

How to Play Chess

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Want to learn how to play chess? Trying to refresh yourself on the rules after a long break? Chess is a very popular two-player strategy game thought to have originated in India many centuries ago. To **win the game**, you must "checkmate" your opponent by moving your pieces such that the opponent's king faces a threat of capture that can't be eliminated. Although it has a set of easily comprehended rules, it takes strategy in order to defeat a skilled opponent. Read on to learn everything you'd ever need to know about playing chess!

Things You Should Know

- The aim of chess is to capture your opponent's king; however, most chess games end as soon as the opponent's king is in a position such that they cannot escape without being captured (known as "checkmate").
- Familiarize yourself with the basics by going over how each piece moves.
- Practice playing online and against others to develop your skills and improve at the game.

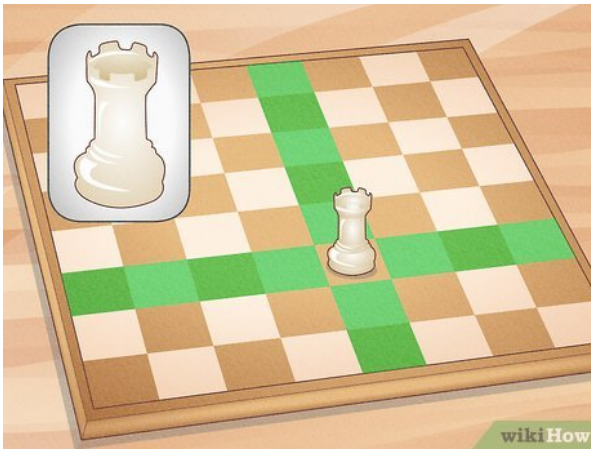
Object of the Game



The goal of chess is to capture your opponent's king; however, most games end before the capture when the opponent is unable to prevent their king from being captured. Checkmate occurs if you put your opponent's king in check (meaning it is under direct threat) *and* they are incapable of moving the king or blocking the threat with another piece. When this happens, say "checkmate" out loud to declare the end of the game. Let your opponent double-check if they can make a move before declaring yourself the winner!^[1]

- Games may also end in a draw if neither player can force a checkmate, such as if the kings are the only pieces left on the board.
- A game also ends in a draw if the opponent has no legal move that they can make, such as if the king is trapped but also not in check. This is referred to as a *stalemate*.
- A game also automatically ends in a draw if the same board state is achieved 3 times. This can happen accidentally, but it's more common when both players repeat the same move 3 times because nobody thinks they can win.^[2]

The Pieces



Rooks (the small castle towers, valued at 5 points) Rooks are the stubby round pieces that look like medieval towers on a castle. They can move any number of squares horizontally or vertically, but they cannot jump over other pieces or move diagonally.^[3]

- After your queen, your two rooks are the most valuable offensive pieces in the game, although they're excellent defensive pieces early on in the game.



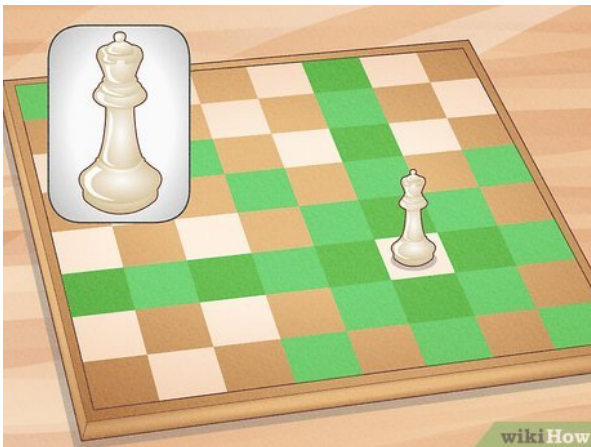
Knights (the horses, valued at 3 points) Knights move in L-shapes by going 2 spaces horizontally and 1 space vertically (up or down), or 2 spaces vertically followed by 1 space horizontally (left or right). Knights are unique because they can jump over other pieces.^[4]

- Knights are considered just as valuable as bishops. They're versatile pieces that are helpful when it comes to offense and defense.
- Knights are also unique because they're the only piece outside of the pawns that you can move on the first turn of the game.



Bishops (the rounded tops with the slits, valued at 3 points) The bishops are the thin, tall pieces with the coin-slot carved out at the top. They can move in a straight line diagonally in any direction. They cannot jump over other pieces.^[5]

- Like the knight, bishops are extremely diverse when it comes to their skills on offense or defense.
- Note that you have one bishop that can only move on black pieces, and another bishop that can only move on white pieces.



Queen (the tall piece with the round cap, valued at 9 points) Your queen is the heavy hitter. It can move any number of squares in any linear direction as long as there isn't a piece blocking the path. In other words, they can move diagonally, up/down, or left/right. They can't jump pieces.^[6]

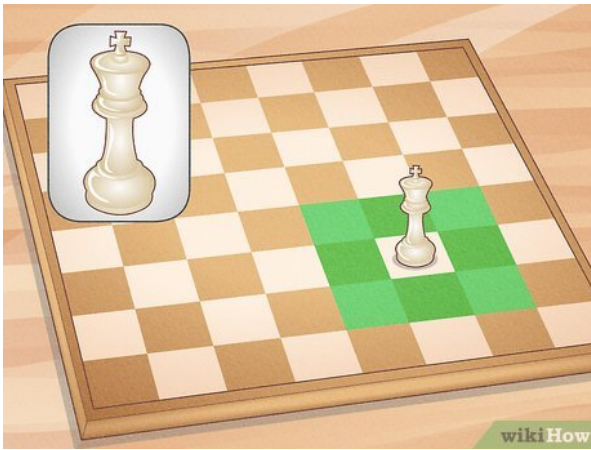
- If you're struggling to picture this, a queen moves like a bishop *and* a rook combined.
- Your queen is the single greatest tool when it comes to capturing your opponent's king while protecting yours.

EXPERT TIP

Queens are the strongest pieces in the game, and they can move horizontally, vertically, and diagonally.



Sahaj Grover
Chess Grandmaster



King (the tall piece with the crucifix on top, worth the game) Your king is the tallest piece in your chess set and is the piece you need to protect throughout the game. Kings can move 1 space at a time in any direction.[7]

- You can't move your king into a space where it can get captured during the next turn. In other words, you cannot intentionally move your king into check.

EXPERT TIP

Since a king can never be placed on a square where it can be captured, two kings can never be placed on adjacent squares.



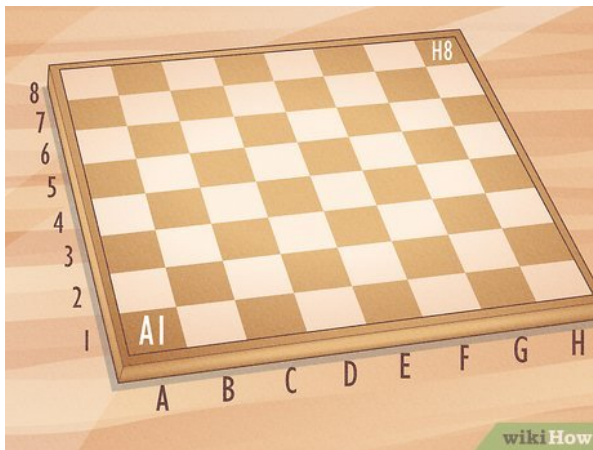
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Pawns (the short, stubby, round pieces, valued at 1 point) Pawns can only move 1 space forward toward your opponent's side of the board. However, a pawn can move 2 spaces forward on their first move of the game (if there isn't another piece in the way).[8]

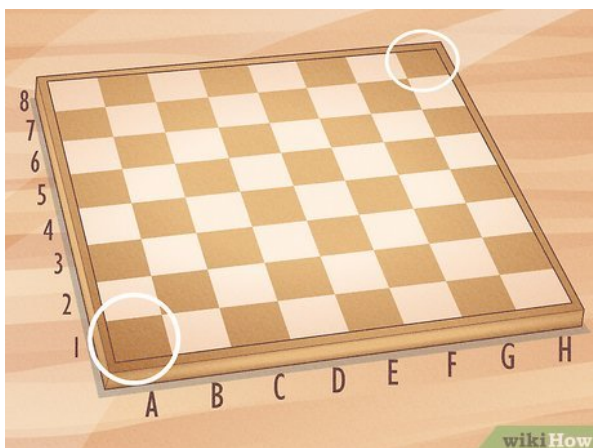
- Pawns can only attack by taking a piece that is 1 space away on a diagonal to the pawn. There is, however, an exception. When a pawn moves two spaces forward to bypass a pawn capture, and *only* a pawn capture, the opposing pawn may capture as if said piece moved one square. This move is called *en passant*. The pawn captured will then be taken off the board.
- Your pawns are the shortest and weakest pieces in a game of chess. However, they're extremely important. Your pawns help create space for other pieces, set up moves, and box in your opponent's pieces.
- A pawn can be promoted to a queen, rook, bishop, or knight if it is successfully advanced to the other side of the board.

The Board



Learn the rank and file system to orient yourself and keep notation. Ranks are the horizontal rows and the files are the columns going between the players. Ranks are listed 1-8, starting with the side of the board with the white pieces. Files are listed as the letters “a” through “h” starting from the white player’s left side. Reference a specific square on the board by listing the rank followed by the file.^[9]

- For example, the left corner for the white player is a1 while the left corner for the black player is h8.
- Practice notation by listing each move you and your opponent make by writing down the piece and the square to which it moves.
- You do not need to use the rank and file notation system if you don’t want to, but it does make setting up the board and learning the game easier.



Position the board so each player has a black space in the lower-left hand corner. Have both players sit across from one another to start your game. Turn the board so that each player has a black square in the lower-left corner and a white square in the lower-right corner.^[10]

- Use the rhyme, "white on the right" to help you remember while you’re setting up your game.

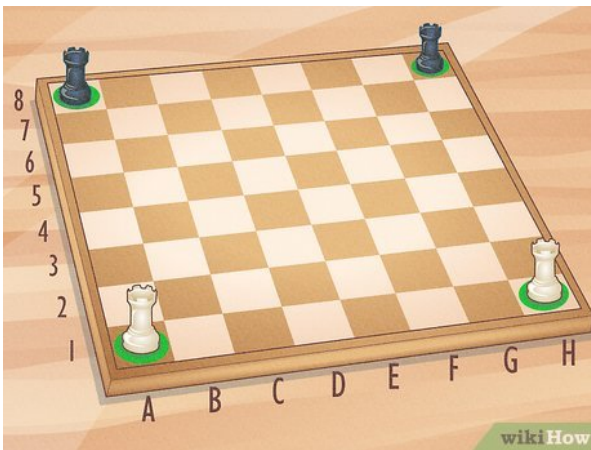
EXPERT TIP



Sahaj Grover
Chess Grandmaster

Understand the basics of a chess set: Chess is played on a board that is made up of 64 alternating black and white squares. The chess set is made up of 32 pieces, 16 for black and 16 for white. Each set consists of 1 King, 1 Queen, 2 Rooks, 2 Bishops, 2 Knights, and 8 Pawns.

Setting Up



Place the rooks in the corners of the board. Place the white rooks on squares a1 and h1, and put the black rooks on squares a8 and h8.^[11]

- Rooks are labeled “R” if you’re using chess notation.



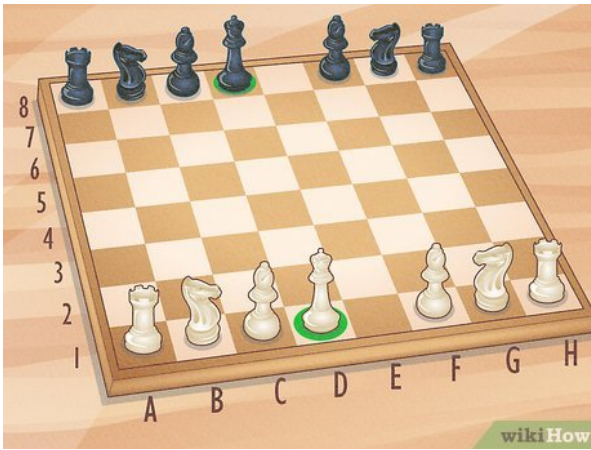
Set the knights next to your rooks. Put the white knights on the squares b1 and g1, and set the black knights on b8 and g8.^[12]

- Knights are the only pieces that can jump over other pieces.
- Knights are labeled either as “N” in notation.



Put the bishops next to your knights. If you’re the white player, place your bishops on c1 and f1. Black bishops go on c8 and f8.^[13]

- Bishops can’t move onto a square that isn’t the same color as its starting square.
- Label bishops as “B” if you’re using notation.



Place the queens on their matching colors in the back rows. Put the white queen on d1 and the black queen on d8.^[14]

- Queens are labeled as “Q” in notation.
- An easy way to remember how you orient the queen and king is the phrase, “The queen always gets her color.”



Set the kings next to the queens. Put the kings next to the queens to complete your back row. ^[15]

- Kings are labeled as “K” when you’re using notation.



Place your pawns in the row in front of your other pieces. Put 1 white pawn in each square of rank 2 and set the black pawns in the squares of rank 7.^[16]

- Pawns are not labeled with any letter in notation.

Taking Turns



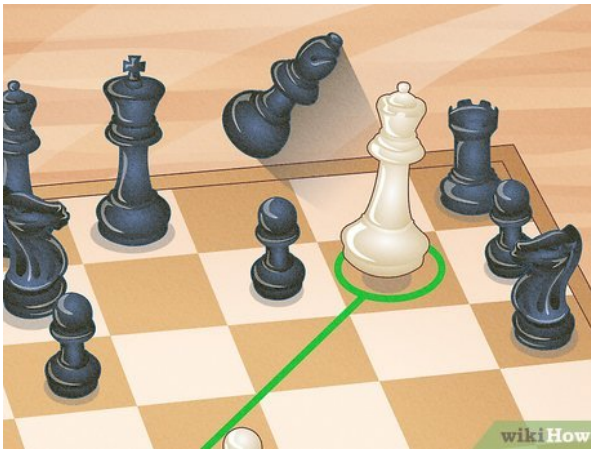
Start the game with the player who has the white pieces. The player who has the white pieces always starts a game of chess. Choose any one of your pieces that is able to move and put it in its new space. After the player with the white piece takes their turn, play alternates to the player with the black pieces.^[17]

- If you're playing multiple games in a row, alternate who starts with the white pieces to keep the games fair.
- The player with the white pieces has a slight advantage since they get to make the opening move.
- You can flip a coin, do rock paper scissors, or allow players to volunteer who goes first.



Move your pieces to develop the board and attack or defend. Players can make one move every turn. On your turn, you can move any piece so long as it is legally allowed to move. You can threaten your opponent's pieces by moving your pieces into a space where you can capture them on the next turn. Alternatively, you can reinforce a defensive position by moving pieces away from your opponent's threats so that your pieces protect one another.^[18]

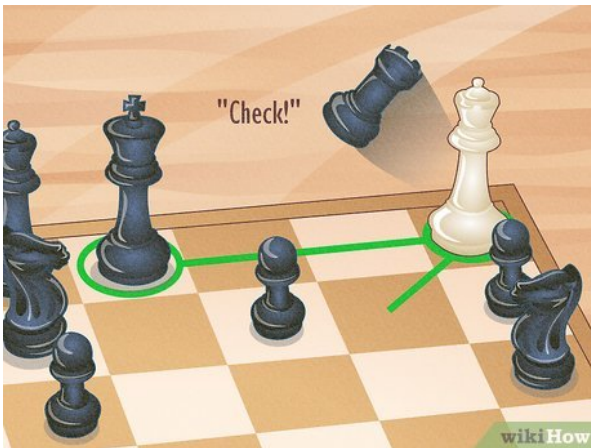
- For the first few turns of the game, players usually move pawns, followed by knights and bishops. You can play in whatever order you'd like, though!
- In competitive chess there's a rule that if you touch a piece, you have to move it. It's okay to touch pieces as you're just starting to learn, but practice moving the pieces in your mind once you've got the basics down.



Capture your opponent's pieces by moving onto the same square as them. Capturing pieces means landing on the same space as an opponent's piece and removing them from the game. Try to capture your opponent's stronger pieces, like their queen, rooks, and bishops to make their turns less powerful.^[19]

- When you capture your opponent's piece, pick it up off of the board and set it aside.
- Pawns cannot capture pieces directly in front of them like other pieces do. Instead, pawns can only capture pieces that are 1 space diagonally in front of them.
- You cannot capture your opponent's king. However, to win the game you need to set up your pieces so they would be able to capture the king.

Tip: During your turn, check whether or not your opponent can capture your pieces on their next turn. Protect your own pieces while you try to capture your opponent's pieces.



Put your opponent's king in check to pressure them. Move one of your pieces so it can potentially capture your opponent's king during your next turn. Your opponent must get out of check during their next turn either by moving their king, blocking your piece, or capturing your piece.^[20]

- Putting your opponent in check is ideal because it can cause them to drop whatever their gameplan was and move pieces to protect their king. It can also force the king into progressively riskier positions.
- The king can capture the enemy piece only if it's not in check after the capture.
- If you're in check, you must do something to protect your king, or else you make an illegal move.

Special Rules



The “en passant” rule En passant, meaning "in passing" in French, is when one pawn captures another pawn after its starting move. You can only do en passant if your opponent has moved a pawn 2 squares forward from its starting position so it's next to one of your pawns. If this happens, you may move your pawn into the space behind your opponent's pawn to capture it.^[21]

- You can only perform an en passant move during the turn after your opponent moves the pawn. You cannot wait to do it on any other turn after.
- This is probably the most complicated move in the game. If you're new to chess and you're just playing casually, feel free to skip this rule as you're learning.



Pawn promotion If you move a pawn to the back row on your opponent's side of the board, it immediately gets promoted to any piece of your choosing (besides the king). In most cases, it's best to choose to promote to a queen because the queen is the most powerful piece. This way, you can have multiple queens on the board at a time.^[22]

- It doesn't matter if your queen has already been captured or is still in the game when you promote your pawn.
- To indicate pawn promotion in chess notation, write the square where the pawn is promoted. Then, use an equal sign to show what the new piece is. For example, you may write c8=Q.
- Reasons to “underpromote” (i.e. not choose a queen) are to avoid stalemate or to utilize the knight's move. This is pretty rare, though.



The castle maneuver Once during the game, you may choose to make a special move known as **castling**. To castle, move your king two squares horizontally toward either rook. Then on the same move, move the rook to the square immediately on the other side of the king. The spaces between the king and rook must be 100% clear.^[23]

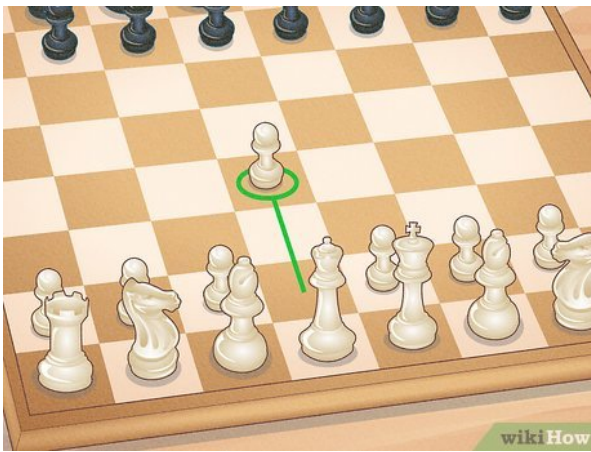
- You cannot castle if your king was in check during the previous move, or if it would be in check after the move.
- You also cannot castle through any squares that are under attack by enemy pieces.
- You cannot castle rooks that have moved, or if your king has moved.

Tips and Strategies



Use the point value of each piece to determine their importance. Each piece in a game of chess is valued differently depending on how powerful it is. The queen is the most powerful piece and is worth 9 points. Rooks are worth 5 points, bishops and knights are worth 3, and pawns are worth 1 point. Try to protect your more powerful pieces so you can use them later in the game.^[24]

- The king's value is undefined as it cannot be captured.
- Compare the total value of all the pieces still on the board for each player to determine who has a material advantage (this is one way to determine who is "winning").
- Point assessment is also useful when considering possible captures. For example, using pieces with a lower value to capture pieces with a higher value gives you more of an advantage.



Start with a strong opening pawn or knight move. Your opening move determines a lot about how the beginning of the game will play out. If you're white, choose a center square to attack with your D or E pawn, or move your B or G knights out to the center for a strong attack. As black, defend the center squares by matching and playing off your opponent's pawn or knight moves.^[25]

- When people talk about complex "openings" like the Queen's Gambit, London Opener, or Sicilian Defense, they're talking about a sequence of memorized moves that are proven to start you off right. These are known as book moves, and they're a great way to improve at the game!

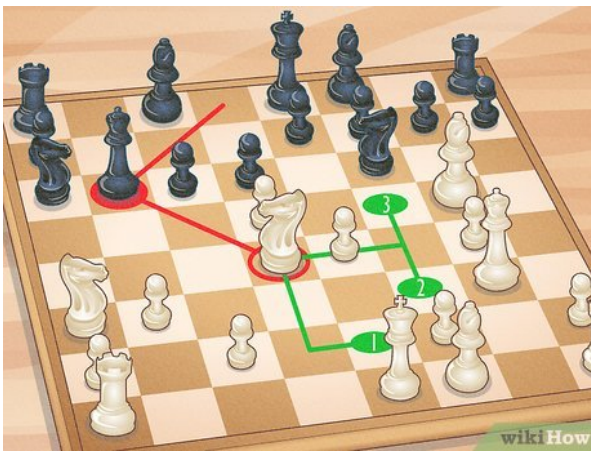


Aim to control the center of the board. Pieces near the center are at their most powerful since they have the most mobility and control. This forces your opponent to the sides of the board where they have fewer moves to choose from. Controlling the center helps you play more offensive and your opponent defensive.^[26]

- Keep 1 or 2 pawns in the center of the board so you can still use your stronger pieces to attack.
- This is why people often start the game by moving the 2 pawns in the middle of the pawn file and the 2 knights, since this covers the 4 squares at the center of the board.



Plan 2-5 moves in advance to take pieces and avoid traps. Think several moves ahead to anticipate and counteract your opponent's moves and stop any plans they're making. Try to figure out how you'd respond to obvious moves your opponent might make. Plan out contingencies and ask yourself how you'd escape from attacks.^[27]



Scan the board after each of your opponent's moves. Every time your opponent makes a move, take some time to scan the board. Move pieces out of the way if your opponent is going to capture them next turn. Try catching the piece that's threatening your piece or move one of your pieces to threaten a strong piece your opponent has.

- It's okay to give up a piece in order to draw your opponent into a trap where you'll capture an even more valuable piece.



Develop all of your pieces as the game moves on. If you lose a game and realize that you hadn't moved half of your pieces during the game, that might be why you struggled. Aim to get every piece on the board open and moving. This will allow you to use all of your pieces to develop your gameplan. The more choices you have, the better!^[28]

- The exception here is your king and maybe a rook and a few pawns to protect it. It's okay to leave them back for defense!



Community Q&A

Question

What if the opponent doesn't move the way I wish?



Community Answer

You need a strong defense and to be prepared for almost anything. One of the main strategies of chess is forcing your opponent into a situation where, no matter what he or she does, you are given an advantage, such as capturing a piece or securing a better position.

Helpful 243 Not Helpful 44

Question

What are promoted pawns?



Donagan
Top Answerer

These are pawns that have reached their eighth row (the opponent's first row) and have been converted to some other piece such as a queen.

Helpful 146 Not Helpful 35

Question

Can the rook and king move together?



Community Answer

Under certain conditions, yes. It is known as castling and is very useful. It was one of the few changes made in the last millennium.

Helpful 165 Not Helpful 52

Question

Can a horse come back to its previous place?



Community Answer

Yes, it can.

Helpful 156 Not Helpful 50

Question

What are the moves of the bishop?



Community Answer

A bishop moves diagonally in any direction and as many open squares as it wants. It must stop before coming to a square occupied by a piece of its own color. It can stop on a square occupied by an opponent's piece (thereby capturing that piece).

Helpful 121 Not Helpful 43

Question

How does a pawn move?



Donagan
Top Answerer

Usually a pawn moves one square forward. On its first move, it can move either one square or two squares forward. A pawn may move one square diagonally forward if in doing so it captures an opponent's piece.

Helpful 44 Not Helpful 18

Question

Can the pawn move forward two spaces only once?



Community Answer

Yes. Your pawns may each move either one or two spaces forward on their first move. In all subsequent moves, each may move only one space.

Helpful 94 Not Helpful 32

Question

I am a beginner in playing chess. What moves should I learn to be an expert?



Insanity
Community Answer

Expert moves takes time to learn. You need to learn the basic moves, like protecting every single piece of your chess pieces. After that, you can try to learn to focus on a side to check-mate the king. You might want to know some openings and endgames technique too.

Helpful 64 Not Helpful 20

Question

Can any chess pieces move backwards?



Community Answer

All pieces except pawns can move backwards in directions permitted for the piece in question (e.g. rooks can move straight backwards, bishops can go backwards diagonally, etc.). Promoted pawns can move backwards in the same manner as the piece they've become.

Helpful 79 Not Helpful 33

Question

Can you ever capture the king and take it off the board?



Community Answer

No. The king remains on the board until the very end of the game. If your king can be captured on your opponent's next move, you are in check and must get out of check immediately. You can do so by moving your king to a safe spot, by putting one of your own pieces between your king and the attacking piece, or by capturing the attacking piece. If you are in check and cannot immediately get out of check in one move, you are in checkmate, and the game is over (without your opponent's actually having to remove your king).

Helpful 90 Not Helpful 26



Tips

- Keep playing and practicing to get better at chess. You can play the computer or other players online for free at [Chess.com](https://www.chess.com) or [Lichess.org](https://www.lichess.org).

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About This Article



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This article was co-authored by Sahaj Grover and by wikiHow staff writer, Eric McClure. Sahaj Grover is a Chess Grandmaster, World Champion, and coach, who attained his Grandmaster title at the age of 16. He has been a World Junior Bronze Medalist, World U10 Champion, South African Open 2017 & 2018 Champion, and the Winner of the Arnold Classic 2018 & 2019. Sahaj is known for dynamic attacking skills and being an excellent endgame player. This article has been viewed 2,047,484 times.

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