

Playing “Tournament Level” Chess Games & Planning

Part 1: Finding High Level Plans and “Critical Thinking” in Chess

Concepts:

- How to “put it all together” in chess!
- “Critical thinking skills” and advanced planning!

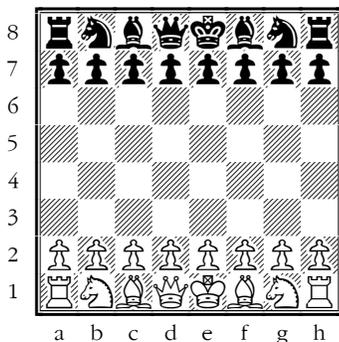
Everything you have learned in this curriculum, from the basics of the game, how the pieces move, the fundamental principles of development and Opening strategy, to tactics, basic and advanced pawn play, and finally Endgame technique has prepared you for this final lesson. You are almost an experienced scholastic chess player ready to take on the world of high-level tournament chess – and succeed!

But... how does it all come together? Learning to apply what you know is often much more important than knowing everything (if that were even possible). Possessing the ability or “thinking tools” to figure out something you ***don't know*** or a position you have never seen, is ***far more important than your ability to memorize*** what you are taught.

Let's talk about planning and critical thinking skills. How can you transition from just ***knowing things*** to actually ***applying things*** you learned in your own chess games? It isn't always easy, but let's try to simplify a few important concepts...

Critical Thinking, Organizing Your Thoughts, and Finding a Plan: the Opening!

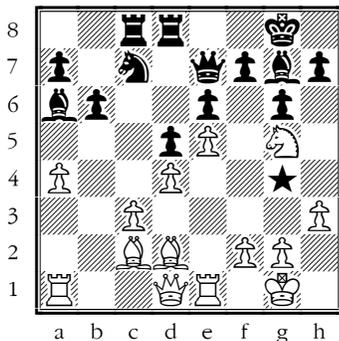
You now know there are many things, perhaps too many, to think about even before your first move. Below is a guide of our recommended “steps to success” for putting together what you know about the Opening stage of a chess game:



Follow the “steps to Opening success”. Use this section as ***practical advice on how to apply all the “X's and O's” you have learned so far!***

- Don't just develop pieces, develop plans! **How to:**
- 1) Start out by always attacking the center;
- 2) As the pawn structure changes different paths (diagonals, squares and files) will become available to your pieces. Be willing to change and relocate;
- 3) As the structure becomes clear, develop a plan first and **then** develop your pieces accordingly;
- 4) It is a wrong thought to say, “OK, I will just develop and get castled and then find a plan”. **Think about the plan from the beginning!**

Critical Thinking, Organizing Your Thoughts, and Finding a Plan: the Middlegame!

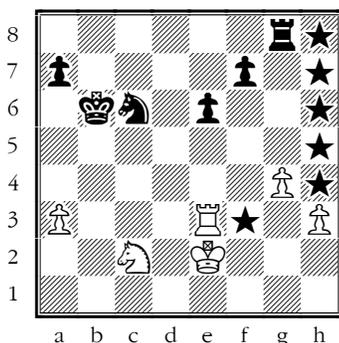


In this complicated Middlegame, white developed a plan of 20.Qg4 followed by h4-h5 for a Kingside attack. Black couldn't stop this idea because the **structure supports white's Kingside attack!**

The Middlegame is the "ultimate battlefield" where you and your opponent's armies collide, often in heaps of forks, pins, skewers and other tactics. Knowing how to find and target positional weaknesses is also essential:

- No "hope" chess! Always play what's best! "Hope chess" is when you are playing for tactics or tricks that are based on your opponent ***missing*** your threat or ***not playing the best move***. **How to:**
- Attack in the direction of your pawns, or in the center if it is open;
- Look for "Big 3" opportunities: Can you ***check***, can you ***capture***, can you ***attack the Queen?***
- Find and target positional weaknesses first and foremost, as they are the enduring features in the game.
- Your opponent might find the best moves, but if you are attacking something that is positional and can't be undone, his/her best moves can't stop you!

Critical Thinking, Organizing Your Thoughts, and Finding a Plan: the Endgame!



In this game white played 1.Kf3!, protecting the g4-pawn so that he might advance the passed h-pawn. By recognizing that advantage, white was able to achieve a winning position because of the outside passed h-pawn. The game ended in a draw due to later mistakes by white.

If an Endgame is reached where one side has a significant material advantage, we will toss those games up to technique, because those positions should be winnable by "***keeping it simple***" (**Lesson 16**). Here we are going to talk more about the critical thinking process of a roughly equal Endgame:

- Less pieces means less room for mistakes! **How to:**
- Unfortunately, many players play Endgames like the opposite is true (meaning with less pieces, they move quickly and spend little effort); ***Don't do that!***
- The correct approach to an Endgame is to think of it as "less room for error" and make every decision like it could be your last;
- Take a moment to see what positional weaknesses have carried over from the Middlegame. Target the opponent's weaknesses and defend your own;
- Do you have any passed pawns? If yes, develop a plan of advancement. Do you have any pretending passed pawns? If yes, develop a plan to trade.
- Prevent your opponent from doing the same.

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Part 2: Prophylactic Thinking in Chess

Concepts:

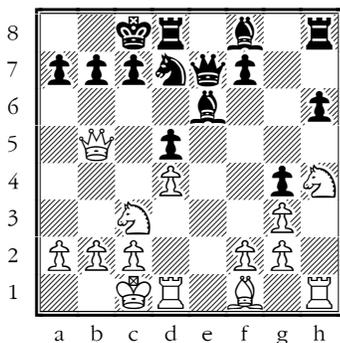
- What is prophylactic thinking?
- Advanced “critical thinking”: Stopping your opponent's threats!

The bad news? Every checkmate attack and tactic you try to come up with for yourself, every plan based on targeting a positional weakness, and every single thing we covered in Part 1 that should be **your** “thought process” is also going to factor into **your opponent's** plan! So what do we do?

Welcome to chess, the most difficult game in the world! That's what it's all about: Learning as much as you can – which you are doing by reading this curriculum – learning how to apply it – which is what we worked on in Part 1 – and now, realizing that stopping your opponent from doing the same, while carrying out your own plans, is what makes chess so hard.

Like most of the last few lessons, we're going to give the “short and simple” version of very deep, and very advanced chess concepts – so don't get frustrated if it is a lot to take in. Instead, focus again on the fact that instilling these general concepts and critical thinking skills in your games is better earlier rather than later.

The Definition of Prophylactic Thinking in Chess:

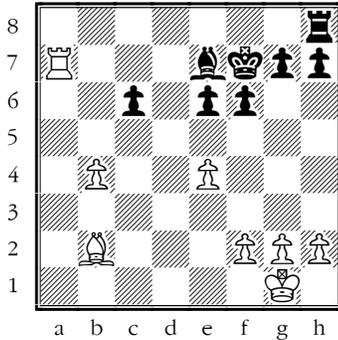


No, Marshall did not miss it: If 2.Nxd5 Bxd5 3.Qxd5 Qg5+! 4.Qxg5 hxg5, the h4-Knight is pinned!

Prophylaxis or prophylactic thinking is the act of focusing not only on stopping your opponent's immediate threats or tactics, but on preventing their overall plans and goals from becoming reality. It is defined loosely as “future defensive mindedness” or “**thinking defensively** about the future”.

As you improve, recognizing and stopping your opponent's **immediate** threats isn't too hard, yet even among the best players in the world, prophylactic thinking is a skill to be acquired and improved upon. It takes a lot of discipline to think about your opponent first, and put your plans second (doesn't sound fun does it?), but it is ultimately the road to chess success. In this game, Frank Marshall just played 1...0-0-0 against World Champion Emanuel Lasker. Did Marshall miss 2.Nxd5? Think about your weaknesses!

Prophylactic Thinking, Example 2: Lautier, J. – Kasparov, G. Tilburg 1997 1/2

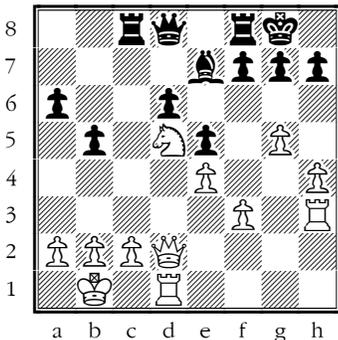


Even if you don't see how your opponent can expose your weakness, always be aware of it!

In this famous game the first grandmaster failed to apply prophylactic thinking when he played 20.Rc7?, and the second (the reigning World Champion at the time no less) failed to punish him. This example, like the previous, tells us to always be aware of our **potential** weaknesses, even if we don't see an immediate way for them to be attacked.

White's potential weakness we refer to is the back rank. After 1.Rc7, a draw was agreed as both sides simply **assumed** the c-pawn would be traded for the b-pawn. However, 20...c5!! would have won the game! If white plays 21.bxc5 then 21...Rb8 and suddenly white is losing either the b2-Bishop or getting back rank checkmated. If white does nothing after 20...c5, black will win the b-pawn.

Prophylactic Thinking, Example 3: Fischer, R. – Bolbochan, J. Stockholm 1962 1-0

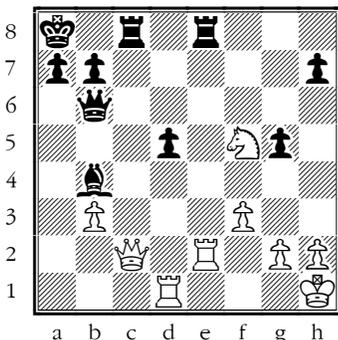


When you calculate, always consider your opponent's ideas too!

In this game the great American champion, Bobby Fischer, has just established his Knight on the strong outpost at d5. He now has the option to keep the Knight on this post and try to develop an attack (likely on the Kingside) or consider trading the Knight for the Bishop on e7, at the **chance** of winning the d6-pawn. Prophylaxis?

1.Nxe7+ would be a terrible move, not only because it gives up the Knight for that "Big Pawn" on e7, but also because after 1...Qxe7 2.Qxd6 would lose immediately to 2...Rfd8!! either winning white's Queen or delivering back rank checkmate after 3.Qxe7 Rxd1#. Did you recognize white's potential weakness as the back rank mate here?

Prophylactic Thinking, Example 4: Teschner, R. – Portisch, L. Monaco 1969 1/2



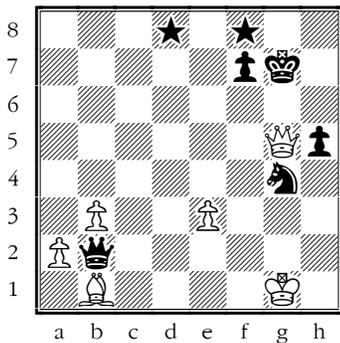
One final example of "lack" of prophylaxis!

In our final example, it is white to play. Teschner was down a pawn and so played the move 29.Rxd5?? He clearly was **not thinking prophylactically** about his weaknesses (or at least not enough). Fortunately for him however, the great Portisch wasn't aware of white's weakness either.

Portisch responded with 29...Qa6?, completely missing 29...Qf2!!, threatening 30...Qf1 checkmate and winning the game on the spot. 29...Qa6 was met by 30.Ng3, which defended everything. White went onto draw the game despite making that horrific blunder on move 29. Note if after 29...Qf2 black plays 30.Rxf2 then 30...Re1+ and mate.

Our final lessons involve two very important rules that every chess player, scholastic or otherwise, needs to know. Other than a draw reached from perpetual check, a draw reached by mutual agreement – meaning one player offers and the other accepts – or the classical “King vs King” draw, there are two other ways a chess game can arrive at a draw, both of them applied in international tournament play.

“Three-Fold Repetition” – Also Known as “Repetition of Position”



Note that “three-fold repetition” does not necessarily have to be reached by checks (not the same as perpetual) though this game was agreed to a draw by checks as neither player wanted to risk losing.

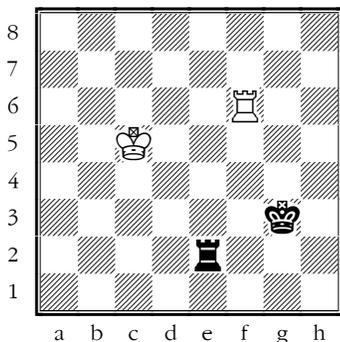
Because this rule can be slightly confusing, we will first quote the exact language from the FIDE (International Chess Federation) handbook: The game is drawn, upon a correct claim by the player **having the move**, when the same position, for at least the third time (not necessarily by sequential repetition of moves):

a. is about to appear, if he/she first writes his/her move on his/her scoresheet and declares his/her intention to make this move that repeats the position, or

b. has just appeared, and the player claiming the draw has the move.

What this means is that when a position has occurred three times in the game, either player can claim a draw on their move. It must be the exact position however, not a single pawn changed! (But it doesn't have to be repeated in three **consecutive** moves, which is what many believe.)

The 50-Move Draw Rule – The *Enforced Draw Due To of “Lack of Progress”!*



One example of a “dead drawn” ending would be Rook vs Rook – the fifty move rule prevents this game from going forever!

The fifty-move draw rule was put in place to prevent players from playing forever in drawn positions. Basically, the rule prevents one side from trying to win solely on time or by causing his/her opponent fatigue (make them tired). The rule states that **a draw can be claimed by either player if fifty moves have been made (by each player) with no captures or pawn moves on either side.**

Making a capture and/or moving a pawn are two things that suggest “**progress**” in chess, so if too much time goes by without either, the game is deemed, or can be claimed, a draw. Fifty moves is considered more than enough time to checkmate the opponent in any of the basic checkmate patterns (Lesson 4 for example). This is why it is important to learn and memorize the basic checkmate patterns!



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Instructor's Guide

The key points of lesson 20 are clearly practical, and in many ways, the beginning of “**chess psychology**”. Players can learn the “X's and O's” of basic strategy and tactics in self-taught methods (books, curriculums such as this one, etc), but without guidance or some level of psychological advice, they never truly develop the ability to apply their knowledge in games.

This was one of our main goals in this lesson: Attempt to give something that many books offering a “technical approach” do not: **A user's guide to “critical thinking skills” in chess!** It is likely obvious to those reading this lesson that many of the concepts recommended in regards to a players' thought process could have been expanded upon (some in great detail). However, in keeping it relatively simple, we hope that beginning chess players – whether they be coaches or students themselves – will have a chance at ***immediately instilling*** the basics of critical thinking into their games.

Prophylactic thinking is much easier said than done. We did not provide worksheets on this as we intend for a coach to use the positions given within Part 2 in an “open classroom question and answer” format. The basics of “why did my opponent go there” were already discussed in Lesson 6, so going any deeper into “prophylactic exercises” would prove too abstract for children to follow at this level. The “general thought process” behind ***prophylaxis*** is key here.

Practical Notes and Advice – Lesson 20:

- **When teaching the practical pieces of advice offered in Lesson 20, try to refer back to different lessons:**
- **Example: “In lesson 6 we learned Openings, right everyone? So this is what our thought process might be during the Opening while we try to follow the basic rules of development”, etc. In this way the “abstract” concepts of thinking attach themselves to something concrete that the students learned.**
- **Review the rules of Part 3 and make sure you fully understand the technicalities of each “claim” a player might make during a game before explaining them to your students. Otherwise, a first inaccurate impression of the rule might be a lasting one.**