CINCINNATI SCHOLASTIC CHESS

Series Handbook

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This Handbook provides information about selected rules and procedures that are applicable to tournament chess generally. It is a supplement to the information posted on the CSC website, www.chesscincinnati.com for those who would like to have a broader understanding of tournament chess. For complete and authoritative information about U.S. Chess Federation rules, please see the *U.S. Chess Federation's Official Rules of Chess*, 7th Edition (2019, reissued 2024 with updates), which can be found online at www.uschess.org.

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Ratings

A rating is a numerical measure of a player's skill at playing chess, or, in chess terms, the player's "strength." A player earns a rating by playing in a section of a tournament for which the game results are reported to the US Chess Federation (USCF). Based on the results reported, the USCF calculates one or more of several different ratings depending on the form of play (over-the-board, correspondence, online) and time control (e.g., blitz, quick, regular).

The USCF calculates different over-the-board ratings based on the *total playing time* that each player has for the game. The total playing time is the sum of the "thinking" time, expressed in minutes, allowed to each player plus the time, expressed in seconds, for the delay or increment allowed at each move times 60 (which assumes a game lasting 60 moves). For example, the time control G/30;d5 means that each player has 30 minutes of "thinking" time for the game with a 5-second delay at each move before the player's clock begins to run; so the total playing time is 30 minutes + (5 seconds x 60) = 35 minutes. In shorthand, the total playing time is *mm*+*ss*, where *mm* stands for the minutes of thinking time and *ss* stands for the seconds of delay or increment. The different ratings calculated by the USCF are as follows:

- *Blitz:* total playing time is between 5 and 10 minutes inclusive (5 ≤ mm+ss ≤ 10, and "thinking" time cannot be less than 3 minutes)
- *Quick:* total playing time is more than 10 minutes and less than or equal to 65 minutes (10 < mm+ss ≤ 65)
- *Regular:* total playing time is equal to or more than 30 minutes (30 ≤mm+ss)

If the total playing time is between 30 and 65 minutes inclusive (30 ≤ mm+ss ≤ 65), the game is *dual rated*, meaning that it is included in the calculations for both *Quick* and *Regular* ratings.

With respect to over-the-board ratings, a player earns a rating by playing in a *rated* section, which means a section for which the game results are reported to the USCF for rating purposes. It is not necessary that a player already have a rating in order to play in a rated tournament — in fact, every player must play in at least one rated tournament as an unrated player because that is the only way to get a rating. Unrated players will acquire an official but *provisional* rating as soon as they have played four rated games. Because most tournaments are four or more rounds, a player usually is officially rated after playing in only one rated tournament. A rating is indicated as provisional in various ways: *1150 (P15)*, *1150P15* and *1150/15*, where *P*, if it occurs, stands for *provisional*, and the number after the "*P*" or "/" indicates the number of games on which the rating is based. A player's rating is provisional until it is based on more than 25 rated games. When the rating is no longer provisional, the number of games is not shown. For example, 1150/15 indicates a provisional rating of 1150 based on 15 rated games, whereas 1150 by itself indicates an *established* (not provisional) rating that is based on more than 25 games. A provisional rating can fluctuate greatly as results are processed. Established ratings also fluctuate but usually with smaller incremental changes than for provisional ratings. To summarize:

- A player with from one to three rated games will have an *unofficial rating* but is officially *unrated*.
- A player with four to 25 rated games has an *official provisional rating*.
- A player with 26 or more rated games has an *official established rating*.

The USCF has defined class designations based on rating, and players are often referred to by these designations according to what their rating is; for example, as a "Class C" player or an "Expert" player, and so forth. These designations mean something quite specific within the chess community. A "Master" player is someone who has achieved a rating of 2200 or more, not anyone who is merely perceived subjectively to play the game really well. A player rated 2150 plays the game really, really well but is "only" an Expert, not a Master; and it is inaccurate to refer to such a player as a "Master." The USCF rating classes are shown in the following table:

Rating	***Class***		***Rating***	***Class***
2400 and above	Senior Master		1000–1199	Class E
2200–2399	Master		800–999	Class F
2000–2199	Expert		600–799	Class G
1800–1999	Class A		400–599	Class H
1600–1799	Class B		200–399	Class I
1400–1599	Class C		100*–199	Class J
1200–1399	Class D		**The lowest possible rating is 100.*	

Beginning Rating for Purposes of a Tournament

Although players' ratings change virtually every time they play a rated game, new official ratings are not calculated for each round of a tournament. Instead, each player has a beginning rating that, for purposes of any particular tournament, will remain unchanged throughout the entire tournament. Because a player's beginning rating determines both what section(s) he or she is eligible to play in and, in combination with other factors, how he or she will be paired within that section, it is helpful to understand what rating is used as a player's beginning rating.

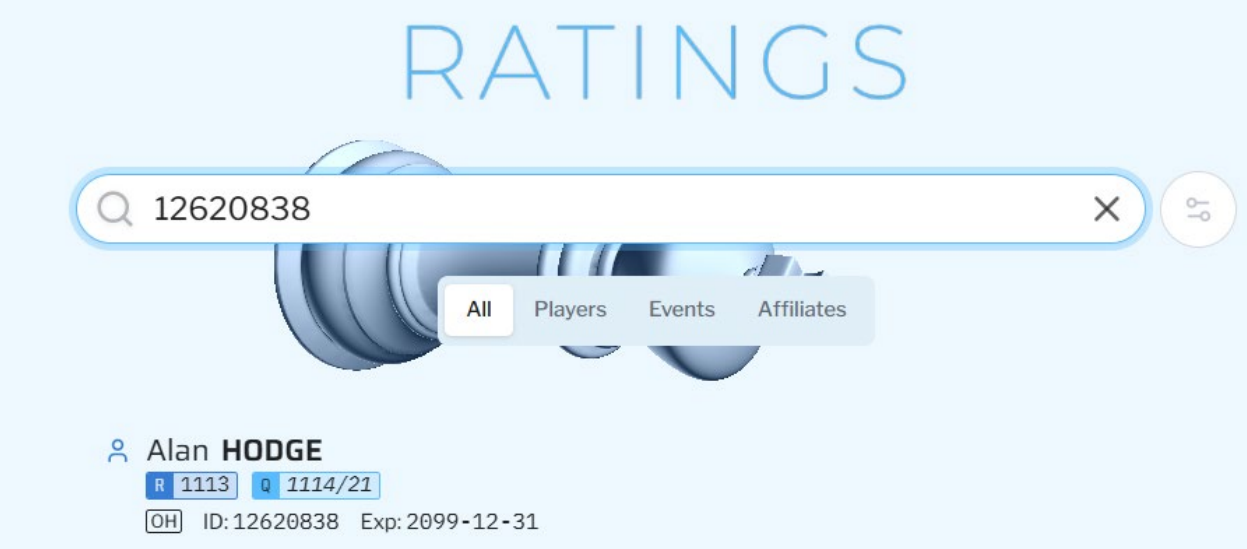
There are two ratings of record published by the USCF: a player's *official rating* and the player's *most recent rating*.

- Near the end of every month the USCF publishes a new rating database that shows the *official ratings* for players as of the first day of the next month. Because of the time needed to publish each new supplement or database by the first day of the following month, the data cut-off date for results to be factored into the new ratings is the third Wednesday of the month. For example, for official ratings as of July 1, 2021, no results reported after June 16, 2021 were included in the rating calculations.
- Tournament results are typically submitted within a day or two of a tournament's conclusion, and the USCF calculates new ratings usually on the same day that it receives the results. As soon as they are calculated, these new ratings are published in the Event Summary (wall chart) for the tournament and in the player's tournament history. Results reported after the data cut-off date for the

most recent database will cause a player's *most recent rating* to differ from his or her *official rating*.[1]

Normally a player's beginning rating will be her or his *official rating* as of the first of the month in which the tournament is played. Tournament advertising should indicate this explicitly; for example, "official Regular ratings as of 8/1/2025 will be used." Sometimes when a tournament is scheduled very near the beginning of a month, official ratings as of the previous month are used. The reason for this is to avoid the need to update the ratings for perhaps many players immediately before a tournament begins. Tournament directors might also choose in some situations to use a player's *most recent rating* in lieu of her or his official rating, especially when a player is officially unrated; or to use the most recent rating if requested by the player to do so, provided that the most recent rating is higher than the official rating.

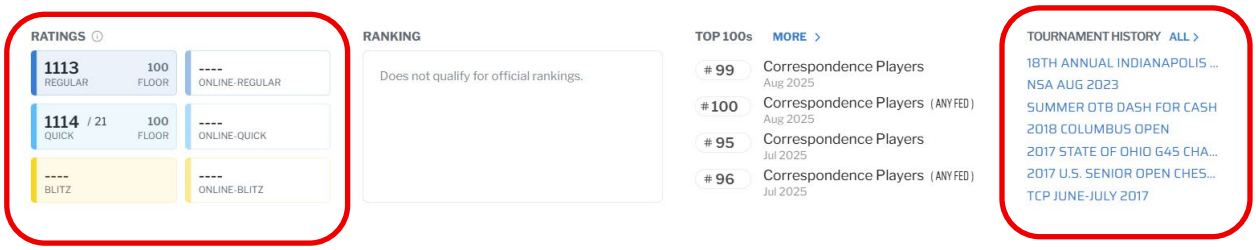
To see a player's ratings, enter the player name or USCF ID number on the USCF website: https://ratings.uschess.org/. When the player's record opens, the ratings displayed on the front page are his or her current *official* ratings. The screen print below shows an example ("R" stands for Regular, "Q" stands for Quick, and "B" stands for Blitz). Be aware that if no expiration date is displayed in a player's record, the ID is a non-member ID and *the player is not a USCF member*.



To find the player's most recent rating, click on her or his name. When the player's record opens, his or her several current *official* ratings are displayed, and the recent tournaments in which he or she has played are listed in order from the most recent (listed first) to oldest under "Tournament History". Click on the most recent tournament to open its USCF Event Summary, or click on "All" next to Tournament

[1] It is possible but very unlikely that a player's rating will not change when new results are reported unless the player is on his or her "floor". A floor is a rating below which a player's *official* rating will not fall regardless of any results reported. If a player's rating exceeded 1400 at any time, his or her floor equals his or her highest lifetime rating rounded down to the nearest hundred less 200. For example, a player whose lifetime highest rating is 1569 has a floor of 1300. Players who were never rated higher than 1400 do not have a floor.

History to see the player's rating changes for all tournaments played. The new rating shown for the player's most recent tournament is the players' *most recent rating*.



Touch-Move

"Touch-move" refers to USCF Rule 10. In simple terms, this rules states:

- If you intentionally touch one of your pieces, you must move that piece if you legally can.
- If you intentionally touch one of your opponent's pieces, you must capture that piece if you legally can.
- If you legally move one of your pieces to a square and release it (that is, let go of it so that physical contact between your hand and the piece is broken), it must remain on that square whether or not that is the square to which you intended to move it.
- If you move a piece that you cannot legally move, you must put that piece back on the square where it was before you moved it, and then make a legal move.

The touch-move rule does not apply to any piece touched accidentally or to any piece not on the board.

Touch-Move and Castling

When castling, a player must move the king first and then the rook (Rules 8A2, 9C, 10I). When a player touches the rook first, castling is not allowed, and the player is obligated to move the rook if it is legal to do so. If there is no legal move with the rook, the player is free to make any legal move.

Rule 10I2 (Variation I) permits a player to move the rook first when castling. CSC does not allow this variation in its tournaments.

Touch-Move and Pawn Promotion

When promoting a pawn, a player selects a piece (queen, rook, knight or bishop) to replace the pawn. A player may pick up an off-the-board piece, decide otherwise, and select a different piece. This does not violate the touch-move rule, and a player can change his or her selection until the replacement piece touches the promotion square on the board. At that point, the choice of a replacement piece is determined (even if he has not yet released the piece) and that piece takes the place of the pawn.

When choosing a piece to replace the pawn, a player is not limited to pieces that have been captured. For example, a player who wants to promote a pawn to a rook can do so even when he or she already has two (or more) rooks on the board. The tournament director will provide the desired piece if it is not immediately available to the player among nearby off-the-board pieces.

Touch-Move and Adjusting a Piece

To adjust a piece means to reposition it so as to make it clear which square it occupies. The touch-move rule does not apply to adjusting a piece as long as a player adjusts the piece properly. Adjusting a piece is proper if: (1) the piece was placed in contact with two or more squares so that there is some ambiguity about where it is located, (2) a player adjusts it when his or her own clock is running, and (3) the player announces his or her intention to adjust the piece before doing so by saying "adjust" (or the French term "*j'adoube*") audibly to the opponent. If a player adjusts any piece without first saying "adjust," the touch-move rule applies.

It is not proper to adjust a piece for any reason other than to clarify its location. For example, it is inappropriate to adjust a piece simply to change its orientation, such as which way a knight is "facing," when there is no question as to which square it occupies. It is best to adjust only one's own pieces. If a player moves a piece in such a way that it is unclear which square it occupies and then presses the clock, the opponent has the right to restart the player's clock and ask him or her to adjust the piece, or may call a tournament director for assistance.

Illegal Moves

When an illegal move is played, such as when a player makes a move that does not get him or her out of check, the opponent has the right to claim an illegal move. The opponent may choose to make a claim or not; if she or he chooses to make a claim, she or he must do so to a tournament director. This is required especially if the opponent wants the benefit of the time penalty; i.e., to have two minutes added to his or her time. The opponent may choose to waive the penalty even after making the claim to the tournament director. A condition applies with respect to the penalty: in order to have the penalty applied, the opponent must make the claim before making his or her own move. If the opponent makes any move after the alleged illegal move, he or she may still claim the illegal move, but the penalty will not apply. Players sometimes resolve claims of an illegal move between themselves without involving a tournament director; this is acceptable, but generally speaking, a player should not adjust the time on either clock, deferring to the tournament director to do this.

When a player makes an illegal move and the opponent chooses not to make a claim, the opponent should, without making a move, immediately restart the player's clock and bring the illegal move to the player's attention. Whether or not the opponent makes a claim, the player must "take back" the illegal move and make a legal move.

When both players fail to recognize the illegal move immediately and continue to play as usual, any moves played stand until one player or the other recognizes the illegal

move. After recognizing an illegal move, a player should pause the clock and call a tournament director. One of the following resolutions will be applied:

- If fewer than ten moves have been played since the illegal move occurred, and if the position can be restored to the point immediately before the illegal move was played, the position is restored and the game is continued from that point, applying the touch-move rule. (*Note:* A complete move is one move by each player; thus "ten moves" means that each player moved ten times. Each player moving five times does not equate to ten moves.) The restoration of the position can be based on the scoresheet of one or both players, or by agreement between the players in the absence of a suitable scoresheet. No time will be restored to either player's clock in this situation, and no penalty will be assessed for the infraction.
- If (a) fewer than ten moves have been played since the illegal move occurred but the position cannot be restored to the point immediately before the illegal move was played, or (b) it is not known how many moves have been played since the illegal move occurred, or (c) it is known that ten or more moves have been played since the illegal move occurred, the illegal move will stand and the game will continue from its current position subject to the following:
  - If a player who is on the move is in check, the game continues from the current position with the player required to get out of check immediately.
  - If a player who is on the move but has not yet moved is giving check, then the opponent, with his or her clock re-started, must take back the last move played (illegally), and the game continues from that position with the opponent now on the move and required to get out of check. The touch-move rule applies.

Notation

Rules Relating to Notation

USCF Rule 15A stipulates that "each player is required to record the game (both the player's and the opponent's moves), move after move, as clearly and legibly as possible …" Recording the moves of a game is called *taking notation* or *notating*. The system for recording moves is called *notation*, and the record of a game's moves is called a *scoresheet* or a *game score*. The tournament organizer may stipulate that a particular type of scoresheet be used, in which case the organizer is obligated to provide the stipulated scoresheets for the players' use. The tournament organizer may also prohibit the use of certain scoresheets, such as electronic notation devices. Several USCF rules apply to taking notation, including these:

- *Rule 15A:* Players are required to make a move on the board before recording it, and their scoresheets must be visible to the tournament director and to their opponents at all times during a game.
- *Rule 15A (Variation I):* A player using a paper scoresheet may make a move on the board before recording it. This variation does not need to be advertised in advance.

  Note: Players may expect this Variation Rule to be in effect unless the tournament director or organizer has explicitly advertised that it is *not* in effect.

- *Rule 15B:* If *either* player has less than five minutes of time remaining, *both* players are excused from the requirement to take notation. Either player may choose to continue to take notation.
- *Rule 15D:* Sometimes a player will want to use the opponent's scoresheet to correct his or her own scoresheet. The rules allow this, provided that both players have at least five minutes of time remaining, and it is unsportsmanlike to refuse to make one's scoresheet available for this purpose. However, a player is permitted to make corrections to his or her scoresheet only when his or her clock is running (i.e., to correct a scoresheet, a player must be on the move and is not permitted to pause the clock). If any issue arises in connection with correcting a scoresheet, including an opponent's refusal to make a scoresheet available, a player should request the assistance of a tournament director; in this case it is permitted to pause the clock until the issue has been resolved.
- *Rule 20C:* Players are prohibited from writing anything on their scoresheets except the moves, draw offers, clock times, the header information normally found on a scoresheet, and the result (with or without the players' signatures).

The normal practice for a player on the move is to make a move, press the clock, and record the move played; and when the opponent completes a move, to record the opponent's move immediately. However, it is permissible to reply to the opponent's move before recording it; that is to say, your opponent moves, then you make your move, then you record both your opponent's move and your own move at the same time.

A player who is unable to take notation must make the tournament director aware of this. Depending on the particular situation, the tournament director can take different actions at his discretion, including finding another person to take notation for the player or deducting a number of minutes from the player's time. A player who is required to take notation and refuses to do so, or does so only intermittently, will be reminded of the requirement and is also subject to a penalty, which could be the deduction of time from his or her clock, forfeit of the game, or expulsion from the tournament. A player may make a claim if his or her opponent is not taking notation, but a tournament director can also intervene even if no claim is made.

A player who does not notate, stops notating, or notates only intermittently forfeits the right to make certain claims that depend on a "reasonably complete" scoresheet (even if his opponent has a scoresheet). Examples of such a claim include a draw by repetition of position (unless a forced perpetual check can be demonstrated) or by the 50-move rule, and a claim of an illegal move when several moves have been played after the alleged illegal move. A scoresheet may lack up to three move pairs (a move pair is one move by each player) and still qualify as reasonably complete for the purpose of demonstrating a claim provided that the moves necessary to establish the claim are all present or obvious, which is a question for a tournament director to decide.

Notation Systems

There are several notation systems. The standard notation system currently used is *algebraic notation* (also known as *short algebraic*), of which there are two variations: *long algebraic* (also called *computer algebraic*) and *figurine algebraic*. Before the 1980s the standard notation system was *descriptive notation*. Many books and magazines published before the turn of the millennium used descriptive notation; some of these books have been reissued in algebraic format, but it is not unusual to encounter descriptive notation in personal libraries (especially those of older players), public library collections, and used book shops. Each of these systems is described in the Appendix.

Why Chess Notation is Useful

Besides being required by tournament rules and necessary for certain claims, chess notation is an essential tool for improving as a player. To put it most simply, if you are going to *play* chess, it is helpful to be able to *read* chess, just as if you are going to play music, it is helpful to be able to read music. This ability enables two great benefits:

- *Learning from others' experience:* Just about any published game played by anyone at any time over the last few centuries or more, in any place and in any language, can be reconstructed by any other player anytime anywhere from a relatively simple and compact record. In addition to providing a very specific connection to history, this enables a player today not only to read the many instructional books written by the great masters past and present, but also to play through and study their games.

- *Learning from one's own games:* Recording the moves of your own games enables you to analyze them, which means to play them over again to see what you did right, where you went wrong, and what else you might have done. Analyzing your games is one of the best ways to improve, especially if you do it with a coach or stronger player who can point out things to you usefully.

Electronic Notation Devices

An electronic notation device shows a chess board and pieces on a screen, and on this screen a player replicates the moves played on the board. The device automatically records the moves of the game and can be used to print out or electronically save the game record after the game is over. Some players find that using an electronic notation device is more convenient and accurate than using a paper scoresheet.

Because an electronic notation device shows the new game position immediately when a move is entered, it is possible that a player, before moving on the actual game board, could "try out" a possible move, see the resulting position, "take the move back" if he or she doesn't like the position, and "try out" another move. To use an electronic notation device in this manner is unsportsmanlike and specifically a violation of Rule 15A, requiring that players make each move on the board before recording it on their scoresheets, and Rule 20D, prohibiting the use of assistance during a game.

An organizer or tournament director has the authority not to allow the use of electronic notation devices in a tournament. The *USCF National Scholastic Chess Tournament Regulations* specify that the use of electronic notation devices is intended to be allowed only to "players with special circumstances who are approved by the Director of Events or Chief Tournament Director" to use them. When they are allowed, all users of an electronic notation device are required to comply with the rules for their use as specified in Appendix E of the *Regulations*. The pertinent text follows:

APPENDIX E: APPROVED ELECTRONIC NOTATION DEVICES
(Last updated August 2025)

Introduction:

This Appendix applies to ***players with special circumstances*** who are approved by the Director of Events or Chief Tournament Director to use an electronic notation device (END) as an alternate means of score keeping during over-the-board events. ***The only ENDs allowed*** are those certified by US Chess for tournament use or a device provided by the Tournament Staff.

A player authorized to use an END is responsible for setting and operating the device according to the instructions below.

END Owners will:

1. Set the device in the appropriate mode for recording moves.

2. Turn off or disable any setting(s) that could alert the player to any illegal moves.

3. ***Make the move on the board before recording the move on the device.***

4. Keep the END ***on the table in plain view*** of the opponent at all times during the game. A player will not at any time hold the player's END below the level of the tabletop or in their lap.

5. Touch the END only when recording moves.

6. Never input "variations" in the END at any time during a game.

7. If asked by the opponent to see the END for the purpose of entering missing moves on their official scoresheet, the player will set the player's END mode to algebraic (or the appropriate mode that allows the opponent to see all previous moves) and turn the END around so the opponent can view the display screen. The END will remain on the table at all times.

8. Never take the END with them if they leave the board while the game is still in progress, including trips to the bathroom.

9. Be ready to take written notation if the END malfunctions (if notation is required during game play in this section). If the END malfunctions, the player shall begin notation with the next move and fill-in missing moves when the player is on move by borrowing the opponent's scoresheet or END.

10. Summon a TD when questions arise.

Opponents:

1. May ask the player who owns the END to show them the device, explain its use, and ensure it is correctly set for game play for this tournament.

2. May not ask the device owner to take written notation instead of using their END.

3. May ask the device owner to see the player's END for the purpose of entering missing moves on their own scoresheet. When this occurs, the END will remain on the table.

4. Shall summon a TD when questions arise.

Coaches/Parents:

1. Are strongly encouraged to assist their players in understanding proper tournament etiquette regarding ENDs before tournament play begins.

2. Should, before the start of a game, summon a TD when questions arise.

Tournament Directors:

1. Should check a player's END to verify it is correctly set when requested to do so by either player.

As of August 1, 2020 the USCF has approved only the following electronic notation devices for tournament use by players:

- MonRoi Personal Chess Manager
- Plycounter®
- ChessNoteЯ-Nexus 6 and Nexus 9 ENDs with software version 2.3.2

Pairings

Pairing Rules

Different types of tournaments call for pairing players in different ways. This document considers only Swiss tournaments, the commonest type of tournament in the US. The basic pairing rules for a Swiss tournament are summarized as follows:

- *Rule 27A1:* A player may not play the same opponent more than once in a tournament.
- *Rule 27A2:* Players with equal scores are paired whenever possible.
- *Rule 27A3:* Within a score group, i.e., all players who have the same score, the upper half by ranking is paired against the lower half.
- *Rule 27A4:* Players receive each color the same number of times, whenever practical, and are not assigned the same color more than twice in a row.
- *Rule 27A5:* Players receive alternating colors whenever practical.

While the basic rules can be stated so simply, complying with them without exception is often challenging. Some violations are unavoidable, such as round 2 pairings when accelerated pairings are used and when a score group comprises only two players who

have already played each other (violations of Rule 27A2), when the number of rounds exceeds the number of players in a section (violates Rule 27A1), and when, in a four-round tournament, a player is assigned one color three times and the other color once (violates Rule 27A4). The fact that the complete rules for Swiss pairings occupy 46 pages of the rule book demonstrates how complicated pairing can be.

How Players are Paired

All the players in a tournament are divided into groups, called sections, defined usually by rating. In scholastic tournaments, grade is often another defining factor. Players play only other players in their own section and ordinarily never play the same player twice in the same tournament.[2] Because there are usually more players in each section than there are rounds in the tournament, each player plays only some (not all) of the other players in his or her section. Players are paired against each other as follows within each section separately.

- *Round 1:* All players are listed in descending order by rating. Unrated players are listed, in no particular order, at the bottom of the pairing list. The list of players is then divided into two halves. The first player in the upper half is paired against the first player in the lower half (on the top board), the second player in the upper half is paired against the second player in the lower half (on the second board), and so forth until all players are paired. Colors are assigned randomly on the top board, and then alternate on each following board. For example, if the higher-rated player on the top board is assigned white, then the higher-rated player on second board is assigned black, and so on.
- *Pairing a player out:* If the number of players in a section is odd, the lower half has one more player than the upper half. In this case the player with the lowest rating is "paired out" — meaning that he or she has no opponent for that round and will be given a full-point bye. If a tournament has fewer or more than four rounds, an unrated player may be considered the lowest rated player and therefore may be paired out; but if a tournament has four rounds, it is normal not to pair out an unrated players unless there is no suitable alternative pairing. The reason for this is that a player needs to play four rated games in order to obtain his or her first official rating; accordingly if a tournament has four rounds, unrated players are "protected" from being paired out if possible so that they can obtain their official rating by playing in a single tournament. (In a tournament with fewer than four rounds, an unrated player with no rated games to his or her credit cannot obtain an official rating in any case, whereas in a tournament with more than four rounds, an unrated player may be paired out and still play the four games required for an official rating.) No player may be paired out more than once in any tournament.

[2] If the number of players in a section does not exceed the number of rounds in the tournament, it will be necessary in the Swiss system to pair players against the same opponent more than once. The Swiss system was designed to handle sections with a large number of players, not a small number. For this reason organizers of Swiss tournaments combine small sections when feasible to create a single larger section where Swiss pairings can work as intended.

- *Subsequent rounds:* For each subsequent round players are first sorted by score group. A score group is a group of players with the same tournament score. The score group with the highest score is paired first, and pairing proceeds in order of score to the score group with the lowest score. Within each score group players are paired upper half with lower half, as explained above for round 1, taking into account the other factors relating to pairing mentioned below. If the number of players within a score group is odd, one player in that score group is paired with a player from the next lower score group. If the number of players to be paired in the entire section is odd, the lowest-rated player in the lowest score group who has not already been paired out is paired out (usually).

Other Factors Relating to Pairing

Pairings are influenced by several other factors, including alternation of color (playing the color that is the opposite of the color played in the previous round), equalization of color (the number of times a player has had each color), whether unrated players are in the section, whether a player has been paired out previously in that tournament, and whether any players have elected to take optional byes for the current or a future round. These factors also influence who gets paired out. Moreover, players who have already played each other ordinarily may not be paired against each other again in the same tournament. Because all these factors must be taken into account, it can be a complex and time-consuming process to determine pairings. This is why tournament directors commonly use pairing software.

Accelerated pairings may be used in situations where the number of players in a section substantially exceeds a specified number, determined by the number of rounds: 2^x where x is the number of rounds. For example, for a five-round tournament, the specified number is 32: $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 = 32$). When accelerated pairings are used, the effect is to divide (by rating) a section or score group into quarters rather than halves, then to pair the first quarter against the second quarter, and the third quarter against the fourth quarter. In other respects the pairing process is as described above. Accelerated pairings are typically used only in the first two rounds of a tournament. (If accelerated pairings are used only in round 1, their effect is nullified in round 2.)

The Pairing Chart

At the beginning of every round, the pairings for each section are shown in a pairing chart that is posted in a designated location. The pairing chart is used to let every player know (1) who his or her opponent is, (2) what color to play, and (3) what board to play on. The board numbers on the pairing chart correspond to numbered boards in the playing room where the players will play their games. The player listed in the left player column is always the person playing white; the person playing black is always listed in the right player column.

A pairing chart sometimes shows other information as well, such as the players' ratings, USCF identification numbers, and game scores. "Unr" stands for "unrated" and indicates a player for whom the USCF has not yet calculated an official rating — this is usually a player who is playing in a rated tournament for the first time.

The pairing chart includes result columns where the players record the result of their games. To record a game's result, a player enters a "1" in the "Res" column to the left of the name of the winner and a "0" in the "Res" column to the left of name of the loser. If the game is a draw, a player enters "1/2" in the "Res" column for both players. In the case of a forfeit, enter "F" for the player who forfeited and "X" for the player who did not. *Both* players are responsible for making sure that the result is recorded correctly. Below is an example of a pairing chart showing results.

[Tournament Name] — [Section Name] Pairings for Round 1				
Bd	**Res**	**White**	**Res**	**Black**
1	*0*	Michael Monster 925	*1*	John Champion 1025
2	*1/2*	Ross Knight 1000	*1/2*	Benjamin Bishop 900
3	*1*	Wannabe Queen 875	*0*	Carlyle Castle 975
4	*F*	Rudy Rude 950	*X*	Penny Pawner Unr

The results recorded show that on board 1 Champion defeated Monster, on board 2 Knight and Bishop drew, on board 3 Queen defeated Castle, and on board 4 Rude forfeited (and Pawner got a forfeit win).

The Wall Chart

The wall chart is one form of a crosstable that shows standard information for each player (name, USCF ID, rating, etc.) and, after play begins, the results of all the games in each section of a tournament round by round. Additional information may also be shown, such as a player's school grade ("Cl/Gr"), team, and state.

By consulting the wall chart you can find out who has played whom in what round and with what color and result, who is in the lead, who is in each score group, who has taken a bye for any round, and who has withdrawn from the tournament. Players are listed normally in order of their beginning rating; the "pair number" indicates the player's ranking in a list of all players in the tournament (or section), listed by rating, with number 1 being the highest-rated player. For each player and for as many rounds as have been played (or paired), the wall chart shows:

- Color played (W or B)
- Opponent (identified by pair number)
- Cumulative game score
- If the player has a full- or half-point bye ("bye")
- If the player has withdrawn ("----" = a zero-point bye)

Below is an example of a wall chart for a four-round tournament, in which round 3 is in progress. The first column shows the players' pair numbers. Two rounds have been completed; colors, opponents and results are shown for these rounds. Round 3 has been paired but not completed, so colors and opponents (by pair number) are shown but no results. Nothing is shown for round 4.

[Tournament Name] – [Section] Wall Chart

Pair #	Name/Rating/ID	Cl/Gr	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Total
1	John Champion		W 4	B 3	W 2		2.0
	2295 10000001	12	1.0	2.0			
2	Ross Knight		B 3	W 6	B 1		1.0
	2000 10000002	10	0.5	1.0			
3	Benjamin Bishop		W 2	W 1	B 5		0.5
	1937 10000003	11	0.5	0.5			
4	Michael Monster		B 1	W 7	B 6		1.0
	1855 10000004	9	0.0	1.0			
5	Wannabe Queen		B 7	bye	W 3		1.0
	1735 10000005	9	0.0	1.0			
6	Irwin Eliminator		bye	B 2	W 4		1.5
	969 10000006	7	1.0	1.5			
7	Carlyle Castle		W 5	B 4	bye		2.0
	Unr 10000007	6	1.0	1.0	1.0		

The wall chart shows cumulative scores, so it takes a bit of arithmetic to determine the result of any particular game after round 1. To know whether a player won his round 2 game, subtract the round 1 score from the round 2 score. For example, John Champion's round 1 score was 1 and his round 2 score was 2. This means that he scored 1 point in round 2 — indicating that he won his round 2 game. Benjamin Bishop's score, however, did not change from round 1 to round 2, meaning that he scored 0 in round 2 — indicating that he lost his round 2 game. In other words, a player's result from any individual game, or round, is reflected by the *change* in that player's cumulative score from the preceding round. Similarly, by comparing the score for the bye round with the score for the preceding round, you can determine whether a bye was a full-point or half-point bye.

The Standings Chart

The standings chart is another form of a crosstable. It lists players in descending order by score[3] so it is easier to see immediately what players are in each score group. Within each score group players are listed in order by rating. Differences between the standings chart and the wall chart as are follows:

- The order in which players are listed on the standings chart changes as their scores change; players are listed consistently in the same order on the wall chart.
- The standings chart does not show the color played; the wall chart does.
- The standings chart shows the results of each round as a win ("W"), loss ("L") or draw ("D") rather than as a cumulative numerical score as on the wall chart. The standings chart includes a total score column at the right where each player's current cumulative score is shown.
- The standings chart shows "B---" and "H---" rather than "bye" for a full- and half-point byes respectively.

[3] The standings chart can be sorted alphabetically as well.

An example standings chart is shown below.

[Tournament Name] – [Section] Standings										
#	**Name**	**ID**	**Rtng**	**Post**	**Gr**	**Rd 1**	**Rd 2**	**Rd 3**	**Rd 4**	**Tot**
1	Penny Pawner	12345678	1482	1476	8	W8	W9	D2	W3	3.5
2	Ross Knight	22345678	1249	1266	10	W4	W8	D1	W7	3.5
3	Brook Rook	32345678	1007	1062	8	W6	W5	W9	L1	3.0
4	Michael Monster	42345678	654	663	9	L2	D7	B---	W6	2.5
5	Wannabe Queen	52345678	1306	1240	9	W7	L3	L6	W9	2.0
6	Irwin Eliminator	62345678	642	665	7	L3	B---	W5	L4	2.0
7	Carlyle Castle	72345678	715	773	6	L5	D4	W8	L2	1.5
8	John Champion	82345678	735	708	12	L1	L2	L7	B---	1.0
9	Benjamin Bishop	92345678	555	551	11	B---	L1	L3	L5	1.0

In addition to the players' place numbers (first column), names, results and opponents by round, and total score, the standings chart may show additional information. In this example, the player's USCF ID number, beginning rating ("Rtng"), post-tournament rating ("Post") and school grade ("Gr") are also shown. The post-tournament rating is an *estimated* new rating for the player calculated by the pairing software. While these estimated ratings are often quite accurate, they are not official; only the USCF can calculate and publish a player's official rating.

Sandbagging

Manipulating one's rating by intentionally losing games is called sandbagging. A player's purpose in sandbagging is to achieve a lower rating in order to become eligible to play in a section with a lower rating ceiling, with the idea that the player is likelier to win more games against the assumed weaker competition — and therefore have improved chances of winning a prize. Sandbagging violates the rules and ethics of chess, is disrespectful and unfair to the player's opponents, and is dishonest. In a word, sandbagging is cheating. The pertinent rules are identified below (quoted from *U.S. Chess Federation Official Rules of Chess*, 7th Edition, 2019, 2024).

> **20A. Conduct of players.** Players shall participate in the spirit of fair play and good sportsmanship, and must observe the US Chess Code of Ethics.
>
> **US Chess Code of Ethics, Standards of Conduct.** 6. … The following is a list of examples of actions or behavior that are considered unethical …
>
> 6(c): Deliberately losing a game for payment, or to lower one's rating, or for any other reason; or attempting to induce another player to do so. Deliberately failing to play at one's best in a game, in any manner inconsistent with the principles of good sportsmanship, honesty, or fair play.
>
> **20L. Manipulating results.** Collusion to fix or throw games, whether before or during the game, in order to manipulate prize money, title norms, ratings, or for any other purpose is illegal ….

With the objective of protecting our events from sandbaggers, we have implemented the following policy:

When CSC finds evidence of sandbagging by any player who has entered a CSC event, that player will be subject to disciplinary actions, which may be any of the following: forfeiture of games and loss of points scored, a requirement to play in a higher section, ineligibility for any prize, expulsion from the tournament, and exclusion from future CSC events.

Appendix: Notation Systems

Algebraic notation

Algebraic notation is the commonest method of chess notation now in use. It is also the official standard notation system of the US Chess Federation.

The rows of squares running from one player to the other are called *files* and are labeled from a through h. The rows of squares running from left to right are call *ranks* are numbered 1 through 8. Each *square* is identified by its file and rank: a6, d4, etc. A row of squares all of the same color and touching each other only at corners is called a *diagonal*.

Pieces are identified by capital letters: K = king, Q = queen, R = rook, B = bishop, N = knight. Pawns don't get a capital letter, because it is enough to indicate the file they are on or moved from.

Moves are recorded by identifying the piece being moved and the destination square. For example, Nf3 means that a knight moved to square f3. For pawns only the destination square is recorded: thus, e4 means that the pawn on the e file moved to square e4.

In a situation where either of two pieces can move to the same square, either the rank or the file that the piece is moving *from* is indicated as well as the square it is moving *to*. This makes it clear which piece was moved. For example, when one rook is on a1 and the other is on f1, and they can both move to e1, the move is recorded as Rae1 if the a1 rook is moved, and as Rfe1 if the f1 rook is moved. Similarly if one knight is on f3 and the other is on f5, a knight move to d4 is recorded as either N5d4 or N3d4.

A complete move record comprises three parts: the move number, White's move, and Black's move, always in that order. Sometimes these appear in columns, but sometimes, to save vertical space, moves follow one another along a line of text. The examples below illustrate:

1. e4 e5
2. Nf3 Nc6
3. Bb5 a3

and so on

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a3 and so on

Captures are indicated by inserting an "x" before the destination square. For example:

- Bxb3 means that a bishop captured a piece located on b3.
- Raxe1 means that a rook moved from a1 to capture a piece located on e1.
- N5xd4 means that a knight moved from rank 5 to capture a piece located on d4.
- exd5 means that a pawn moved from the e file to capture a piece located on d5. Optionally this move could be written simply as "ed" without ambiguity.

Special moves and notations are indicated as follows:

- Check is indicated by "+" written after the move, double check (optionally) by "++", and checkmate by "#" (for example, Qa4+, Nh3++, Rd8#).[4]

- Castling short (that is, on the kingside) is written as 0-0; castling long (that is, on the queenside) is written as 0-0-0.

- *En passant* captures are recorded just as other pawn captures are. For example, when a pawn on the e file moves to f6 and in the process captures a pawn that was on f5, the move is written "exf6." Note that the move records the capturing pawn's *destination square*, not the square occupied by the pawn that got captured. Optionally "ep" can be added at the end of the move ("exf6 ep"), but it very often is not; the game position makes it clear that the capture was made *en passant*.

- For the promotion of a pawn the move is written as any normal pawn move followed by "=" and the letter for the piece that replaces the pawn: b8=Q, f8=N. If the promotion results in check, double check, or checkmate, then +, ++, or # are added after the move as applicable.

- … (ellipsis) is used to identify a move by a black piece when the context does not make this obvious (as when moves are recorded in "White" and "Black" columns). For example: Bc4 means that White moved a bishop to c4 whereas … Bc4 means that Black moved a bishop to c4.

Annotation

Annotation refers to comments that someone adds to the moves of a game while analyzing it or when preparing it for publication. The simplest form of annotation uses only a few symbols:

- ! = good move
- !! = very good (or brilliant) move
- ? = bad or questionable move
- ?? = blunder
- ?! = a questionable and probably bad move
- !? = means something like "an unusual or uncertain but possibly good move"

These common symbols are pretty universal among chess publications, but other symbols are used as well, which are usually defined within the book or magazine using them. Game annotation is often not limited to the use of these symbols. The published records of many games are interrupted at different points for the insertion of verbal comments by an annotator. These comments frequently include alternative moves or lines of play that the players might or should have considered (or were happily avoided), or references to other games where the same position occurred.

[4] Common practice is as described here. The *U.S. Chess Federation's Official Rules of Chess* (7th Edition, 2019, page 218, Rule 38A8.e.) offers no symbol for double check and indicates that either "++" or "#" can be used for checkmate.

Variations of Algebraic Notation

The system described above is known as *short algebraic* notation. *Long algebraic* notation, also called *computer* notation because it is used in many chess computer programs, shows both the square the piece is moving from and the square it is moving to, separated by a hyphen or "x". For example:

Short Algebraic	*Long Algebraic*
Kf1	Ke1-f1
Raxe1	Ra1xe1
g8=N#	g7-g8=N#

Figurine algebraic is a variation in which the pieces are represented not by letters but by symbols (KQRBNnbrqk). This is a more international method and reflects the fact that the pieces' names are different words in different languages and often have different initials. Otherwise the system is identical, even to the point that squares are usually identified by Latin letters and Arabic numerals.

Descriptive Notation

Descriptive notation was used very commonly through the middle of the 20th Century. Many older chess books that are still available use it.[5]

Moves are indicated by identifying the piece making the move and its destination square, but with a dash in between. The designation of the pieces is the same except that in descriptive notation *Kt* is used for a knight and *P* for a pawn, but the designation of the board squares is quite different. Each file is identified by the first-rank piece occupying it at the beginning of the game. From White's viewpoint, the files are designated as follows, *from left to right*: QR (queen rook), QKt (queen knight), QB (queen bishop), Q (queen), K (king), KB (king bishop), KKt (king knight), and KR (king rook). These same files run *from right to left* when looked at from Black's side of the board. The ranks are counted from nearest to farthest for *both* players. Thus for Black K1 indicates his first rank, and K8 his eighth rank, just as they do for White. A common opening illustrates these basic differences:

	Descriptive		*Algebraic*	
	White	Black	White	Black
1.	P–K4	P–K4	e4	e5
2.	Kt–KB3	Kt–QB3	Nf3	Nc6
3.	K–K2	K–K2	Ke2	Ke7

Captures are indicated by identifying the capturing and captured pieces with an *x* in between, but without reference to the square they occupy. (Note the contrast: algebraic notation identifies *where* the piece was captured but *not what* piece was captured; descriptive notation identifies *what* piece was captured but *not where* it was captured unless necessary to avoid ambiguity.) In case of ambiguity, as when a piece can

[5] When older chess books using descriptive notation are reissued, they are usually "translated" to algebraic notation.

capture more than one piece of the same type or when two pieces of the same type can capture the same piece or type of piece, the file or rank of one (or both) of the pieces must be added. Check, discovered check, double check, and checkmate are typically indicated by *ch*, *dis ch*, *dbl ch*, and *mate* respectively. Castling may be indicated by 0-0 or 0-0-0, or by *Castle QR/KR*, or by *Castle Long/Short*. *En passant* capture is indicated by writing *ep* or *e. p.* after the move. In pawn promotion the replacement piece is indicated in parentheses (Q). Here are more examples of moves written in descriptive notation.

- PxP ch (pawn captures pawn and gives check)
- KtxQBP (knight captures the pawn on the queen bishop file)
- Kt(K4)xQBP (knight on K4 captures the pawn on the queen bishop file, and we can deduce that the other knight could also have taken this or a different pawn, since the notation specified that it was the knight on K4 that made the capture)
- Kt(K4)xQBP(5) (knight on K4 captures the pawn on QB5, and we can deduce not only that the other knight could also have taken a pawn, but also that the knight on K4 could alternatively have captured a pawn that was on QB3)
- P–KKt8(Q) ch (pawn moves onto the eighth rank of the KKt file and is promoted to a queen, giving check)