



COLUMNISTS

ChessOK  
Cafe

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## Advanced Chess School

Last [month](#) we discussed [Dinosaur Chess](#), which teaches the absolute beginner how to play chess. After you have graduated from Professor MacDinosaur's academy, [Advanced Chess School](#) is the next step on your road to chess mastery. It covers a wide range of subjects in the opening, middlegame and endgame. It starts off by teaching you how to checkmate the lone king and proceeds to more advanced topics, such as utilizing a material or positional advantage. The more advanced material, and in particular some of the exercises, will provide a healthy challenge even to intermediate players who can use *Advanced Chess School* to review and reinforce their knowledge. The exercises can also be used for speed training, even if you are familiar with the material.



Overall, the main emphasis in *Advanced Chess School* is on tactics and basic endgame play, as is appropriate for players at this level. In fact, if you are looking for a tactics program, but are afraid that [CT-ART](#) might be too tricky, *Advanced Chess School* might be a good choice.

Like other ChessOK programs, *Advanced Chess School* is based on training material prepared by an experienced coach. The author, Nikolay Zhuravlev, is a chess master from Latvia; besides being a highly respected trainer, he has authored many books for beginners and intermediate players.

### Getting Started

The first time you start the program you are asked to register your name and Elo-rating using the dialog box here:

List of users

Jack

New user

John

ELO

900

Min=800 Max=2800

OK

Cancel

In this example, I'll register a new user by the name of John with an estimated rating of 900.

**ChessCafe.com** is pleased to invite readers to a game of chess at Convekta's ChessOK Playing Zone!



Click here for the [Flash](#) version or here to download and install the [Full](#) version.

The reason why you must create a profile is that *Advanced Chess School* keeps track of each user's performance. Several users can be registered, which makes the program ideal for use in a school or a chess club.

It's important that you enter a realistic rating, as it is updated after each exercise to reflect your progress. If you are unsure about your rating it's better to start too low than too high. Your rating will increase to the appropriate level once you have solved a sufficient number of exercises. After that the rating changes will tell you how fast you are improving.

If you enter a rating that is too high, say above 2000, you may be surprised if it doesn't increase when you solve the exercises correctly. The reason is the same as when one player beats a much lower rated player in a tournament. He doesn't gain any rating points. But in case he loses, his rating decreases. Almost ninety percent of the exercises in *Advanced Chess School* have a difficulty rating below 1600.

Finally, don't expect the rating level to be directly comparable to other rating systems; of course you can compare your rating to others who are also using *Advanced Chess School*.

### Theory and Practice

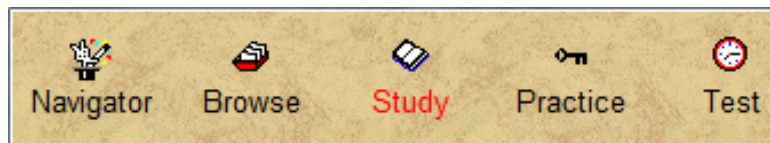
*Advanced Chess School* uses the same basic approach as most ChessOK tutorial programs. It divides the training into two main sections:

- Theory – Essential Chess Knowledge
- Playing Instructive Examples

The theoretical part uses three different approaches to teach and reinforce the material:

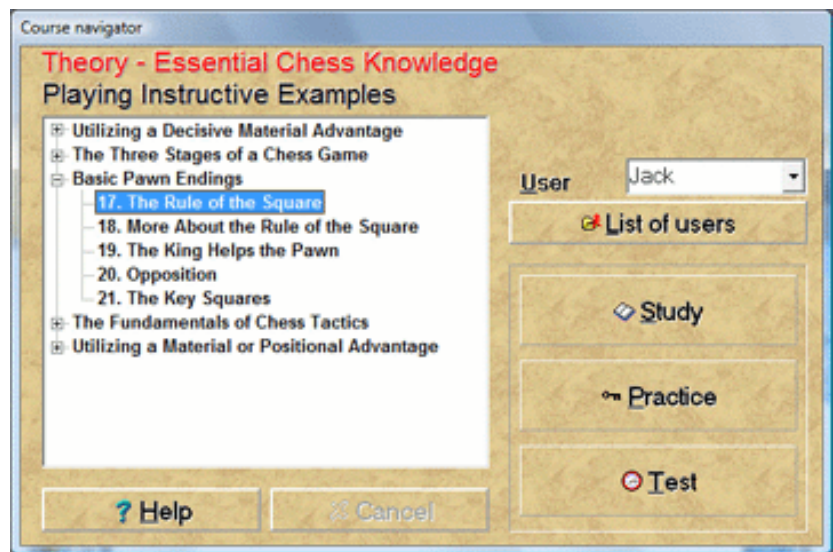
- *Study*: In this mode a new topic is introduced via a narrative and examples that the user can play through on the screen. This should be your starting point for each new topic.
- *Practice*: When you select this mode you are given exercises to solve from the selected topic. The program keeps track of your practice results.
- *Test*: Here you can select various test parameters, including a theme. The program keeps track of your ten most recent tests.

When "Playing Instructive Examples" you can choose either practice mode or test mode.



### The Course Navigator

The course navigator (above) is displayed when you launch the program, but it can also be accessed from the leftmost button on the toolbar ("Navigator"), as shown in the image. The other buttons allow you to browse the exercises ("Browse"), enter study mode ("Study"), practice or take a test. The "Study" button on the toolbar is highlighted, indicating that the program is currently in study mode. The course navigator is shown in the screenshot below:



The highlighted text at the top of the dialog shows that “Theory – Essential Chess Knowledge” is selected. If you wanted to select “Playing Instructive Examples” instead, just click on the text. Below that, in the window with the white background, the table of contents for this mode is displayed. It consists of five sections, and each one is broken down into several subsections. The user has highlighted “The Rule of the Square” in the section “Basic Pawn Endings.” Highlighting a section name is equivalent to selecting the first subsection.

The “Study” and “Practice” buttons take you directly to the study material or exercises for the selected subsection. “Test” is slightly different, as it offers its own selection of a theme and other parameters.

The “User” drop-down box allows you to select any of the registered users and the “List of users” button presents a screen for managing users. You can select, create, remove or rename users. This function is primarily intended for trainers who need to keep track of multiple students.

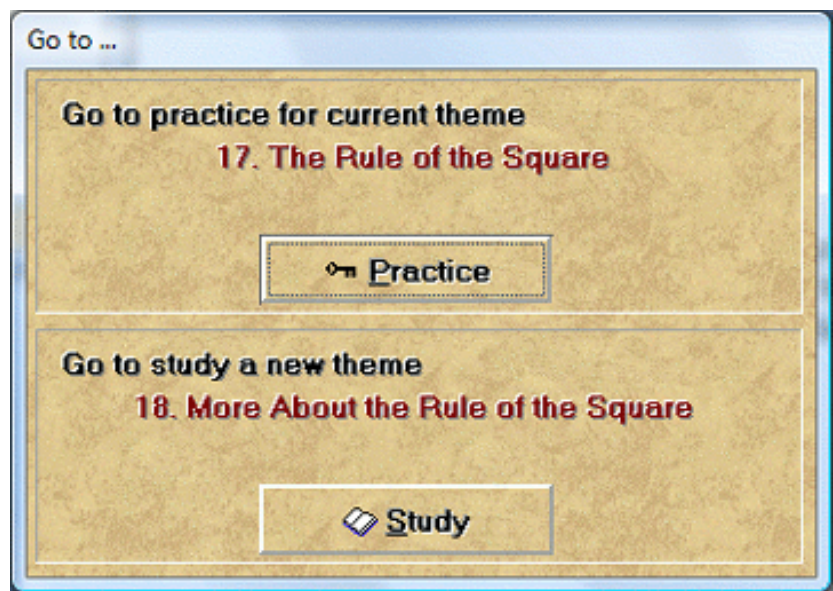
Those readers who recall my two columns about *CT-ART* ([here](#) and [here](#)) will notice the similarity between that program and *Advanced Chess School*. So if you know how to use one of the programs, you already know how to use the other. Because of this I recommend that you have a look at the *CT-ART* columns, as I will not describe in detail some of the features that are already covered there.

### Study

After you click the “Study” button in the course navigator, the first lesson for the selected topic is displayed.



The above image shows the starting point for the rule of the square lesson, a basic concept in pawn endgames. The lessons use both graphic illustrations on the board and verbal explanations on the right side of the screen. The white triangle below the left corner of the chessboard shows that it is White's move. Several positions, often from real games, are used to show how the theoretical material works in practice. You can switch back and forth between positions within a lesson by using the blue arrows shown at the bottom left of the image. When you come to the end of a lesson the following dialog box is displayed:



Here you are given a choice of solving exercises based on the current lesson by clicking "Practice" or starting the next lesson by clicking "Study." We'll have a look at the practice mode next.

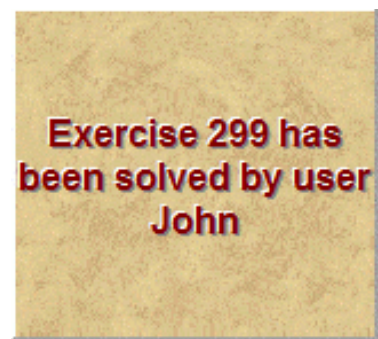
### Practice Mode

You can start practice mode from the course navigator, from the dialog box shown above or by clicking the "Practice" button on the toolbar. When switching to practice mode you are immediately presented with the first exercise.



In the diagrammed position it is White's move, as shown by the white triangle. On the right side of the image you see that White has a winning position, and below that the text "Your move" shows that the program is waiting for you to find the correct move. The status bar at the bottom of the image shows that the score for this exercise so far is zero out of a possible twenty points. The penalty increases every time you make a wrong move.

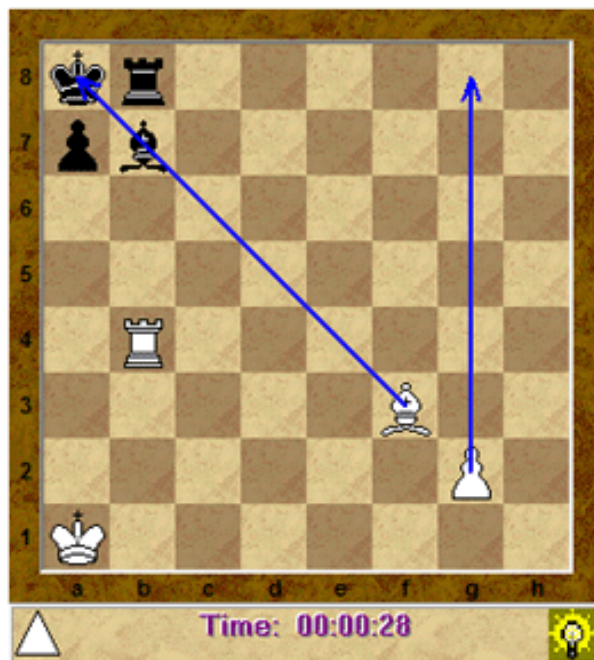
Practice mode allows you skip an exercise and then come back to it later using the blue arrows below the chessboard. Few users will be able to solve all the exercises at first, so don't hesitate to skip exercises and solve them later.



The program keeps track of which exercises you have solved. You can always see if you have solved the current exercise or not. Instead of displaying "Your move" a message is displayed stating that you have already solved the exercise (see above image). This is just meant to be informative, and it doesn't stop you from reviewing the exercise and solving it again if you wish.

When you find the correct move, the program responds and then asks you for your next move. Sometimes there is more than one good move in a position and you will be asked to consider other moves besides the one you chose.

If you don't play the correct move, the program will guide you by using arrows to draw attention to key aspects of the position, as shown in the diagram below:



If you still don't find the correct move, the piece that you are supposed to move will blink. If you can't find the correct move after that, the program will make the first move for both sides and resume the exercise from there.

After solving an exercise you can play through all the variations on the board. This is recommended, because there are often additional variations given that were not played, plus it helps to review the solution.



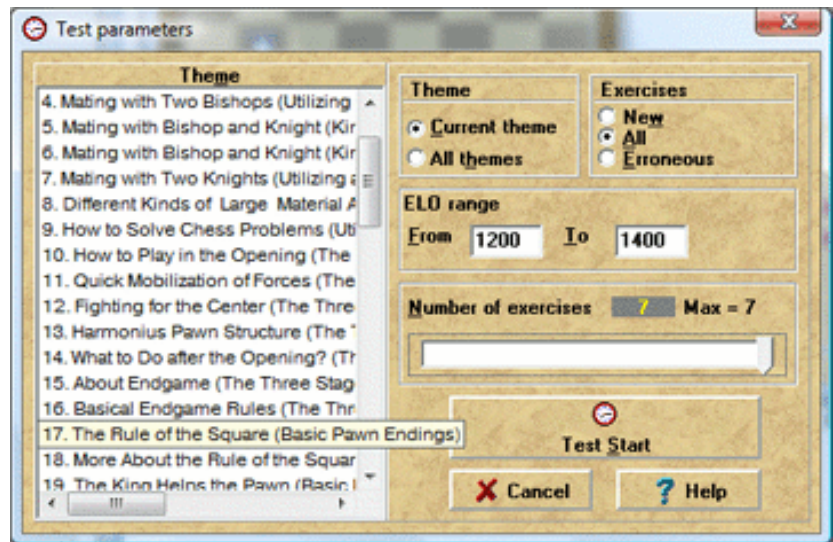
If you place the mouse over the chessboard and right-click, a menu offers the following options:

- *Enlarge board & Shrink board*: Resizes the chessboard.
- *Show markers*: Request a hint for the current position in the form of the arrows described above.
- *Play current position...*: This option allows you to play the current position against the built-in chess engine.

- *Invert board*: Rotates the board 180 degrees.

## Test Mode

Test mode can be started from the course navigator or by clicking the “Test” button on the toolbar. There are several parameters that the user can set before a test begins, as shown on this screenshot.



Here the user has selected the theme “The Rule of the Square (Basic Pawn Endings).” I want to draw your attention to the “Elo range” which has been set to 1200-1400. It’s a good idea to use this parameter to limit the difficulty of the exercises if you want to begin with the easier ones and work your way up.

The main difference between practice and test mode is the order of the exercises. In practice mode they are always presented in the same order, but in test mode it varies.

The test mode in *Advanced Chess School* is almost identical to that in *CT-ART*, so I will not go into detail here but refer you to my earlier [column](#). The main difference is that there is no 5x5 board in *Advanced Chess School*.

## Playing Instructive Examples

This is the second major section of the program. Here you play selected positions against a chess engine, so you might find this similar to playing a real game, although there is a difference. The chess engine doesn’t follow pre-analyzed lines, so playing against it is quite different from solving exercises in the theoretical part of the program (Theory – Essential Chess Knowledge). It’s more like playing a game against a friend who is willing to guide you when you go wrong – a friend who is a strong chess player, but fallible nevertheless.

If you select the wrong continuation when playing against the engine, it will often react immediately and show you the correct plan. However, sometimes it will allow you to play on after you make a mistake until the consequences of the mistake become clear. Here is one such example:



Instead of taking advantage of the opposition, the user has played into a draw by repetition. However, the program didn't announce the mistake until the third repetition. The correct solution can now be displayed by clicking the Answer button.

### Statistics

Like most other ChessOK training programs, *Advanced Chess School* keeps track of the rating changes of each user based on his performance. Overviews of their results in practice mode and in tests are also provided. This feature was also described in more detail in my earlier [column](#) on CT-ART.

### Summary

*Advanced Chess School* is an interactive tutorial suitable for players who have already learned the rules of chess and want to take the next step towards intermediate strength. As such it is a good follow up to *Dinosaur Chess* or [Chess School for Beginners](#).

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

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***Dadi wants your questions!! Send it along and perhaps it will be answered in an upcoming column. Please include your name and country of residence. [Yes, I have a question for Dadi!](#)***

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