

Principles for Stronger Chess

Opening Principles

As a general rule, the opening consists of the first 10 or so moves of a chess game. The opening is the time when a player attempts to accomplish three main goals.

- Gain control of the important center squares (d4, e4, d5, and e5) with one or two center pawns (often called a *strong pawn center*).
- Develop Knights and Bishops to prepare for middle-game play and to free the King for castling.
- Castle early to protect the King and to develop the castled Rook, moving the Rook closer to open center files (c, d, e, and f). (An open file does not have a pawn of either color remaining on it.)

Middle-Game Principles

The middle game starts somewhere between the 10th and 20th move after center pawns have been moved, minor pieces (Knights and Bishops) have been developed, and pieces have been traded. The middle game has several goals:

- Place pawns to prevent the advance of enemy pieces onto your side of the board, and move your pieces in a way that gains space on your opponent's side of the board.
- Gain control of an open file with one or both Rooks. (Remember, an open file does not have a pawn of either color remaining on it.)
- Place Bishops on important open diagonals. (An open diagonal is one where no pawns are blocking the movement of the Bishop along the diagonal. Important open diagonals are those which run through one or more of the d4, e4, d5, and e5 center squares.)
- Create a Knight outpost if possible. (A Knight outpost is the placing of a Knight on a square where the opponent has no way of attacking it without losing a piece of greater value than the Knight. Usually the Knight is protected by a pawn.)

End-Game Principles

The end game starts when most of the pieces are off the board. Each player may only have two or three pawns left and perhaps one or two minor pieces. An important goal of the end-game is to use the King as a major attacking and defending piece.

- Move the King toward the center of the board where it can assist its own pawns in becoming Queens and prevent its opponent's pawns from reaching the eighth rank and becoming Queens.