



The Seven Habits of Highly Successful Chess Players

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“Champions aren't born, they're made.” This quote has become a motto for many athletes over the years and has now entered the chess world as new players from all ends of the world work hard to achieve their goals. Have you ever wondered what makes two chess players different? Former world champion Garry Kasparov has enforced his philosophy that all students beginning chess have the potential to be great. So then, why isn't everyone a grandmaster? The answer lies deeper than we think. It lies in our work ethic and how far we are willing to go to become better.

Many think chess masters are born with the talent to go pro, to be the best. Many believe world champions like Bobby Fischer and Mikhail Tal started beating everyone from the first time they touched a chess piece. But this is not true. The reality is, these players made chess their dream, studying every day to rise to the top and become some of the greatest players to ever play the sport. They held positive mindsets, followed effective routines, and maintained the best habits to achieve their success and you can do the same! If you follow these 7 habits of highly successful chess masters, you too will be able to work hard and achieve your goals!

1. Practice regularly

You may have heard of the saying “an apple a day keeps the doctor away,” but what about “30 minutes of chess play increases your progress every day.” Many amateur chess players believe that the only way to become a grandmaster is by studying chess for hours a day with no break in between. Yet, that cannot be further from the truth! Many experts and former world champions have stated that a simple 30-minute chess session daily can do wonders towards growth.

We believe in work-life balance and coach our students to maintain a healthy balance in all the activities that they undertake, be it chess, academics, or other extracurricular activities. With time management principles in mind, we recommend the below session types for chess study that players can follow based on their time availability. These session types cover a wide range from 5-minute nano sessions to 75-minute regular sessions to even Chessathons and Hackathons, which account for longer periods spent on chess learning!

No.	Session Type	Time
1	Nano Session	5 minutes
2	Micro Session	15 minutes
3	Mini Session	25 minutes
4	Regular Session	75 minutes
5	Chessathon	3 hours
6	Hackathon	8 hours

Chess Session Types

Many successful chess masters use this as a guideline and ensure daily chess study happens to achieve their goals!

2. Quality over quantity

Quality over quantity is a very common phrase we hear these days, but what does it mean? And how does it apply to chess? Entrepreneur coach Jessica Steward says “Quantity is a measure. Quality is a characteristic. Quantity is about accumulation. Quality is about integrity.” Quality reflects your values. When we look at chess, have you ever thought that learning all the openings and doing every puzzle out there will help you become a stronger player? If you have, it is time to change your approach.



Let us look at an example - would you rather spend 30 minutes trying to solve 100 puzzles where you get 50% right, or would you rather spend 30 minutes solving 10 puzzles where you get 100% right? One helps you pass time, the other helps you improve. One helps you increase the number of puzzles completed, the other helps you improve your pattern recognition to win more games. Can you guess which one?

If you said solving 10 puzzles and getting 100% right, you are absolutely right! Many past world champions have stated that they would rather study one opening fully than read 50 different openings and know only a couple points about each. Keep this in mind the next time you sit in front of a chess board. Are you here to increase your quantity and pass time, or are you here to increase your quality and become stronger?

3. Optimize your chess preparation

Many students have come up to me and said "he's playing this opening and beat me, so I'm going to play it next round" during tournaments. It may not match their style or strength, but somebody beat them with it, so it must work right? WRONG! You should never mimic an opponent's style of play just because they won. Similarly, it is never a good habit to play the same openings as a grandmaster just because they have won matches with it. These chess champions have spent years working on that opening to fit their strengths. Unless you wish to spend days, months, or years studying chess books, your best choice is to work towards your unique style.

We all have role models in the game – Grandmasters Magnus Carlsen, Viswanathan Anand, Hikaru



Nakamura – but it is impossible to be exactly like them! Do not mirror your role models; the idea is to match their character, not their game. A well-known example is GM Hikaru Nakamura winning a strong game with an opening called the Scandinavian Defense. Two days later, another Master in the same tournament used that exact opening without sufficient study. He said he tried it because Hikaru won with this Defense, but it backfired. He was forced to resign within 15 moves and left the tournament

with only one win.

Optimize your chess preparation before tournaments to suit your style. It is important to focus on your strengths and improve your confidence in those areas than learn new ideas you may not be comfortable with. As GM Nakamura says, "The way I play is unique. It's mine, and mine only."

4. Free your mind

Imagine you are sitting on a bench in the park, ice cream in one hand, a book in the other. You are thinking about the concert you have tonight, while staring at an old man feeding the ducks by the lake. When is your birthday? I bet it took you awhile to pause, stop thinking about the scenario painted above, and then think about yourself. This is exactly what happens to chess players during games! Many lost games have little to do with over-the-board mistakes and more to do with our concentration.

A few years back, in the 5th and final round of the Kings Island Open chess tournament, two strong grandmasters were paired against each other, each with a perfect 4/4 score going into the last round. It started off a fairly equal game, both players playing skillfully, but then suddenly one player gave the game by making a rookie mistake! He left his queen hanging! He lost the game and with that, the chance to finish at the top. When asked about the game he said, "It was my opponent's time, I went for a walk and saw a businessman on his phone, then I panicked and thought about my project due tomorrow. After that I just could not focus back on chess again." Situations like this are very common in chess, and one we must avoid ensuring complete focus during a game.



How many of you have gotten lost in thoughts in the middle of a chess game? Maybe you thought about what you will do after the match, or you wonder what color the walls are, or you are curious to watch another match. All these are distractions that experts have said can be detrimental to successful play during any chess game. It is vital we clear our minds and come to chess only thinking about chess, whether it is studying puzzles, learning a new opening, or playing a game.

Our ability to retain material and focus decreases significantly with a pre-occupied mind. Yet with a free mind, it comes very seamlessly. If you find yourself losing focus, here are a couple methods to bring yourself back: take a small walk around the room, close your eyes and sing the alphabet, or rub your palms together and place them on your eyes.

After these things, you can focus back on the board with a fresh mind. The beauty of this habit is that we can apply this to anything we do during the day.

We can just focus on math while in math class, or we can think only about the meeting during office work; we can focus on one goal at a time without getting overwhelmed trying to achieve our full success in one day.

5. Student at heart; humility is key

"I am the wisest man alive, for I know one thing, and that is that I know nothing" – Socrates. At the end of the day, no one knows everything. If we were born knowing everything, what would we do with all this time on Earth? We are all students to the game of chess, always constantly learning new tricks, ideas, variations, etc. Strong chess players understand that there will always be more to learn



about the game. They realize that if they become overconfident in their abilities, they will lose their hunger to learn from their own games and from the games of other players.

We must stay humble and recognize that no matter what level we reach, there will always be more to learn. Current world champion Magnus Carlsen has said multiple times in his interviews that no matter how high his rating goes; he will continue to learn and improve as he understands he will always be a student to the game of chess.

6. "It ain't over till it's over!"

"Don't give up!" This is something you have heard time and time again, but that just reinforces the importance of this phrase, and it is never more evident than in chess! How many times have you seen a player deliver a stunning comeback from a lost position? Checkmating after losing a queen? Winning by seconds after being down 10 minutes on the clock all game? Never give up and never resign! Why? Because you give up the opportunity to get any points back.

Famous Chess player and author Savielly Tartakower had a well-known phrase about this: "No one ever won a game by resigning." He wanted to say that unless and until you continue to play the game till the very end, you would never know whether you ultimately won or lost. Really?



Well, think about it. Let us say you lose a queen within the first 10 moves. Would you rather keep fighting and earn a hard-fought draw after 50 moves, or resign after 10 moves and give up any hope to gain any points? What if it was the last round with a trophy on the line? 0 points means no award, a draw or win means you win the trophy. Would you not keep fighting? After all, we are all humans, and humans make mistakes. If you resign, you give up the chance to let your opponent make that mistake which allows you to come back and win!

7. "Gens una sumus"



Latin for "we are one people," this official chess motto was adopted by the International Chess Federation (FIDE) in the mid-1900s. Chess was always about unification; a place where people from different backgrounds can come together and enjoy a game we all love, and one in which wars are fought on the board with funny looking pieces. Chess is not about winning or losing, nor about crushing, or being crushed, but about having fun together.

It is important to remember that when playing games. We are all here to enjoy the sport and share our passion with our peers. Force never achieved success, but passion has. As Bobby Fischer once famously said, "Chess is life." Have a positive mindset, help your peers, continue your growth, and have fun!

Final Thoughts

"Chess as a sport requires a lot of mental stamina, and this is what makes it different from a physical sport. Chess players have a unique ability of taking in a lot of information and remembering relevant bits. So, memory and mental stamina are the key attributes" (Former World Champion Viswanathan Anand). It is crucial to maintain a positive routine day in and day out to ensure consistent growth without overdoing anything. We hope that by sharing these 7 important habits of highly successful chess players, you are inspired to follow a similar routine which will lead you to high success in the game of chess.