



The Most Common Opening Inaccuracies

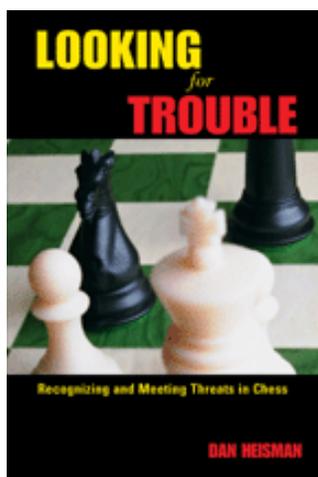
Quote of the Month: *The most common reason why one fails to improve is making the same mistake over and over.*

This month we will examine the most common opening inaccuracies, varying from subtle mistakes that allow the opponent more freedom than necessary to blunders that may give the opponent a winning advantage. I have seen each of these mistakes dozens of times – often by the same player! Weak players repeatedly make these errors when trying to follow opening principles, without taking the time to research their move sequences. With a little effort, any well-known inaccuracy can be eradicated by looking in an opening encyclopedia. However, I know many experienced intermediates who would seemingly do *anything* to improve, but have never taken *a few minutes* to look up their opening sequences, and thus are doomed to “repeat history.” I have *not* included common tactical traps such as the Petroff’s Trap and the Cambridge Springs Trap (which *are* included in *Novice Nook’s Chess Lists*). I also previously addressed opening sequences in [The Most Common Opening Tactics](#).

COLUMNISTS

Novice Nook

Dan Heisman



Incorrect Queen’s Gambit Defense – 1.d4 d5 2.c4



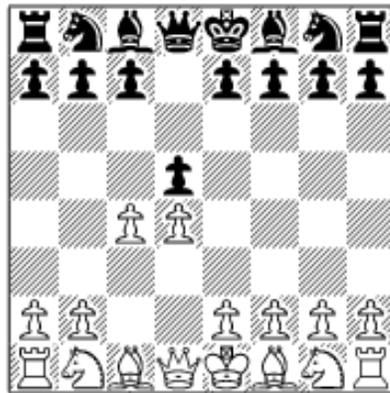
Black to play

2...Nf6(?) This natural but weak move seems to be the granddaddy of opening inaccuracies and, of course, it also occurs after **1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 d5(?)**. If White meets this move sequence correctly, it allows him more than the usual opening advantage. One way to avoid this sequence is to remember that *the only three common moves for Black after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 are* pawn moves: 2...dxc4 (Queen’s Gambit Accepted); 2...c6 (Slav); and 2...e6 (Queen’s Gambit Declined). All other moves are rare, suspicious, or inaccurate! **3.cxd5** White has to play this now. The slow 3.Nc3(?) allows Black to transpose into a Grünfeld with 3...g6, a Queen’s Gambit Declined with 3...e6, or a Slav with 3...c6. **3...Nxd5 4.Nf3** Here most beginners play 4.e4!?. More precise is 4.Nf3, because 4.e4! is *very* difficult to play correctly, while the 4.Nf3 lines are relatively easy. After 4.Nf3 White then plays 5.e4 and has more than the normal opening advantage. If Black tries to stop 5.e4 with 4...Bf5, then 5.Nbd2 is good. A recent offhand game of mine went 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 d5 3.cxd5 Nxd5 4.Nf3 Nc6 5.e4 Nf6 6.Nc3 Bg4 7.d5 Nb4?? (I was hoping for the famous queen sacrifice 7...Ne5?)

8.Nxe5! Bxd1 9.Bb5+ c6 10.dxc6 and White wins. Black has to play 7...Nb8 or 7...Bxf3 but White is much better in either case) 8.Qa4+ picks up the knight.

A similar position occurs after **1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4?! –** Confusing a Nimzo-Indian with a Queen's Gambit. **4.a3** Equally good is 4.Qa4+ Nc6 5.Nf3 and the black knight blocks the c-pawn. **4...Bxc3+ 5.bxc3** and White has the bishop pair almost for free (on the average worth half a pawn!), since cxd5 is unstoppable and there will be no doubled pawns as a counterbalance.

...Bf5 in the Queen's Gambit – 1.d4 d5 2.Nf3 Bf5(?) Playing the queen's bishop out too soon usually runs into trouble when White replies with an early Qb3, e.g. **3.c4 e6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.Qb3** and the double attack on the b- and d-pawns is already strong. Even more common is **1.d4 d5 2.c4**



Black to play

2...Bf5? 3.Qb3 and again the double attack gives White an advantage. White can also play differently on the third move **1.d4 d5 2.c4 Bf5 3.Nc3 e6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.Qb3**, with the same idea! Of course, better for Black on move 2 is 2...e6, 2...c6, or 2...dxc4.

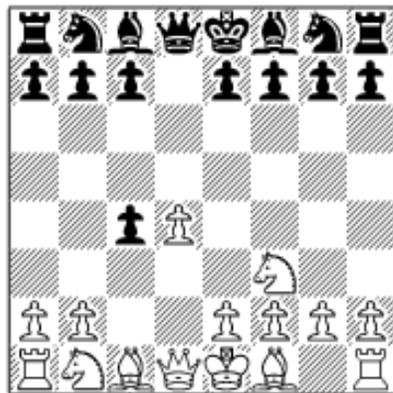
Nc3 against the Slav – 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6



White to play

3.Nc3 There is nothing terribly wrong with 3.Nc3, but most grandmasters play 3.Nf3, which avoids the Slav Gambit 3.Nc3 e5! and aids in subtle transpositions. The general rule is that *in games where Black has played either ...c6 (Slav) or ...dxc4 (Queen's Gambit Accepted) and may play ...b5 and possibly ...b4, it is better to delay having the knight on c3*. So the main move is Nf3 first.

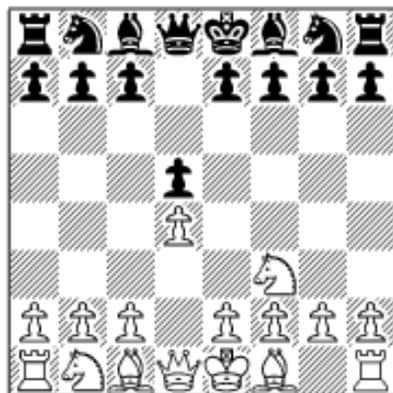
Trying to hold the Queen's Gambit pawn – 1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.Nf3 Even if White plays 3.e3, the pawn cannot be held: 3...b5? 4.a4 c6 5.axb5 cxb5 6.Qf3! winning a piece!

**Black to play**

3...b5(?) Many players try to hold the pawn. While computer analysis shows that this is not as bad as its reputation, it isn't as good as "normal" lines, so there is no reason to recommend it for Black. Better is the normal 3...Nf6. I won't try to show all the lines, but two are **4.a4 4.e3** is also possible **4...c6 4...a6? 5.axb5 axb5?? 6.Rxa8** wins the rook – a well-known pattern. **5.e3** Simplest and probably best.

For the more complicated 5.axb5 see the next line. **5...Nf6 6.axb5 axb5 7.b3**, and after this thematic move Black's queenside is crumbling. More complicated but also good for White is **5.axb5 axb5 6.Nc3 Bd7 7.e3 a6 8.Ne5** If **8...Bc6 9.b3** and White is much better **8...Nf6 9.b3 cxb3 10.Qxb3 e6 11.Ba3** and White holds a nice edge.

Blocking break moves – Don't put your pieces (especially knights) in front of important pawn break moves (See [Break Moves: Opening Lines to Increase Mobility](#)) **1.d4 d5 2.Nf3**

**Black to play**

2...Nc6(?) Black has no scope for his pieces as his c5-break is delayed: *Don't put a knight in front of your c-pawn in double d-pawn openings.* A cramped position is likely to result. Better is 2...Nf6 or 2...e6 or 2...c5.



A similar inaccuracy is **1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5**

Black to play

3...Nc6? Blocking the thematic break ...c5. So obviously 3...c5 is better. After 3...Nc6? a very cramped position may result, especially if Black does not break with ...f6 later!

Allowing the Lollis in the Two Knight's Defense – **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.Ng5 d5 5.exd5**



Black to play

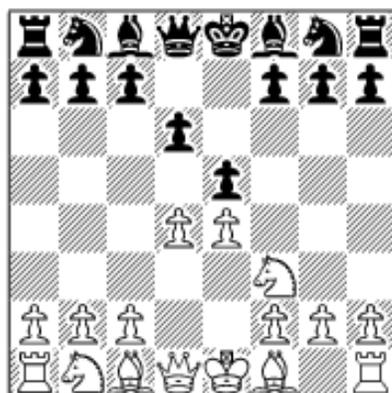
5...Nxd5(?) Black should play the classical 5...Na5 or the complicated 5...b5 or 5...Nd4.



White to play

6.d4! This is the Lolli, which is an "Improved Fried Liver Attack." Black is in trouble now, e.g. **6...Nxd4!? 7.c3** wins a piece or **6...Be7 7.Nxf7!** See your local opening book for more information.

Philidor's Opening – 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4



Black to play

3...Bg4? Weaker players almost never play the better 3...Nd7 because they don't take the time to look up their opening moves, *which is the worst meta-mistake you can make!* **4.dxe5** This is what Morphy played in his famous Opera Box game against the Duke of Brunswick & Count Isouard. It is certainly good, and computer analysis shows that 4.Be2 may be just as good. **4...Bxf3(?)** Losing the

bishop pair and time. Even worse is the common beginner mistake 4...dxe5? when 5.Qxd8 Kxd8 6.Nxe5 is pretty much winning for White. Apparently, best is the gambit 4...Nc6!?, just giving up the pawn for development. **5.Qxf3 dxe5 6.Bc4 Nf6 7.Qb3** and with the double attack on f7 and b7, White was on his way to winning one of the most famous games in history: **7...Qe7 8.Nc3 c6 9.Bg5 b5 10.Nxb5 cxb5 11.Bxb5+ Nbd7 12.O-O-O Rd8 13.Rxd7 Rxd7 14.Rd1 Qe6 15.Bxd7+ Nxd7 16.Qb8+ Nxb8 17.Rd8#**

An Early ...b5 in the Ruy Lopez – 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4

**Black to play**

4...b5 is not really a mistake, it has even been played by grandmasters. But it is dangerous, and weaker players usually play it for the wrong reasons. The general rule is: *The Black e-pawn only needs protection from the removal of the guard tactic Bxc6 dxc6 Nxe5 after the White e-pawn is protected.* So normally ...b5 is not played until after 4...Nf6 5.O-O Be7 6.Re1 guarding the e-pawn. With the early

...b5, however, we might reach an interesting position after **5.Bb3 Nf6**

**White to play**

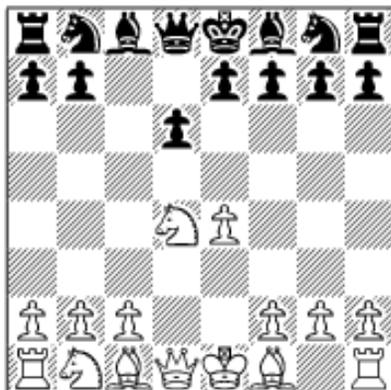
In addition to safe moves like 6.O-O or 6.c3, White can try the tricky **6.Ng5?!**, which is really just the Two Knights Defense with a safer bishop on b3! If Black then plays **6...d5 7.exd5** then **7...Nxd5?** is a huge mistake because of the Lolli-like **8.Nxf7!** and White is winning! Black should have just played 7...Nd4 with a “normal” game.

An Early ...O-O in the Ruy Lopez – Another common mistake for Black in the Ruy Lopez is to castle when the e-pawn requires defending: **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.O-O Be7 6.Re1**

**Black to Play**

6...O-O? just loses the e-pawn after **7.Bxc6 dxc6 8.Nxe5**, e.g. **8...Qd4 9.Nf3 Bg4??** But nothing can win back the pawn. **10.Nxd4** (Counting!) wins. The normal move is – you guessed it – **6...b5** to prevent this tactic. That is why Black plays **3...a6** before White can do the removal-of-the-guard tactic, so that ...b5 is available later. White can answer a later ...a6 with Bxc6.

An Early ...Nc6 in ...d6 Sicilian – 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4



Black to play

4...Nc6 is an awkward move because, by not attacking the e-pawn with 4...Nf6, White is now free to setup the Maroczy Bind with 5.c4 and put his queen's knight behind the c-pawn. This probably is not what Black wanted White to do!

Qd2 before f3 in Yugoslav Dragon – 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7



White to play

White plays 7.Qd2(?). This allows the harassing 7...Ng4, which is good for Black, e.g. 8.Bg5 h6 9.Bh4 Nc6 and Black's pressure on d4 already gives him a slight advantage. Better is the normal 7.f3. Note that if Black plays ...Ng4 too soon it can be disastrous. For example 6...Ng4?? (instead of 6...Bg7) runs into 7.Bb5+, e.g. 7...Bd7? 8.Qxg4 wins the knight.

...Nxd4 in Scotch – 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4

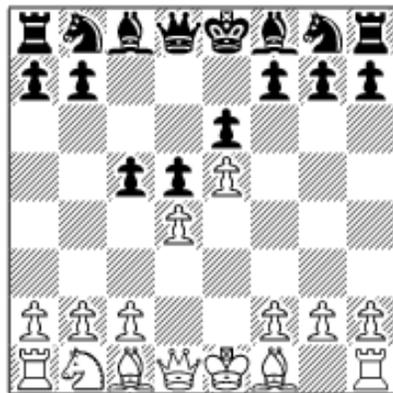


Black to play

4...Nxd4? Black helps White develop his pieces. Just because Black captured on d4 on the previous move does not mean it is advantageous for him to continue capturing – chess is not checkers, where the capture is mandatory! 5.Qxd4 Already White has a strong position, since his queen is unassailable and he has two pieces in the center to Black's none, e.g. 5...c5 6.Qe5+! Qe7 7.Qxe7 Bxe7 8.Bf4

and White will soon castle queenside with a very strong queenless middlegame. Better is for Black to develop a second piece with 4...Bc5, 4...Nf6, or even 4...Qh4.

Bb5 in advance French – 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5

**White to play**

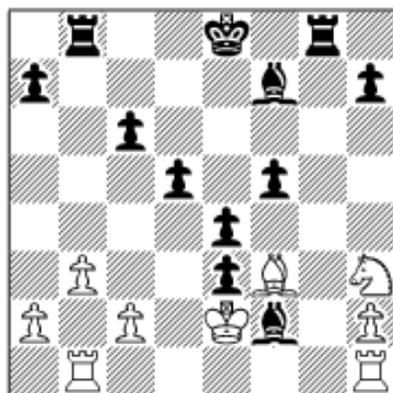
4.Bb5+(?) At the very least, this allows Black to offer to trade his queen's bishop, which is clearly his worst minor piece.

4...Bd7 Now White either has to allow a trade or lose a tempo. Better is 4.c3, keeping the pawn chain intact by allowing White to recapture cxd4 in response to a later ...cxd4.

I am sure any experienced instructor can

add a few more!

If you repeatedly make these mistakes or don't learn to take advantage of them, then your improvement will be slow. Anyone can make a mistake once, but if you learn not to repeat it you will soon be a terrific player!

A Simple Counting Problem**White to play**

In this position, visualize White playing **1.Nxf2**. Black is winning, but what is the best response to this capture?

This is an interesting "reverse psychology" question; however, it is easy enough that no good player would miscalculate it. General principles would indicate that the immediate recapture **1...exf2** is to be given priority. But another principle states: If

you can capture with check, you might win a tempo. Therefore, the second principle would lead you to think you should play **1...exf3+** first. What can be wrong with that? The check is more forcing and the knight still hangs.

But here the instructive issue is:

General principles can't be blindly applied to tactical sequences. Only apply general principles to quiet positions, when it is possible to play quickly without chance for a big mistake. Careful analysis is required when tactics are involved.

If **1...exf3+?** then White does not respond with the "automatic recapture" **2.Kxf3?**. Instead White responds **2.Kxe3**, eliminating the attack on the knight and White has just won a pawn (with an admittedly lost game, but that is not the point). So the original **1...exf2** is correct! The idea is that after this recapture the *bishop on f3 is trapped* anyway, so **1...exf2** is the only way to win a piece and make the win even easier.

Several weaker players responded to this problem by postponing the recapture

with 1...f4? or 1...d4? This does not help, e.g. 1...f4? 2.Nxe4 dxe4 3.Bxe4 gives away pawns unnecessarily. The general advice for such situations is to *make the best recapture right away – don't play quiet moves that give your opponent the opportunity to figure out the best way to return the piece.*

If you got this problem wrong (or right for the wrong reason) you need to work on counting!

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

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