it's also necessary to develop the ability to see lines and positions in one's mind. That's where much of chess talent reigns. Randomly moving pieces about to experience new settings may be helpful, as it can be when moving lettered tiles in Scrabble, but few opponents are going to let you try out chess variations to see what results. You're going to have to explore those possibilities in your head, not on the board. Certainly take advantage of the wisdom offered by Chernev and Reinfeld, but don't blindly adhere to their pithy sayings. Even one-liners can contain typos.

What should you do with your grandson? I would play with him joyfully and, as it becomes appropriate, inject comments supporting your ideas as they come out in the context of actual playing situations. Kids tend to derive more from aphorisms when they reinforce real-life occurrences and less from them when offered in abstract isolation. But whatever you do with him, if you have fun doing it, he'll have fun, too.

Question I have been playing serious chess for about fifteen years in the Las Vegas area and my playing strength oscillates between 1700 and 1800. I'd like to find out what style of player I am. Right now I'm playing everything, e-pawn, d-pawn, and the English, though I make certain to follow the rules. I develop knights before bishops, I play for the center, and I usually castle fairly early, but I can't tell that it makes any difference. I enjoy being a "tactical player," but I also feel at home in openings with a gradual build up. I score about the same, no matter what I play. It doesn't matter if I study or not, if I don't play in tournaments or play every week, if I play at faster or slower time controls. I just keep going along, between 1700 and 1800. I feel I'm still trying to find myself. One thing you should know: I'm a little heavy in terms of my weight, and maybe this slows me down over the chessboard. Yet I love to take risks and take chances, you might say, spin the dice. What should I try? **Morton Gelinda (USA)**

Answer I think the metaphor is "spin the wheel," and have you thought about trying roulette? You seem to be living in the right town, but I can't see how your size carries any weight here. I know there's a theory that short-armed people (like Petrosian) prefer short moves and

long-armed players (like Olafsson) prefer long moves, but I've never read anything about overweight players preferring heavy moves.

My advice is that you get your play analyzed by an experienced teacher or master. You've been exploring this and that, apparently relying on too many generalizations. It's time to become more specific, under the critical eye of an objective observer. You might indeed be a "tactical player," and a hefty one at that, though I'm not sure your description has anything to do whatsoever with your true style and skill level. It's time to get more real. You need help, and a good place to start is under the guidance of a caring chess professional. Good luck, and don't worry so much about your weight. But you didn't say anything about your height.

Question Recently, through a friend's connection, I was able to start teaching chess in a private school. I'm about 1500, but I have read a good deal and know enough to teach the game to school children. My friend has encouraged me to give private lessons and small groups as a way to make extra money, which I could really use. My question is what do you think is a reasonable rate for me to charge as a 1500-rated teacher, while also being fair to my students? **Joe Heath (USA)**

Answer What you should charge depends on many factors, from your experience as a teacher, to your playing strength, to the part of the country in which intend to teach, to the teaching fees your prospective clientele is used to paying for comparable training in other disciplines (music, dance, sports, and so on). It is much easier to find enough students in large metropolitan areas who can support chess lessons, and much less likely to uncover them in sparsely populated areas. I've known teachers used to getting \$75 in New York who have trouble charging \$25 anywhere else. I think you have to see what the market will bear. If you suggest a rate a potential student doesn't seem to be able to meet, ask the student to propose a counter rate that might satisfy both of you. Most people are usually fair and reasonable on such matters. Eventually, as you do this enough, you'll start to settle on a rate that works for you and your community. You could also ask around, seeing what other teachers charge. You might start by asking your friend, the one who helped you. Maybe he or she knows something that you ought to know, too.

Question For the past year I have been studying the endgame through various books, including Reuben Fine's *Basic Chess Endings* and *A Guide to Chess Endings* by former world champion Max Euwe. It has been troubling work, and I think it has given me a broader understanding of chess theory, but I have not performed at a higher level in OTB. There are all kinds of typical methods that players use to study the endgame, but for me it has become drudgery, and I do not feel I am getting anywhere. Frankly, I also have trouble remembering the moves and variations. Can you make any different suggestions other than the standard ones to make studying the endgame a little bit more fun and to help me recall things better? I thank you for your advice. **Philip Tripoli (USA)**

Answer There are plenty of things you can try. Here are two. Collect great endgames, diagramming and analyzing them fully in your own book. You can use a loose leaf binder for this purpose, or work with a fixed book, in either case taping printed diagrams into place, around analysis and commentary. The loose leaf format might make more sense, so that you have the option of moving examples about, dropping or replacing them as you see fit.

As you write up these endgames, try to create a narrative that explains each move and its part in the overall plan. Chess is a game of ideas, and chess ideas are given most cogently in the language of chess moves. But it can't hurt to restate those ideas in the language of words to enlarge your understanding. As Alexander Kotov more or less said in several places (such as in *Think Like a Grandmaster*), if you can't put a chess idea into words, you really don't have command over it.

Additionally, it's well known that by creating a narrative, even if the storyline falls short of actuality, you establish for yourself further road signs to help you remember the path home (here, to recollect the moves and positions). In addition to having powerful visual memories, this is indeed what good chess players do to help them play blindfold: they create a logical story to assist them in retaining the moves more indelibly in their minds.

A second thing you can do is more visual. In printing out the diagrams, draw directive lines on them, indicating the paths certain pieces must go along to achieve particular placements or results. These lined diagrams should resemble military battle plans or plays out of a football coach's playbook. Besides, drawing lines can be a lot easier than inculcating them.

Do these two things, explaining every move in words, and directing every plan in lines and arrows, and add to it a third task, summarizing the endgame in a cogent paragraph, and I think it likely you'll get far more out of your endgame study, while possibly obtaining some pleasure in the process (I said some).

Question of the Month

The best answers will be published in the next column.

Style-wise, how would you characterize new world champion Vishy Anand?

Reader's Responses from Last Month

We received many responses to the [September](#) question of the month:

What is highest rating range that most starting adults are assured of reaching?

Among the many interesting replies were the following:

Chris Pendleton (USA) writes: This is a ridiculous question, so I'm not even going to answer it.

Bob Salander (USA) writes: I would say that every adult, unless there is some infirmity, should be able to reach 1400 strength, which I believe is the average USCF rating. In other words, every adult should be able to be average or mediocre.

Tommy Palmer (USA) writes: If you have any talent you have to be able to get to 1800. Some people say 1600, and didn't Lasker say he could make anybody a master with 100 hours of his tutelage? Have times changed?

(BP – Times have changed, and there were really only two Laskers.)

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