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Creating Fritz Opening Books

Fritz users frequently ask a couple of related questions: “How do I force *Fritz* to play a particular opening?” and “How do I create a custom opening book for *Fritz*?” There are a few different ways you can force *Fritz* into a particular opening, but by far the most common way is to create a custom opening book based on a particular opening. Thus, the second question provides the answer to the first.

There are five basic steps in creating and using a custom opening book:

- Clear any game that may be in the Notation pane;
- Create a new (empty) book file;
- Perform a search for the games of a particular opening and copy them into a new database;
- Copy the games from that new database into the newly created book file;
- Make sure the new book is loaded and begin playing.

We’ll look at these steps in order, using Bird’s Opening (1.f4) as our example.

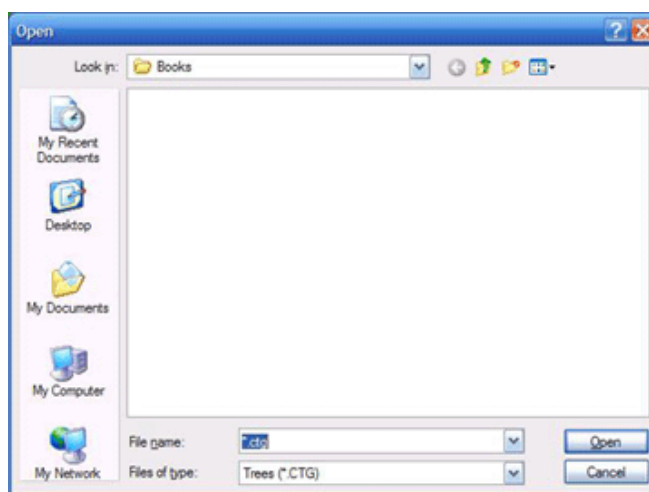
1. Clear any existing game

This is an important step, as it prevents a game present in the Notation pane from being accidentally added to your new opening book. Just go to the File menu, select “New,” and then “Blitz game” or “Long game.” It doesn’t matter which, nor do the specific time controls matter, we’re just “clearing the slate” before creating a new opening book file.

2. Create a new book file

Fritz opening books are actually made up of several files on your computer. However, since all *Fritz* dialogues pertaining to opening books look only for files ending in the extension .ctg, these are the only files we’ll specifically mention.

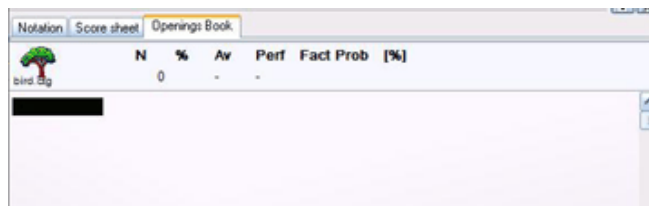
To create a new, empty opening book (into which we’ll copy the games of our desired opening), simply go to the File menu, select “New,” and then “Openings book” (or use the keyboard “shortcut” CTRL-ALT-SHIFT-F11, which will require the dexterity of *Star Trek*’s Mr. Spock delivering the Vulcan Nerve Pinch to execute properly). You’ll see the following dialogue appear:



This is, of course, the standard *Windows* File Select dialogue, which in this case allows you to create a new book file in any folder on any drive. The default folder is the \Books folder, which was created when you installed *Fritz*. Obviously, you can select a different folder; the most important consideration is that you can remember the name and location of the folder in which you stored the book.

The “Filename” portion of this dialogue allows you to name the new file. The file

extension of ".ctg" is already selected, so all you need do is change the asterisk to an actual name. Since we're going to be creating an opening book for Bird's Opening, we'll change the asterisk to the word "bird." After we click "Open" (a misnomer, since we're actually creating a new book, not opening an existing one), the new opening book file will be created in the folder we chose. You can double-check this by clicking on the "Openings Book" tab in *Fritz*' Notation pane, you'll see a blank display with no moves in it, as well as the name of your new file appearing directly below the small picture of a tree in the display's upper left-hand corner:

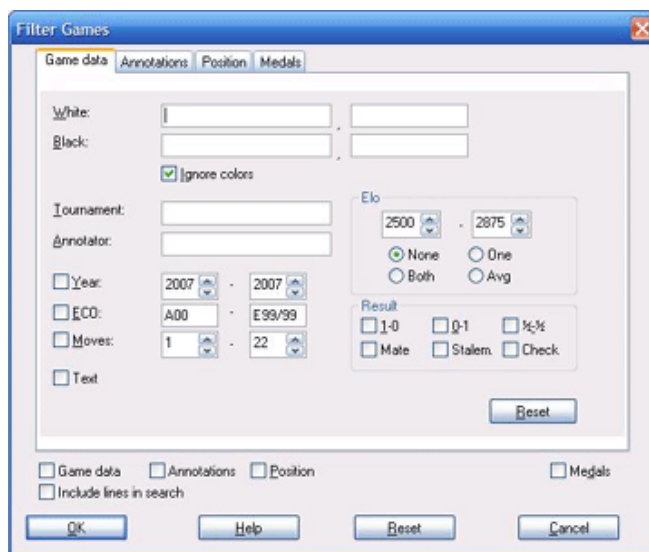


You've created a new empty opening book, so now let's add some games into it.

3. Search for games to add to your opening book

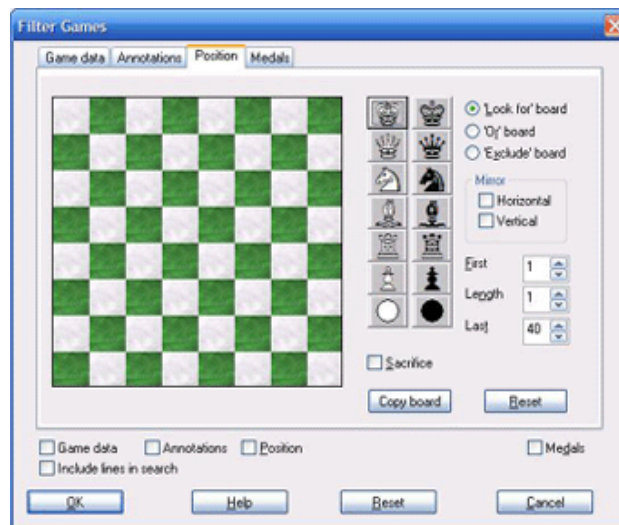
There are several different ways to search for an opening in *Fritz*. We'll briefly look at the two most common methods: searching by position and searching by ECO code (*Encyclopedia of Chess Openings*).

The latter is the easiest. Press F12 to go to the Database window, then go to the Edit menu and select "Filter games" to bring up the Search mask dialogue:



This should be a very familiar dialogue to you by now (if you've been reading past *ChessBase Café* columns). The Search mask allows you to search for games by various criteria. If the opening for which you want to create a book comprises a single ECO code, type that alphanumeric code into both boxes in the dialogue to the right of "ECO." If the opening spans a range of ECO codes (for example, the Ruy Lopez Exchange Variation, which is covered in both C68 and C69) type the first (lower-numbered) code in the left-hand box and the second (higher-numbered) code in the right-hand box. Then click "OK" and *Fritz* will search for the proper games, displaying only those games in the Database window.

It's fairly common, however, to desire an opening that's actually a *subset* of a particular ECO code (for example, the Caro-Kann Advance Variation, which is actually a portion of ECO code B12, along with the Fantasy Variation, and some other side lines). In this case, you'll follow a slightly different procedure. You'll start in the main chessboard screen of *Fritz* by turning *off* the chess engine (Engine menu, select "Switch off engine") so that it won't respond with a move of its own whenever you move a piece, and then make moves for *both* sides on the chessboard until the desired position is reached. Then press F12 to go to the Database window, select "Edit/Filter games" to bring up the search mask, and then click the "Position" tab to get the Position search dialogue:



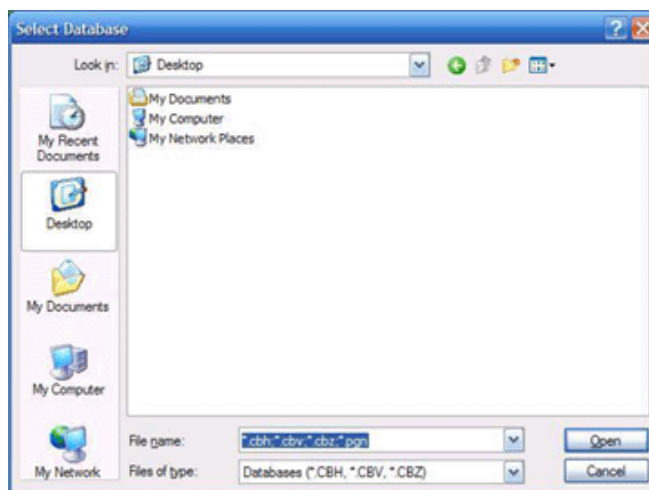
Click the “Copy board” button to transfer the position you just set up from the main chessboard screen over to the Position search dialogue; you’ll see the display switch from a blank chessboard to the position from the main screen. Then click the “OK” button to perform the search.

Returning to our example, Bird’s Opening comprises ECO codes A02 and A03 in their entirety, so we’ll use the first search method: we’ll type “A02” and “A03” into the two boxes to the right of “ECO” and let *Fritz* find the games for us.

After you’ve successfully searched for the games of your desired opening, it’s time to copy them into a new database. Press CTRL-A to highlight all the games in the list, then go to the Edit menu and select “Copy.” Go to the File menu, select “New,” then “Database”; this again brings up the *Windows* File Select dialogue (as in Step 1) with a difference: instead of creating a tree with a .ctg file format, you’ll be creating a database with a .cbh file format. For convenience’s sake, you might consider giving this database the same name that you gave your tree. After creating this new database (and making a note of the folder in which you created it), go to the Edit menu and select “Paste” to finish copying the selected games to this new database.

4. Copy the games into the opening book

Return to the main chessboard screen of *Fritz* (you’ll see a button for this on your *Windows Taskbar*). Go to the Edit menu, select “Openings book,” and then “Import games” from the submenu. The following dialogue will appear:



This “Select database” dialogue lets you navigate to the folder in which you saved the new database containing the games of your desired opening. After navigating to the correct folder and double-clicking on the database name, you’ll see this:



Here's an explanation of the fields in the "Import games" dialogue:

- **Games** – the number of games that will be imported into the opening book. The default values are "1" through the number of the last game in the imported database. These values can be manually changed if the user so desires.
- **Length** – the number in this box refers to the number of plies ("half-moves") that will be imported counting from the start of each game. Take the number of moves per player and multiply it by two to arrive at this value. For example, if you wish to import the first ten moves for each player, you'd set the ply value to "20." You'll also need to select one of the radio buttons from this dialogue. "Absolute length" means that every variation imported into the tree will be the exact length you set in the box, regardless of whether it's a main line or some side variation. This setting is usually best suited to openings that cover a single ECO code. "ECO relative length" means that frequently-played main lines will result in variations that are longer than the less-often played branch variations. This is a better setting for players who are interested primarily in "main lines" instead of side variations.
- **Include variations** – if the imported database includes annotated games, checking this box will include annotators' variations. Leaving the box unchecked means that only the main moves from the games will be included, while excluding any annotators' variations.

After making your selections, click "OK" to begin merging the games into a tree.

5. Make sure the new book is loaded

After all the games are imported into the opening book, click on the "Openings book" tab and check the file name located below the picture of a tree (in the upper left-hand corner of the dialogue) to make sure it's the book you just created. You can then start a new game and the only opening *Fritz* will "know" (and thus play) is the opening from this new book.

We've killed the proverbial two birds with one stone in this *ChessBase Café* column. We now know how to force *Fritz* into a particular opening, as well as the procedure for creating a new opening book from scratch.

Until next month, have fun!

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