



COLUMNISTS

ChessBase Cafe

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CHESS THEATRE

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PGN and CBH File Formats

A frequent tech support question concerns the use of file formats for database files in *Fritz10*, specifically the use of PGN and CBH files. In this edition of *ChessBase Cafe*, we'll take a closer look at these two formats.

PGN is the abbreviation for Portable Game Notation. A chess game database stored in PGN format is really just a normal textfile, with all the information stored in a precise manner. (The set of rules governing this storage of information is called a *protocol*.) For example, all of the game header information (player names, tournament, year, etc.) must be stored in the same order from game to game and from file to file, with strict rules governing the spacing of first/last names, initials, numerals, etc. If there is any deviation from these rules, the file isn't true PGN. This strict standardization is exactly the point behind Portable Game Notation. In fact, the word "Portable" refers to the idea that such notation can be *ported* from one piece of software to another – in other words, the games can be read and understood by a wide range of software that run under different platforms (*Windows*, *UNIX*, *LINUX*, etc.).

Games stored in PGN format are even readable by humans without the aid of additional "reader" software. You can print out a game (or set of games) contained in a PGN file and play through the algebraic notation using a set and board (similar to a book or magazine).

CBH format is the current ChessBase file format (in use by ChessBase since the late 1990s). Among the advantages to using CBH format for game storage are:

- Games in CBH format on average take up approximately 20% of the disk space required by PGN format;
- CBH format allows for the use of various special annotations, such as multimedia annotations (including audio), medals (used to mark games of special interest in the database's game list), pop-ups displaying pawn structures and piece activity, etc.; and
- The ability to easily delete or sort games directly within *ChessBase* or *Fritz* software programs.

Fritz10 can easily read games in both PGN and CBH format. You can also freely copy games between the two formats. This latter activity is often referred to as converting the file from one format to the other, but this sometimes leads new users astray, as they find themselves searching the menus and Help files for a command containing the word "convert." Their failure to find such a command then prompts a tech support question.

All you need to do to "convert" a file from one format to another is:

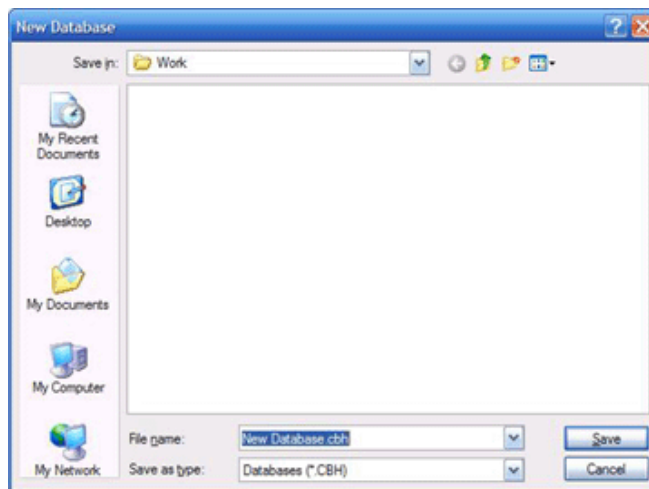
- Create a new database in the desired "target" format.
- Copy the games from the old database to the newly created one.

It's that simple. For example, if you've downloaded a set of PGN format games from the Internet and want to convert them to CBH format, you'd just:

- Create a new CBH database
- Copy the games from the PGN format database into the new CBH database.

And if you have an existing database of the desired format into which you wish to copy the games, you can even skip creating a new database and just copy games into your existing database.

Let's look at an example. Say you've just downloaded a PGN database from the Internet and you wish to turn it into a CBH database. Launch *Fritz10* and click "Play Fritz." After the main chessboard screen appears, press F12 to go to the database window (the game list view). Go to the File menu, select "New," and then "Database" from the submenu. You'll see the standard *Windows File Select* dialogue appear:



This dialogue should be familiar to most *Windows* users. It's practically identical to those found in word processing and graphics programs (to name just two popular examples). It's not the intent of this article to provide a tutorial on basic *Windows* operation; we'll concentrate primarily on the *Fritz*-specific features. Note the pull-down menu next to "Save in"; this is where you'll select the folder in which your new database will be created. It's important to note here that *Fritz* is able to create a database in any folder on any (writable) drive.

The "File name" field lets you name the database. The default name is "New database.cbh" – you'll wish, of course, to rename this to something a bit more relevant. Be sure that the pull-down menu next to "Save as type" is set to the correct format for the database you're creating. Clicking the arrow reveals a menu of various file format choices; in the present example we'll select "CBH." After you've made your selections as to folder, file name, and file type, click the "Save" button.

You'll then notice that the game list is empty, containing just the line "No games found." This is normal, as you have not added any games to this newly created database.

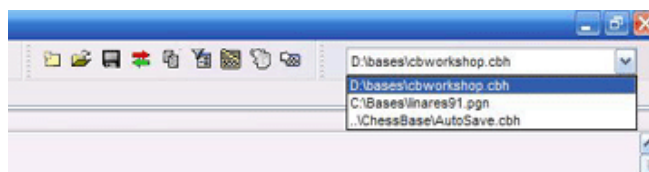
Your next step is to open the PGN database that you wish to convert to CBH format. Return to the File menu, select "Open," and then "Database" from the submenu. You'll again see the *Windows File Select* dialogue; use this dialogue to navigate to the folder containing the PGN database in question. Then just double-click on the database's name to open the database.

There are a number of ways to select the games you want to copy:

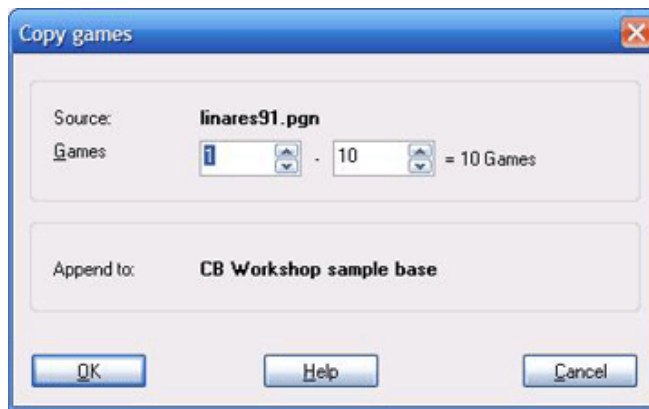
- If you want to select **every** game on the list, just press **CTRL-A** on your keyboard to highlight the entire list.
- If you want to highlight a "block" of games (i.e. several games that appear "all in a row" in the game list), single-click on the first game, then hold down the **SHIFT** key while simultaneously holding down the **down cursor** (down arrow) key until the entire block of games is highlighted.
- If you want to "skip" games in the list (i.e. select individual games that don't appear sequentially in the game list), hold down the **CTRL** key while single-clicking the individual games you wish to highlight.

After you've selected the games to copy, go to the Edit menu and select "Copy."

Next you'll need to open the database you just created. (This new database should be listed in the pull-down menu in the upper right of *Fritz*' game list):



After you've opened this database, go back to the Edit menu and select "Paste." You'll see the following dialogue appear:



This dialogue simply verifies the source database (the one you're copying games *from*), the target database (the one you're copying games *to*), and the number of games you're copying. After reviewing this information, click "OK" to copy the games from one database to the other. Copying games doesn't remove the games from the "source" database; you're simply making a copy of these games in the new database. It just happens to be in a different file format – hence, you've *converted* the games from one format to the other.

You can also copy games from CBH format to PGN format by following the same procedure. However, when you copy CBH format games that contain special annotations (such as multimedia) to any other file format (even the "old" ChessBase format: CBF), these will not be included in the alternate formats. Nor will copying these games back to CBH format somehow restore the special annotations. *Note that the "normal" annotation forms that PGN supports (text, diacritical marks, and position evaluation symbols) can be freely copied back and forth between PGN and CBH format databases.*

Until next month, have fun!

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All the ChessBase software described by Steve in this column, as well as many more ChessBase programs, are available in the [USCFSales Online Catalog](#).

Steve wants your questions!! Send it along and perhaps it will be answered in an upcoming column. Please include your name and country of residence.

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