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Fritz 11 Calculation Training

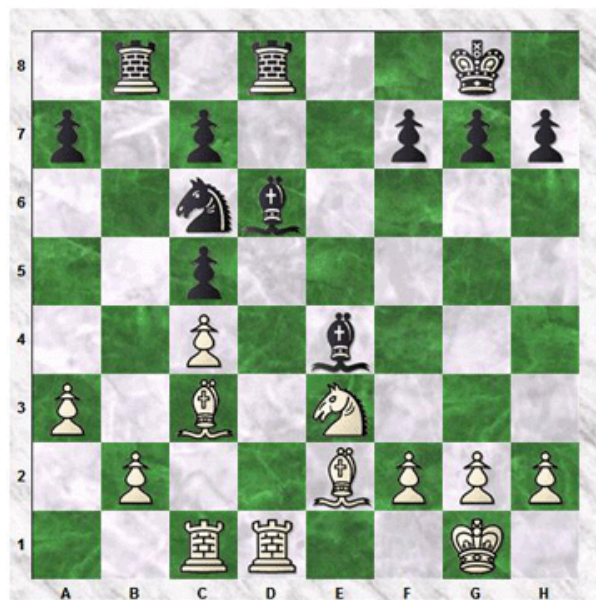
Calculating chess variations is a fundamental process that is at the very core of our game. When you meet a fellow chessplayer for the first time, you're often asked, "What's your rating?" But when a non-chessplayer discovers that you play, you are often asked: "How many moves can you see ahead?" Thus, even non-chessplayers understand that proper calculation and visualization constitute the "guts" of "The Royal Game."

Traditionally we've honed our visualization skills by solving puzzles that tell us which side is to move and challenge us to find a forced sequence of moves that achieves mate or wins a significant amount of material. However, such compositions (unless they're flawed and a "cooked" variation is discovered) cast the game into a deterministic "black & white" (no pun intended) light: the puzzle solver's answer is either right or wrong, with no shades of gray in-between. The solver also knows that there is a single "right" answer for which he's searching.

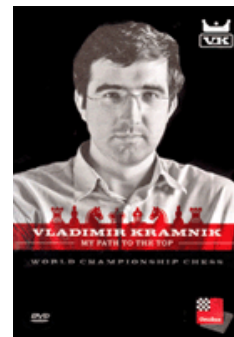
In truth, once the opening ends, practically every position we see thereafter is a chess problem. The difference is that there's often no single "best" move, only an assortment of possibilities ranging from very good to very bad. What's needed here is a system in which we can mentally calculate moves and not only be tested on whether or not the moves are *good*, but also on whether or not the moves are even *legal*.

This is where the new "Calculation training" feature of [Fritz11](#) comes in. You can load nearly any chess position, make moves for both sides *without actually disturbing any of the pieces on the screen*, and be graded on both the strength and legality of the moves you input. The reason I say "nearly any position" is that the feature isn't particularly well-suited to opening positions (this is what "Opening training" is for) nor for a final position of a game that ended in mate (which would just be silly).

Although you can certainly use the "Position Setup" feature to create a test position for yourself, it's much easier to start from an existing position from a database game. For our example, we're going to load a position randomly selected from [Mega Database](#). It is from the game Fernandez-Ayuso vs. Martinez-Hernandez, VLC CS Team Championship, 2003. In the following position, Black has just played 18...Rfd8:



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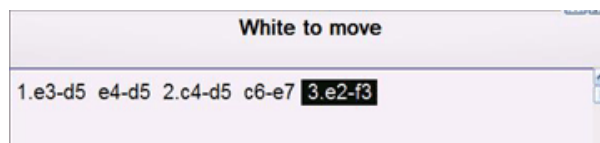
I just double-clicked on the game to open it, then single-clicked on 18...Rfd8 to jump to that position. To start the Calculation Training feature, go to the Tools menu, select "Training," and then select "Calculation training" from the submenu that opens off to the side. As a handy keyboard shortcut, you can hit CTRL-ALT-B while viewing a game to immediately load the current board position as a test for Calculation Training; whichever way you launch the feature, you'll see the normal chessboard screen replaced by the Calculation Training screen. This for the most part resembles the default Fritz layout (chessboard on the left side of the screen, notation pane on the right), but the normal Menu bar and Toolbar are replaced by the Calculation Training Toolbar:



We'll return to this Toolbar in a moment. First, though, we'll describe the basic operation of the Calculation Training feature. A note at the top of the Notation pane will tell you the side to move (White in our example). Make a move for that player by first clicking on a piece and then on a destination square. This is similar to the normal procedure for making a move in a game against Fritz, *except that you will not see the piece physically move on the chessboard*. That's right – the board position will not change. This is the entire challenge of the Calculation Training feature: you're to make as many moves as you can for both sides without seeing any physical change on the board.

Let's give this a whirl using the position shown above. I'll make the first move for White by clicking on the knight on e3 and *holding down the left mouse button*, moving the mouse cursor to the square d5 and then releasing the mouse button. Although the knight will physically remain on e3, the software records it as 19.Nd5. Now I'll enter Black's reply: 19...Bxd5. I'll click on the black bishop on e4, move the cursor to d5, and release the button. Next I'll enter White's reply by clicking on the c4-pawn and moving it to the d5-square to enter the move 20.cxd5.

It's time for a Black response. The c6-knight is in jeopardy, so we'll move it to the e7-square. This retreat pressures the advanced d5-pawn, which is covered by the d1-rook, but I think I'll follow Nimzovich's advice and overprotect the pawn. Thus, I'll click on the e2-bishop and move it to f3. After making all of these moves, this is what I see in the Notation pane:



Remember that the initial position is still shown on the chessboard; the pieces haven't moved at all. It's up to the user to mentally remember the locations of the pieces. Without the mouse clicking and releasing, you have the same activity that we perform during a chess game: visualizing a variation several positions ahead.

All right, we've now calculated a potential position five plies (two and a half moves) deep. How do we check our work? This is where we return to the Calculation Training Toolbar:



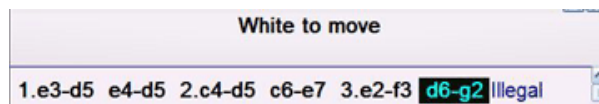
Each button has a particular function. From left to right:

- Left arrow – goes back one move.
- Left arrow with curve – takes back the move you just made (in other words, goes back a move and allows you to replace the next move with a different one).
- Right arrow – moves ahead one move (note that this has no effect if you're viewing the last move of a variation).
- Green check – checks the legality of your moves so far; illegal moves will be noted in the Notation pane.
- Computer chip – activates the chess engine to check for any blunders

you might have made in your calculated variation.

- Terminal, paper, and pencil – causes the program to check your work and assign your variation a numerical score based on strength and accuracy.
- Folder – restarts the training exercise by erasing your work and letting you start over.
- Red X – exits Calculation Training mode; a prompt will ask if you wish to add the variation to the existing gamescore in the database.

Let's illustrate some of these functions. First we'll add an illegal Black move (21...Bd6xg2) to the gamescore. Then we'll click the button displaying the green check to see what the program says:



We see that Fritz correctly marks our last move as "Illegal."

After removing the illegal move and returning to our original variation ending with 21.Bf3, let's click the computer chip button to see what Fritz11 thinks of our move's tactical soundness:



Clicking this button activates Fritz11 in "Infinite analysis" mode, where we can check the engine's numerical evaluation to see if we've made any blunders. After a sixteen ply (eight move) analysis (the "17" means that Fritz is still working on the seventeenth ply), White's about a half-pawn to the good. So it's safe to say that we haven't made any major blunders.

Finally, we'll let Fritz score our complete variation. Click the button to launch the scoring function and you'll see the following dialogue:



You can set the amount of time Fritz will spend analyzing each move of the variation. Although the default value is three seconds, this is far too short for a proper analysis. I prefer a minimum of thirty seconds per move (and longer if I can spare the time). You'll probably also want to click "Annotations" to get some verbal comments. After clicking "OK," you'll see Fritz work through the variation, just as it does in its conventional analysis modes. When the process

completes, you'll see output that looks something like this:



In the final tally, I lost two points for missing the four listed moves that Fritz thought were better, gained back two points for the overall variation, and picked up an extra point for seeing the piece exchanges on d5 for a final score of "1." Not great, but at least I didn't lose points for illegal moves or bad blunders (and, yes, it is possible to achieve a negative score).

To exit Calculation Training, click the Toolbar button with the red "x." You'll see a prompt asking if you wish to save your variation (and Fritz's notes) to the actual gamescore in the database. Choose either answer and you'll be returned to the main chessboard screen.

Calculation Training is an exciting new feature, as it turns any chess game into a treasure trove of puzzles to solve. While you could certainly take any position from a book or magazine and try "solving" it, you'd have no way to check for illegal moves or blunders in the manner that Fritz provides (not to mention the lack of a scoring system).

Until next month, have fun!

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