



COLUMNISTS

ChessOK
Cafe

Dadi Jonsson



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Chess for Networks
Part Two

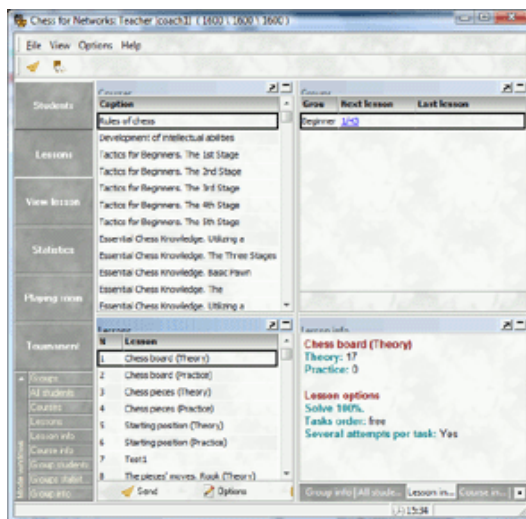
This month we continue our examination of *Chess for Networks*, a software system for administering a chess school or course under the guidance of a trainer. In fact, the country of Slovenia has selected it for use in all their schools. Last month's [article](#) was a general introduction to *Chess for Networks*. This month I will look at some of the general features of the user interface and the process used for assigning lessons to students and how students complete the lessons.



The User Interface and the Trainer's Module

The user interface is very flexible and you can reorganize the workspace as you see fit. You can even stack windows on top of each other, causing selectable tabs to appear beneath the windows. Windows can also be "floated." A floated window can be placed outside the application window, and even on a different monitor. This can be especially useful for demonstration purposes.

The image below shows the trainer's module (or the "Teacher's Place" as it is called). At the top of the window you can see the menu bar and the tool bar. Down the left side of the windows there are six large, gray buttons that are used to switch between different modes. We call this part of the screen the navigation pane. The six mode buttons are:



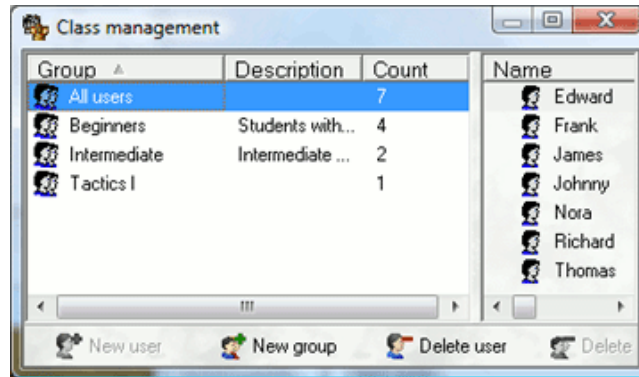
- **Students:** This mode is used for student management such as adding new students and grouping them into classes. The trainer also has access to statistics about the performance of each student and class. Additionally, he can communicate with individual students or the class as a whole in the students' mode.
- **Lessons:** Here the trainer sees a list of all available courses and lessons. He can see the current status of each group and how students have performed in each lesson.
- **View lesson:** This allows the trainer to view the training material in detail. It consists of a number of courses and each course is broken down into several lessons. Finally each lesson contains multiple exercises. Here the trainer can also examine an exercise with selected students or classes.
- **Statistics:** The trainer's module comes with predefined statistics to choose from, but custom queries can also be defined for statistics on students, classes, courses, lessons or tasks.
- **Playing room:** This is for playing games between students or students and trainer.
- **Tournaments:** The trainer can organize different types of tournaments and matches between the students, with or without his own participation.

In the previous image, the lessons mode is selected and below the six large mode buttons there are smaller buttons, one for each window that is available in this mode. These are called mode windows. Four of those windows are currently displayed in the workspace to the right of the navigation pane.

The lessons, playing room and tournament modes are also available in the student's module.

Students and Classes

The trainer registers students and creates the classes or groups using the class management window shown below.



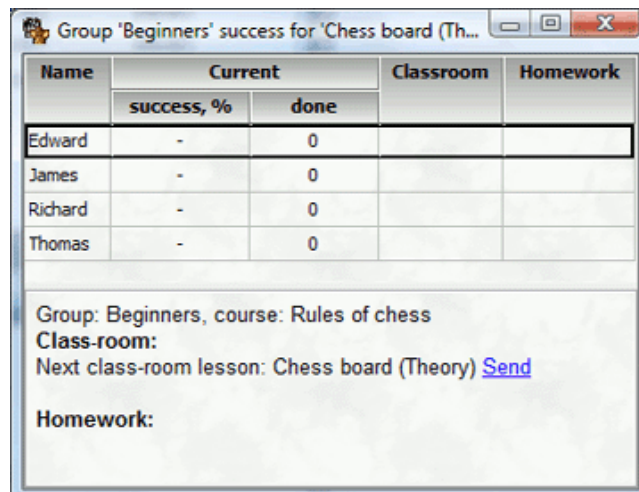
This window has two sections. The group (or class) section on the left lists all groups that have been defined. It shows the group name, a description of the group and the number of students in each group. The "All users" group is created automatically. On the right hand side there is a list of students that belong to the group highlighted on the left. In this case the "All users" group is highlighted, so all the students are listed in the "Name" column.

There are four buttons at the bottom of the window. *New user* is used to create a new user account and add it directly to the highlighted group. *New group* creates a new group or class. If you highlight a user in the "Name" column and then click *Delete user* the highlighted user will be deleted. The fourth button is *Delete group*.

After creating the required groups and registering the students, simply click on a student's name and drag into the correct group. If you make a mistake and put a student into the wrong group, just put him into the correct one and he will automatically be removed from the previous group. After the students have been registered and split into groups, the training can begin!

Sending Lessons to Students

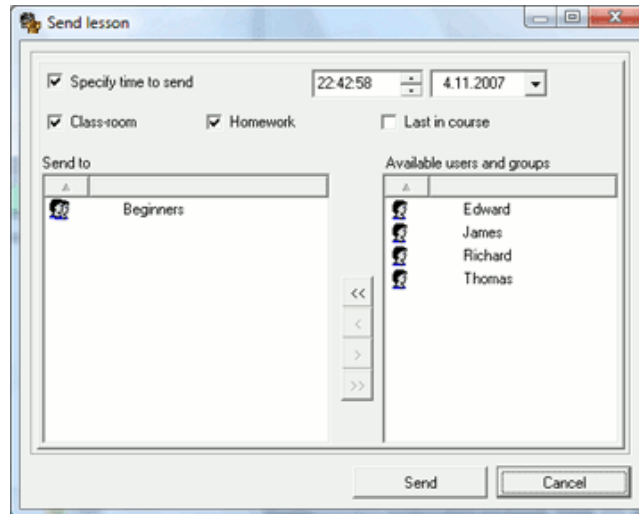
Let's assume that we are starting out with the "Beginners" class that we saw in the screenshot above. We want to distribute the first lesson to all the students in the class. So we click on the *Lessons* mode button in the navigation pane and select the "Beginners" class in the "Groups" windows. The group info window will be updated to display information about the class.



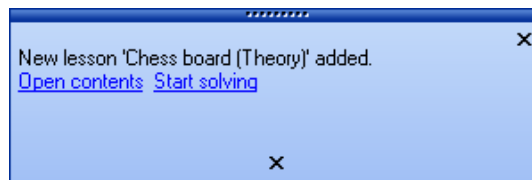
Sending the first lesson to the beginners' class is as easy as clicking on the blue, underlined *Send* link in this window. But before we do that let's have a closer look at what it is showing us. First there is a list of the four students in this class. Since the class is just about to start

there is no information available about completed exercises. The lower half of the window shows that this is the “Beginners” group and their first course is the rules of chess. The first classroom lesson will be about the chessboard. It is a theoretical lesson, meaning that there are no exercises to solve. No homework has been assigned to the group.

Now let’s click on the *Send* link (there is also a toolbar button that serves the same purpose). The “Send lesson” window is displayed:



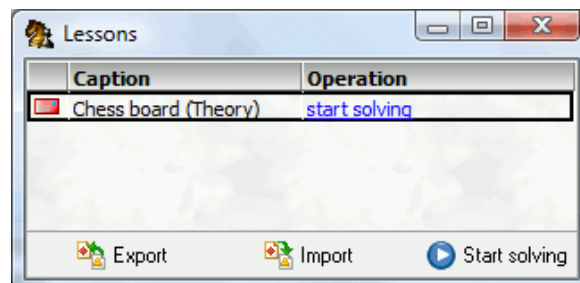
Starting at the top of this window we see a very useful option: “Specify time to send.” Let’s say that the trainer wants to send a new homework assignment package to the students next weekend. This function allows him or her to schedule the package to be sent out automatically by specifying the time when it should be sent. In the next line we see that this lesson will be covered in the classroom and the students are also expected to work on it at home. The lower part of the screenshot is divided into two lists “Send to” on the left and “Available users and groups” on the right. We see that the trainer wants to send the lesson to all the students as the “Beginners” group is in the “Send to” list. The arrow keys between the lists can be used to move items between them. This means that a lesson can be sent to selected students instead of the whole class. When the “Send” button is clicked the lesson will be sent to the students. If a student is connected to the chess school when the lesson is sent out, a small alert is displayed on his screen:



A student would normally click on either “Open contents” or “Start solving” in order to follow the lesson or to begin solving the exercises.

Lessons

There is a special student’s module in *Chess for Networks* which, as the name indicates, is used by students when attending classes, solving exercises, playing games, chatting with the trainer or other students, etc. When a lesson has been sent to a student it is displayed in the lessons window in the student’s module as shown here:



We see here the chess board theory lesson that the trainer sent to the students as the only available lesson. This would normally be a classroom lesson, but the *Export* button at the bottom of the screen allows the student to store the lesson on a portable media (USB flash drive, floppy disk etc.) and complete it at home using the off-line student’s module. Finally,

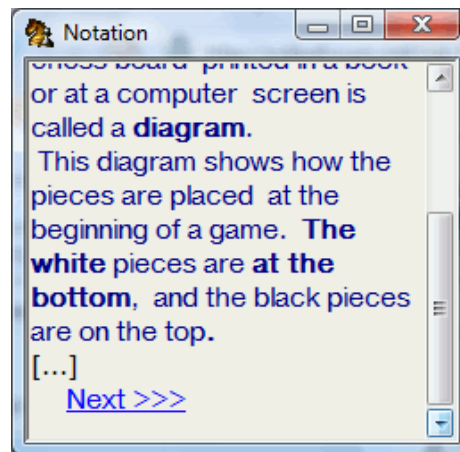
in the next classroom session, he can use the *Import* button to add the completed lesson to the school's database.

When the student is ready to begin the lesson, he clicks on either the *Start solving* button shown at the bottom of the image or the "start solving" link in the "Operation" column. The student's module will display each example or exercise as shown in the image.



There are currently five windows displayed in the workspace (the navigation pane is hidden while studying). Let's start at the top left with the "Task" window. It explains in simple words what the student is expected to do; in this case study the explanations provided with the current example. After completing a task, this window also shows you if you were successful or not. Below that we see the board window, which displays the chessboard. The triangle below the board indicates whose move it is. At the top right we see the clock window. It shows that we are currently looking at example four of the current lesson. The clock is a countdown clock that starts with the estimated time needed to complete this step.

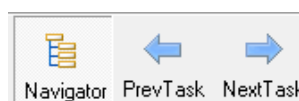
The all important notation window is below the clock window. It is used to show games, exercises and analysis or, as in this case, the explanatory text of the lesson. The student indicates that he has read the text by clicking on the window. If there are some moves in the example, he must play through them before continuing to the next example.



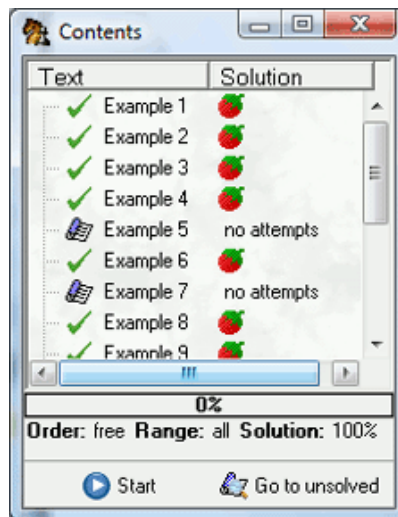
A link ("Next >>>") to the next example is displayed at the bottom of the window and the task window is updated to show that the current part of the lesson has been completed.

Finally there is the console window. This window allows students to discuss the examples with the trainer and other students.

The three toolbar buttons shown in the graphic below can be used to navigate the examples and exercises in a lesson.



The left and right arrows allow the student to select or skip certain exercises and the navigator shows the current status in the contents window.

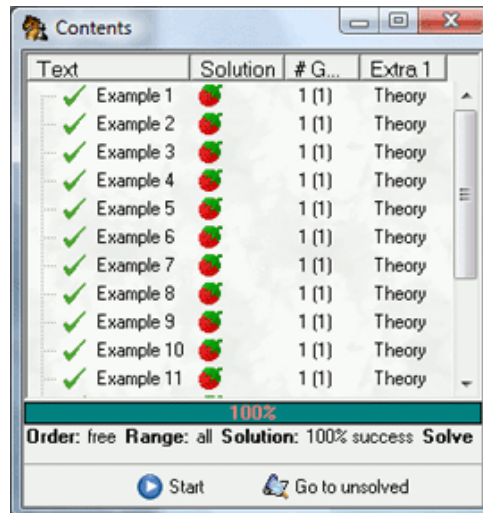


The student has successfully completed all examples except number five and seven, which he has skipped using the arrow buttons on the toolbar. The program will automatically take him back to the exercises he skipped when he has completed the others.

When a student completes a lesson a small pop-up window is displayed indicating that the lesson has been completed.

Checking Progress in the Students Module

When the student is not studying or solving exercises, he can at any time get a complete overview of his progress either by selecting lessons mode or progress mode in the navigation pane. In lessons mode the lessons windows shows all lessons whether completed or not. Completed lessons are displayed in green and the contents window shows the details for each exercise or example similar to what we saw above:



Here we see that the student has completed the examples of the selected lesson successfully and achieved a 100% score. The buttons at the bottom of the window allow him to return to the lesson and continue in case he hasn't completed it.

Summary

In this article we have taken a look at some of the general features of the user interface of *Chess for Networks*. We also saw how a trainer can distribute lessons to students and how students complete the lessons and check their own progress. Although dealing with theoretical lessons is perhaps the simplest interaction between the trainer and the student, this article should give you a glimpse of the possibilities offered by *Chess for Networks*. Still we have just barely scratched the surface, as we have not had a look at assigning and solving exercises, playing games and tournaments, etc. And we have only had a brief look at the vast potential offered to the trainer by the trainer's module. This is perhaps the most advanced training system available and I will most certainly come back to it in the future.

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](#).

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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