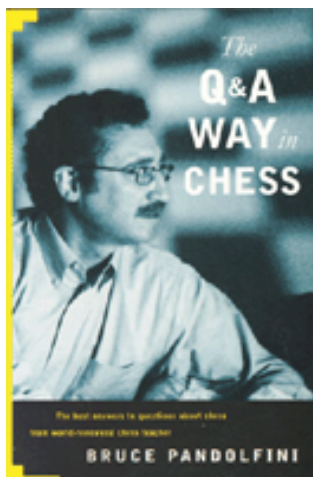




## COLUMNISTS

*The Q & A Way*

Bruce Pandolfini



*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...

*Yes, I have a question for Bruce!*

## Opening, Middlegame, Endgame

**Question** Recently I have been thinking about changing my openings for offhand and tournament games alike, kind of like the way they give you a whole new outfit on TLC's "What Not to Wear," with Stacy and Clinton. I have been playing rated chess for five years and I should be about 1400 USCF very soon. I play 1.e4 as white and the Sicilian against 1.e4. Against d-pawn openings, I play 1...d5. I do not want to become too set in my ways and predictable, so I have been considering adding some new openings. I am afraid that some of my opponents will get to know my choices too well and I want to be prepared. In addition to 1.e4, I'm going to play 1.d4 for a change of pace and then as an extra surprise play 1.c4. Against e-pawn openings, I'm planning to add the Caro-Kann and maybe even Alekhine's Defense. Against d-pawn openings, I might want to try the Dutch as well as the Old Indian Defense. I realize that these choices will give me many things to study, and I do not want to overdo it, but I plan to select variations I can control. I was wondering if you have opinions on this. **Andy Penders (USA)**

**Answer** Yeah, I have opinions on it, but let's just try to answer your question. Clearly, you're concerned with how many openings and defenses you must study in order to play serious chess. To be practical, I don't think you need to learn any new openings if you're happy and doing well with what you've been playing. Rather than tackling entirely new openings, it might be more prudent to add some new lines within the openings and defenses you already play. That should be less taxing and keep you immersed in territory for which you have a degree of familiarity.

That is, within the systems you've been using, look for key branching points that allow for several reasonable but different types of variations. There are myriad possibilities after 1.e4, 1...c5, and 1...d5, your present opening moves of choice, with all kinds of little ways to steer into bright new avenues of attack and counterattack. If after investigating a number of alternative choices you like any of the resulting positions, get appropriate study materials (books, software, online services, etc.) and start augmenting your repertoire. That makes a lot more sense than redoing who you are completely. If instead you really insist on a total makeover, it might be wiser to modify your question and resubmit it to Stacy and Clinton.

**Question** I have been playing for a couple of years and occasionally pick up chess books here and there. The terminology of the game can be confusing. Words can mean the same things to one writer and something else to another writer. Can you set me straight on the differences between two sets of words? I was hoping you could tell me the differences between "ending" and "endgame" and "zugzwang" and "squeeze." Some people use these

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words to mean the same things but I have seen writers being insistent on differences between the words, claiming some writers use these terms slovenly. Others say it doesn't matter, that people use them the same way in ordinary chess talk. Could you clear all that up for me? Thanks. **Bob Fusilla (USA)**

**Answer** I've probably used those terms carelessly when I could have been more discriminating. I also vaguely think I've answered this question before, though maybe it was only in a nightmare. Let's see. When it comes to "ending" and "endgame" I tend to assign slightly different meanings to each term. I prefer using endgame to refer to the last phase of a chess game, as in "the endgame," and "ending" to signify specific endgame positions. But it doesn't have to be that way. Frankly, you can find each term substituting for the other in the writings of the game's most sophisticated authors and players, so I wouldn't want to be a stickler about it.

"Zugzwang" and "squeeze" pose different problems. Zugzwang is used technically by specialists and commonly by most chess players. In its technical use zugzwang refers to a situation where neither player wants to move, not just one of the players. In its common usage, however, it serves to indicate any situation in which a particular player doesn't want to move. For technical use, that's where the word "squeeze" comes in. In its more specialized application it refers to circumstances where a particular player must play a losing move.

Specialists can get very mad at ordinary chess players when they "misuse" the word zugzwang, applying it to squeeze situations or even positions that don't fit perfectly into either category, say where a particular player seems to have only poor moves for choices, and not necessarily losing ones. I think it is okay to cut some slack for both sides. Everyday chess players are not necessarily speaking so precisely and exactly when they're hanging out, and many of those focused on purely technical matters, who incessantly complain about the failure to observe such distinctions, don't necessarily have anything better to do.

**Question** My question concerns middlegame planning. I know that in the opening you shouldn't bring out your queen early, and a few other general rules. In the middlegame how do you know what to look for in order to make an intelligent plan? I find that annotations and analysts recommend different factors and in similar positions. I am trying to base most of my planning on pawn structure and king's position, but beyond that I do not know which factors to examine. I know I should trade down pieces and pawns when ahead and avoid trades of pieces and pawns when behind. I also know a few other plans, such as trading off bad minor pieces, but that is about the extent of it. What are some of the considerations I should be thinking about to make a good plan? If you could just give me a few general rules I would be happy. **Harold Menkowitz (USA)**

**Answer** It would take a lot more than that to make me happy, but I'm not going to get into it here. As a rule, in principle, hypothetically, in theory, and so on, you should resist being too general in your thinking, especially since individual differences, even rather small ones, can be very important in chess. Every position should be analyzed and approached on its specifics, not its universal nature, however helpful general guidelines may seem to be. To give an obvious example, since you've mentioned it, while you shouldn't bring the queen out early without definite purpose, there are indeed times in which circumstances require that you utilize the queen early for advantage or necessity, and I'm certain you understand this.

Nevertheless, I will try to indicate some features that are often factored into the forming of a plan. Before I do that, however, I'd like to clear up a statement you've made. You say you realize that one should trade pieces and pawns when ahead and not trade them when behind. That is not quite a true statement. While as a rule it tends to be good to trade off pieces when ahead, you should be very careful about trading off pawns. In many situations, for instance, if you trade off too many pawns, the other side may have an opportunity to sacrifice its last minor piece for your lone surviving pawn, when your extra minor piece is then unable to help

you force a win.

When ahead, you don't want to trade pawns so much as you want to win them, which you can better do if the other side has fewer ways to safeguard them, and that's one of the reasons you may want to trade pieces. By the same token, while the defender may not want to trade pieces when he's behind, he may very well want to trade pawns, especially if it is likely to lead to the situation already described. But these are generalities, and no matter how often true they are, they still must be assessed in context, by analyzing the specific position under consideration.

Good chess players mull over various elements in coming up with a plan. You've already alluded to several of them. Pawn structure is clearly important, especially the central pawn formation. King placement and king safety are factors, as is material and the number and types of pieces that each player has. As you've already indicated, there are principles on trading forces, and at any point they may constitute an overriding aspect of the assessment. Surely, you should be interested in the minor pieces and getting the right ones for the available or predominating conditions. Pawn majorities, imbalances, weaknesses, potential targets, strong squares, and open lines are also significant.

Then there are questions about transitions. You'll want to determine that certain placements or circumstances are going to work for you in the next stage. For example, you wouldn't want to trade down to an endgame (or should I say ending?) that seems unfavorable to you. But if you can see that the resulting endgame is likely to favor you, you should be emboldened to make plans heading for the last phase, trading appropriate pieces, avoiding complications, minimizing risks, and keeping control. And there are many other factors that can only be appreciated in perspective. Naturally, the best perspective is the one that takes into view the most specifically relevant considerations. To determine what they are, you might actually have to analyze the position in front of you.

**Question** My friend and I are having a discussion about the threefold repetition rule. We have found that it can pertain to any piece except the pawns. It does not have to be consecutive moves; there can be other moves of other pieces in between. We have downloaded some FIDE laws. The rules apply to positions, not moves, as in FIDE article 9.2. Now do the opponent's moves make a difference? We are confused and need clarification.  
**Mike Kempf (USA)**

**Answer** Let it suffice that FIDE must be right (about something). It's not a matter of repeating the same move three times. It's a matter of the same position occurring three times, with everything exactly the same, including potentiality. If the king is on its original square, with castling being possible the first two times but not possible the third time (because the king had moved and gone back to its starting square), the position is considered different, not a true repetition of the two earlier occurrences. Nor do the repetitions have to happen on consecutive moves, as you and FIDE have indicated. There are other small points, such as how the draw is to be claimed, but it may be hard to follow through on some of this if you haven't kept reliable score. With or without a score, it's your turn to explain it to your friend.

**Question** What is Bug House chess? Folks in this area enter Bug House chess tournaments and I have never heard of it until arriving in this city. **Ted McNair (USA)**

**Answer** It's a variant of chess (though many teachers consider it a disease, the way many juveniles love to play it instead of standard chess) where you play with two boards and sets of pieces and have a partner. If you get white, your partner gets black. If you have black, your partner must take white. You play essentially with the same rules, the primary difference being that everything you capture is given to your partner (or teammate), who is then allowed to put these captured "other board" pieces and pawns on his or her own board,

with each placement counting as a separate move. There are other differences, too, such as most Bughouse players allow the king to be taken, and such a capture ends the game. Naturally, you can also win by checkmate or time forfeiture. If you win, you win on both boards; that is, your team wins.

In the past it's also gone by other names, such as "insanity chess" or "tandem put back chess," and I think it's had a few other names as well. I'm attracted to the claim that it was first popularized at the Marshall Chess Club in the 1960s by the Diplomacy playing group of adolescents and young players then inhabiting 23 West Tenth Street, though that's never been confirmed, even though I was very much a party of that clan. I simply viewed it as the other experiment we tried when we got tired of Kriegspiel.

### Question of the Month

The best answers will be published in the next column.

*If you could study the play of only one chess great, who would it be?*

### Reader's Responses from Last Month

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

*What character traits are typically most important for success in chess?*

Among the many interesting replies were the following:

**Russell Wainwright (Canada)** writes: I think the most important traits are memory, concentration, pattern recognition, and simple mental toughness. The last one is probably key.

**Adrian Adorna (Philippines)** writes: Here's my list of character traits for success in chess:

- Knowledge of the game – the chess player must have a crystal-clear understanding of all the basic ideas, concepts, and principles involved in the game.
- Industry – I believe in old-fashioned hard work. He or she must work harder than anybody else; always willing to learn and advance daily in his chess studies for this is never ending.
- Passion and love for the game – if you don't love chess or anything that you do, chances are, you won't get very far with it.
- An inner drive, burning desire, and dogged determination to win and succeed no matter how hard or seemingly impossible the odds are.

These qualities separate the very good from the best.

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