



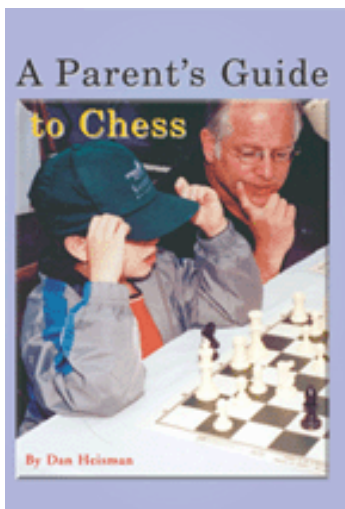
## Novice Nook's Chess Lists

**Quote of the Month:** *"Time management is an important skill in chess; Having 15 minutes left when your opponent has 5 (without time delay clocks) in an otherwise even position is worth about 200 ratings points!"*

### COLUMNISTS

## Novice Nook

Dan Heisman



Lists are fun but they can also be helpful and instructive. I thought that readers would benefit from some instructional lists – many of which have appeared in previous Novice Nooks in one guise or another - and I threw in a couple of “fun” ones. The following, of course, represent my personal opinions; I am sure I missed a few good entries.

### The most important aspects to concentrate upon to start playing good chess (“The Big 5”)

1. Safety - *Chess safety = tactics*; especially important are *counting* and basic motifs
2. Piece activity – Use all your pieces all the time
3. Thinking process – What are all the things my opponent’s move did? Real Chess, etc.
4. Time management – Pace yourself to use almost all your time every game
5. General guidelines/principles – Learning them, and learning then how and when to apply them

*Bonus:* Make your chess learning fun

### The different levels of tactics

1. En prise – You can safely take a piece (or lose one!) for nothing in return.
2. Counting – Seeing whether any series of captures on any square might lead to material loss
3. Single motifs – Pins, Double Attacks, Removal of the Guard, Back-Rank Mates, etc.
4. Non-sacrificial combinations – Two or more motifs leading by force to win of material or mate, but without sacrifice.
5. Sacrificial combinations – Similar to #4 except involving temporary – or even long-term unclear - sacrifice

### The three types of forcing moves you must consider for both players when there is any clash of pieces

1. Checks
2. Captures
3. Threats

Note: Normally, you must consider these for three “time” periods each time you move: The threats already made by your opponent’s previous move, your checks, captures, and threats this move, and your opponent’s possible checks, captures, and threats in response to your candidate moves.

### **The five ways to make an attacked piece safe**

1. Move it to a safe square
2. Capture the attacking piece
3. Block the attack (against range attacks by Bishops, Rooks, and Queens)
4. Guard the piece
5. Counterattack (includes pinning the attacking piece)

### **The three levels of chess thinking**

1. Flip-Coin – Ignores all opponent’s threats, past and future
2. Hope Chess – Considers threats from opponent’s previous move, but not after your considered move
3. Real Chess – Not only addresses threats from the previous move, but also anticipates threats from the candidate move to make sure they can be met.

### **The four major evaluation criteria**

1. Material
2. King Safety
3. Total army activity/mobility (For example, space and time have this as their objective)
4. Pawn Structure

*Bonus:* Relative time remaining on the clock!

**The order you might want to develop your pieces (non-pawns) in classical development.** Note: In real games it doesn’t happen this way, but it is helpful to keep in mind:

1. Knight on the side you are going to castle
2. Bishop on the side you are going to castle
3. Castle (or Queen if you are going to castle queenside)
4. Queen (or castle if castling queenside)
5. Knight on the side opposite castling
6. Bishop on the side opposite castling
7. The Rook which is doing least
8. The other Rook

## **The five things to keep in mind when you are way ahead in material and should easily win**

1. Think Defense First! (**not** the same as “play defensively”!) – Don’t overlook threats or opponent plans!
2. Keep it simple
3. When possible, make even trades of pieces (not pawns)
4. Get all your pieces doing something
5. Don’t worry about the little things

Bonus: Don’t get into time trouble since you don’t necessarily need to find the best move every time to win once you are that far ahead.

## **Actions that will improve your chess play**

1. Learning basic tactical motif patterns well enough for swift recognition of both problem and solution
2. Playing slow games against somewhat higher rated opponents and learning from your mistakes
3. Playing slow games against somewhat lower rated opponents and learning how to win won games
4. Playing over annotated master games, especially ones written for instruction for players at your level
5. Working on your thinking process
6. Taking lessons from a good instructor
7. Learning good general principles for any part of the game (e.g., basic opening and endgame principles)
8. Writing down how much time you have left after every move (over-the-board)
9. Learning the rules, such as three-fold repetition of position, draw by insufficient losing chances, etc.
10. Playing over-the-board tournaments
11. Learning to avoid big mistakes through care, good time management, and better pattern recognition
12. Playing over lots of unannotated/annotated master games quickly – to get a feel of how good players play

## **Things that won’t improve your chess play much, if at all**

1. Playing 'Hope Chess' even a few times per (slow) game
2. Playing almost all fast games
3. Reading chess books for which you are not yet ready
4. Doing tactical problems that are much too advanced for you, or rare patterns you will never see again
5. Memorizing lots of opening lines before you have mastered more fundamental information, like basic tactics and opening guidelines
6. Continuing bad habits without making a serious attempt to find out what

- you are doing wrong
7. Not playing just to protect your rating, or worrying about your rating
  8. Stopping your analysis of a line just because you initially give up material (quiescence error)
  9. Taking one or more of your moves lightly
  10. Playing too fast, or so slowly that you later have to play fast in time trouble.

### **Things I hear quite a bit that are likely wrong/misconceived**

1. "He is a lot higher rated than I am, but I am better."
2. "I am going to get a lot better because I learned the X Opening."
3. "I may not be a good player, but I know all those basic tactical motifs."
4. "No sense looking at that game; I know all the mistakes I made."
5. "I am rated 1200 but I should be 2000 by next year."
6. "I could be a master too if I knew my openings better."
7. "I don't need to play slow – I can see everything in a short time."
8. "Doubled pawns are always bad."
9. "Game in 30 minutes is a slow game time limit."
10. "I can play fast against him – he is no good."
11. "I know how to improve, but my rating has stayed the same because I have not gotten around to it."
12. "I just overlooked losing a piece, but that's not really what we need to discuss."
13. "You should teach a beginner the endgame first." (Except for basic mates like Queen and King versus King, when have you seen a beginner endgame that was still nearly balanced in material?)
14. "You are only a master – what do you know? You probably can't help me."

### **Most common (OTB) rule misconceptions (the following are all wrong):**

1. You can only promote a pawn to a piece that has been captured
2. It is three-fold repetition of moves for a draw (the correct rule: three-fold repetition of *position*)
3. The three-fold repetition for a draw has to be consecutive moves (it does not)
4. The 50-move rule starts when one player just has a King left
5. Shaking hands ends the game
6. You can castle through check
7. It is up to the TD to figure out if my opponent is bothering me without me notifying the TD
8. If you make an illegal move, then touch-move does not apply
9. You should stop keeping score when your opponent has less than five minutes left (this is rarely correct, although it is legal)
10. The insufficient losing chances rule is not a draw claim, but rather a request for a time-delay clock

### **Problems many weaker players have that are theoretically easy to fix but most have trouble overcoming:**

1. Lack of time management – not being able to pace yourself to take almost all your time every game.
2. Inconsistent piece activity – not getting all your pieces into the game, every game.
3. Reading books that won't help you very much because you don't do the basic things from the good basic books.
4. Studying specific opening lines that you will rarely encounter and won't help much if you do.
5. Playing too many speed games without adequate and consistent slow play.
6. Worrying about your rating.

### My least followed advice

1. Move every piece once before you move any piece twice, unless there is a tactic.
2. Play over each game (with an opening book, strong player, software database, etc.), fast or slow, and ask yourself “If we played this game again and my opponent did exactly the same thing, where would I play a different move?”
3. To improve your analysis, evaluation, and board vision, consider the PV Exercise and the Stoyko Exercise (to be covered in a future Novice Nook).

### Best annotated game anthology books for players rated below 1500

1. *Logical Chess Move by Move* - Chernev
2. *The Most Instructive Games of Chess Ever Played* – Chernev
3. *Chess Master vs. Chess Amateur* – Euwe and Meiden

### Opening pattern problems/traps that are good to understand/learn

1. Petroff's trap – **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.Nxe5 Nxe4? 4.Qe2 Nf6?** Best is **4...Qe7 5.Qxe4 d6 6.d4** and White wins a pawn. **5.Nc6+** wins the Queen.
2. Legall's mate – **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 d6 3.Bc4 h6? 4.Nc3 Bg4? 5.Nxe5! Bxd1?** Better to bail out with **5...exd5 6.Qxg4** and White wins a pawn. **6.Bxf7+ Ke7 7.Nd5#**
3. Refuting Damiano's defense – **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 f6? 3.Nxe5 fxe5 4.Qh5+** and if **4...Ke7 5.Qxe5+** with **Bc4+** coming up and a strong attack, or **4...g6 5.Qxe5+** snaring the Rook.
4. Incorrect Queen's Pawn Defense – **1.d4 d5 2.c4 Nf6(?)** Confusing an Indian position with a Queen's Gambit. **3.cxd5 Nxd5 4.Nf3** (4.e4!? is thought to be much less correct but I have done some computer analysis...!) followed by **5.e4**, and its cousin **1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4?!** – Confusing a Nimzo-Indian with a Queen's Gambit. **4.a3** Just as good is **4.Qa4+ Nc6 5.Nf3** and the black Knight blocks the c-pawn. **Bxc3+ 5.bxc3** and White has the bishop pair for free since **cxd5** is unstoppable and he will have no doubled pawns as a drawback.
5. Incorrectly holding Queen's Gambit – **1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.Nf3 b5? 4.a4**

6. Cambridge Springs trap – **1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bg5 Nbd7 5.cxd5 cxd5 6.Nxd5?? Nxd5!** Now if **7.Bxd8 Bb4+ 8.Qd2 Kxd8** (8...Bxd2+ can lose a tempo) Black is just up a piece. Note: I know this move order has not yet reached the full Cambridge Springs, but I still name the trap this way!
7. Defending Scholar's Mate - **1.e4 e5 2.Qh5 Nc6 3.Bc4 g6 4.Qf3 Nf6 or 3...Qe7.**
8. Blocking break moves - **1.d4 d5 2.Nf3 Nc6(?)** and Black has no scope for his pieces as his "c5" break is delayed: "Don't put your Knight in front of your c-pawn in double d-pawn openings."
9. Lolli – **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.Ng5 d5 5.exd5 Nxd5(?) 6.d4!** This is much better than the Fried Liver **6.Nxf7?! Maybe the Lolli would be played more if we called it "The Improved Fried Liver", which it is!**
10. Morphy-Duke of Brunswick & Count Isouard: Philidor's Defense – **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 Bg4? 4.dxe5 Bxf3 5.Qxf3 dxe5 6.Bc4 Nf6** In his new book *My Great Predecessors, Part I*, GM Garry Kasparov calls this the decisive mistake, saying Black must choose between the unpleasant **6...Qf6** and **6...Qd7.Qb3** With the double attack on f7 and b7 White is practically winning.

### The 3 Most important guidelines in the opening

1. Activate ALL your pieces (if possible, move every piece once before you move any piece twice unless there is a tactic for either side)
2. Try to get some control of the center
3. Castle your King into safety

Bonuses: A) Put your pieces onto open lines, or at least where you can create open lines via break moves and B) In general and when possible, pieces are better placed behind pawns than in front of them.

### More good opening guidelines:

1. Use break moves to weaken your opponent's pawn structure and open files for Rooks and Queens.
2. The player who uses his Rooks best usually wins the opening.
3. Don't put your Knight in front of your c-pawn in double d-pawn openings.
4. Don't make trades that help develop your opponent's pieces.
5. Don't give up the bishop pair unless you get at least half a pawn of compensation for it.
6. Move more than two pawns, but six is probably too many!

### Good endgame guidelines:

1. The endgame is the time of the game you can use your King – so make sure to do get him where the action is!
2. Rooks belong behind passed pawns.
3. Passed pawns must be pushed, but don't push them past their zone of protection.



4. Bishops of opposite colors are lead to drawish positions, possibly even when one side is ahead a pawn or two.
5. Never accept a draw unless you want to remain ignorant of what you would have learned.
6. When you are way ahead sometimes it is better to think more about avoiding stalemate than about getting a checkmate.
7. Knights are better when all the pawns are on one side of the board or when the pawns are mostly locked.
8. The endgame guidelines are different than the opening and middlegame guidelines, so don't play an endgame like a middlegame.
9. In the endgame it is much more likely a bad move will turn a win into a loss or draw, or a draw into a loss, so play slow enough games so that you will have time to think about your endgame moves.
10. In the opening, a piece is almost always worth more than three pawns. In the endgame the three pawns are usually worth more than the piece!

### **The most underrated tactical motifs**

1. Counting (by far). Determining if each piece on *both* sides is safe (i.e., exchanges on its square - not including motifs like removal of the guard - do not lose material)
2. Removal of the guard
3. Double threat (as opposed to double attack)

### **Guide to Dan's ChessCafe Articles** (See the [ChessCafe Archives](#))

1. Thinking Process: The Secrets to 'Real' Chess; Applying Steinitz' Laws; Real Chess, Time Management, and Care: Putting it All Together; Analysis and Evaluation; A Generic Thought Process; Learning From Dr. de Groot
2. Time Management: Time Management During a Chess Game
3. General Improvement: Helping You Through the Jungle; Understanding Improvement and Elements of Chess Strength; Chess Books and Prerequisites; An Improvement Plan; The Road to Carnegie Hall; Finding a Good Instructor; The 10 Biggest Roadblocks to Improvement; Using the Computer to Improve; A Fistful of Lessons
4. Endgame: Going to Sleep in the Endgame; King & Pawn & ? vs. King; King & Pawn vs. King
5. Tactics: A Different Approach to Studying Tactics; The Seeds of Tactical Destruction; Revisiting the Seeds of Tactical Destruction; The Most Common Opening Tactics; The Underrated Removal of the Guard; A Counting Primer; A Tactics Quiz
6. Strategy/Positional Play: The Six Common Chess States; Techniques; When You're Winning it's a Whole Different Game; Break Moves: Opening Lines to Increase Mobility; It's Not Really Winning a Tempo!; A Positional Primer; Evaluation Criteria

### **Important general guidelines/principles (Note: Rules apply ALL the time;**

## principles don't)

1. If you see a good move, look for a better one.
2. Make sure each piece is as active as possible, usually activating the least active pieces unless there is a forced tactic where you can win material or must defend; e.g. *in the opening move every piece once before you move any piece twice.*
3. When you are way ahead, *Think Defense First*, but do *not* play defensively!
4. Your game is only as good as your worst move so always be careful!
5. The exchange is worth about half a piece, so therefore the values of the exchange, a piece (Knight or Bishop), and a Rook are roughly in a 1-2-3 ratio.
6. Don't give away the bishop pair – or any material – for nothing.
7. Castling is usually the single best opening move because it is the only move which allows you to spend what would normally take two tempos getting pieces toward where they should be.
8. Don't make a threat unless either A) your threat cannot be met, or B) when your opponent does meet your threat you improve your position relative to his.
9. Pace yourself to use almost all your time every game – to do otherwise would not be giving your best.
10. In the endgame, put your King where the action is!
11. In tactical situations, consider all of both player's checks, captures, and threats (the most forcing moves), usually in that order.
12. Guidelines change depending on the situation. For example, when players castle on opposite sides with the Queens and Rooks on the board, it may be detrimental to win an opponent's pawn on the same side of the board as your King, opening lines for his Rooks and Queens to attack.

## Underrated chess books (mine don't qualify!) – some of these are out-of-print

1. *Point Count Chess* – Horowitz and Mott-Smith
2. *The Middlegame in Chess* – Horowitz
3. *Modern Chess Opening Theory* – Suetin
4. *Chess for Tigers* – Webb
5. *Speelman's Best Games of Chess* – Speelman
6. *Larsen's Best Games of Chess* – Larsen
7. *The Most Instructive Games of Chess Ever Played* – Chernev
8. *Castling to Win* – Timmer
9. *How to Open a Chess Game* – 7 Grandmasters
10. *Win at Chess* – Ron Curry
11. *The Logical Approach to Chess* – Euwe, Blaine, and Rumble
12. *Pawn Power in Chess* – Kmoch – Don't be put off by his terminology; great concepts!
13. *The Bright Side of Chess* – Chernev
14. *The Art of Defense in Chess* - Soltis

## My favorite short chess stories



1. (other authors') *Unsound Variations* – George R.R. Martin. This can be found in Fred Saberhagen's *Pawn to Infinity* anthology. Based on a true story from a tournament in which I participated – but just starts there!
2. (mine) *The Ultimate Truth* (but I have a soft spot for *The Cheating Chess Tournament*)

### **People who helped me learn chess** (Thanks!)

1. Dr. Harvey Heisman
2. Bob Schumsky (who notified me about tournament chess when I was 16)
3. NM Richard Pariseau
4. IM Donald Byrne (just made the US Chess Hall of Fame!).
5. USCF Expert Don Latzel
6. USCF Expert Jerry Kolker
7. Ken Boehm

### **Reasons why gambits are good for improving players**

1. You get to practice tactics.
2. You learn to play with the initiative.
3. You learn about maintaining piece activity.
4. You learn to trade one advantage (time) for others.
5. Your opponents are probably not good enough to win up a pawn even if you mess up.

### **Maneuvers/Ideas I have named after players (I x'd out the names to protect the guilty!)**

1. The XXX Maneuver – moving ...Nbd7 inappropriately in Benoni positions and then ...Nb6 blocking the ...b5 break move
2. The XXX Mistake – assuming the opponent will not make the best reply
3. The XXX Mistake – playing fast and much below your normal strength against low rated players
4. The XXX Maneuver – playing ...Qb6 often and inappropriately
5. The XXX Mistake – allowing back rank mates when up a queen or more
6. The XXX Mistake – losing on time instead of making quick, less good moves, just so you can say your position was still good when you lose
7. The XXX Maneuver – to make nothing moves, enticing your opponent to come up with a bad plan to “punish you” for your nothing moves
8. The XXX Maneuver – to erroneously give up a piece instead of the exchange
9. The XXX Sacrifice – An unnecessary endgame sacrifice to “simplify” into a more difficult or dangerous endgame
10. The XXX Mistake – agreeing to a draw in a won position just because you did not know how to win – without even trying
11. 1The XXX Syndrome – Analyzing chess lines in great depth that can't possibly happen rather than asking yourself “Is that forced?” to see how

likely those variations are

12. 1The XXX Mistake – Playing quickly until you are dead lost and then slowing down because the problem of saving the game has become impossible

### Reasons not to worry about your rating

1. If it gets too low it will go up (and you will have fun doing so!).
2. If it stops you from playing in an event then you will not learn what you would have from that event.
3. It affects your moves, almost always adversely.
4. If it is too high and you want to preserve it there, the only way to surely do this is to never play again and thus preventing yourself from improving to the playing strength of your rating.
5. It affects how you act toward others (usually adversely).
6. It detracts from the real issues, that of playing, having fun, and learning.
7. It causes you to take draws instead of learning about what would have happened the rest of the game.
8. It never works – players who worry too much about their rating inevitably do worse than similar players who don't, for all the above reasons.

### Reasons to hire a good chess instructor

1. A book or chess program cannot answer questions.
2. No great chess player ever got great without good personal instruction at some point.
3. A book or chess program cannot pinpoint your weaknesses, discuss them, and provide plans to improve them.
4. A book does not know what you need next. It attempts to help everyone the same.
5. Because hiring a *bad* instructor is much less effective!

### The easiest chess columns to write

1. Selections of unannotated games
2. Long questions from readers with short answers

**Reader Question** *I'm intrigued by the point about using almost all your time in every game. I'm always amazed when I get to the end of a game with only a couple of minutes to spare and my opponent has 60+ minutes still remaining on his clock in a 60 15 game. I decided some time ago, that I would rather lose on time than lose due to poor play. I realize that losing is losing, but bad habits formed by playing poor chess are not as easily correctable as learning to play faster once I understand what good moves are.*

*Billy Jean King (the tennis player) wrote in her autobiography that when she began to play tennis, she tried to hit the ball as hard as she could on every shot. She reasoned that it was easier to add control to power than it was to add power to*

*control.*

*In chess, you have told us repeatedly that it is easier for a good player to play blitz than it is for a blitz player to play good chess. Since I'm not playing for a world championship or anything important in my games, losing is not a big deal...learning to play well is. I prefer to play a solid 30 moves and lose on time rather than to play badly and lose in 30 with time still on my clock. I'll be able to play faster once I have the pattern recognition and good play principles down correctly... What are your thoughts on this?*

**Answer** Very good question. I can't completely agree with your tennis analogy. And I did not say (or mean to) that "it is easier for a 'good' player to play blitz than..." What I stated was that the best blitz players got that way by learning to play chess well via slow play, which is somewhat different.

Since the worst thing you can do (result-wise) is to lose on time, it is not good to play slow and lose on time until you can learn to play better, but the sentiment is correct. Learning to speed up as you get less and less time is an important skill that must be practiced. It galls me to see players who would rather make good moves and lose on time "just so they can say they had a good position". This is crazy and counterproductive. So yes, play slow, but no, by all means do anything you can to avoid losing on time, even if it means putting all your pieces in take – hopefully you paced yourself so it does not have to come to that! To paraphrase Billy Jean, "At the end of the game it is better to play all your moves fast and learn how to play better than it is to play all your moves slow (and lose for sure) and learn how to play your moves faster."

---

Dan welcomes readers' questions; he is a full-time instructor on the ICC as Phillytutor.

---

 [TOP OF PAGE](#)

 [HOME](#)

 [COLUMNS](#)

 [LINKS](#)

 [ARCHIVES](#)

 [ABOUT THE CHESS CAFE](#)

[\[The Chess Cafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Reviews\]](#) [\[Bulletin Board\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)  
[\[Endgame Studies\]](#) [\[The Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)  
[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About The Chess Cafe\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

Copyright 2002 CyberCafes, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

"**The Chess Cafe®**" is a registered trademark of Russell Enterprises, Inc.