

Summary of differences between the FIDE Laws of Chess (effective January 1, 2018) and the US Chess *Official Rules of Chess*, 7th edition

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Here is a brief summary of differences between the FIDE Laws of Chess and the US Chess *Official Rules of Chess*. This is not meant to be a comprehensive list but rather a “top ten” style list of important differences (more likely to arise in practice) and more obscure differences.

There are two sections: “important” differences and “obscure” differences. The differences labeled “important” are more likely to occur in tournament play.

Important Differences

FIDE rule	US Chess rule
1. The arbiter can call fallen flags without a claim by the player or the opponent. The arbiter <i>must</i> call any observed fallen flag.	Only the players may call a fallen flag.
2. The arbiter will correct all observed rules violations (such as illegal moves and “touch move” violations) even if the opponent does not make a claim. (However, the opponent may make a claim if the arbiter does not observe the violation.)	The director will correct illegal moves observed unless either player has less than five minutes remaining in the time control. (On the other hand, variation 11H1 is often used, although not typically announced. Under this variation, the director does not correct illegal moves unless a player makes a claim.) Other rule violations (such as “touch move”) require the opponent to make a claim.
3. The Laws of Chess require that during a game, no player is allowed to have any electronic device whatsoever that is not specifically approved by the arbiter in the playing venue, even if the device is powered off . The regulations of an event may allow players to have such devices provided they are powered off and kept in the player’s bag throughout the game.	US Chess rule 20N forbids a player from having a “mobile phone or other electronic means of communication” in the playing venue unless it is completely switched off. Rule 20N does not specify the penalty for having such a device, leaving it to the tournament director’s discretion. Rule 20N1 provides for a time penalty the first time a player’s cell phone rings.

The penalty specified in the Laws of Chess for having such a device is loss of the game. However, the regulations of an event may allow a lesser penalty.

(Note that both the FIDE and US Chess rules are likely to change in the future as the rules try to keep up with the rapidly changing landscape of electronic cheating.)

FIDE rule

4. You must make your move on the board first and only then record the move **unless** you are claiming a draw by triple occurrence of position or by the 50-move rule (or sealing a move to adjourn a game). If you want to claim a draw by triple occurrence or the 50-move rule and you touch a piece before making the claim, you lose the right to claim the draw.
5. The penalty for the first illegal move is to add two minutes to the opponent's time. A second illegal move results in **loss of the game**. Note that the Laws of Chess consider moving using both hands or pressing the clock without having made a move to be an illegal move.
6. There is no limit how far back in the game an illegal move may be corrected.
7. You must continue recording moves if you have at least five minutes on the clock, **even if** the opponent has less than five minutes remaining. If the time control has an increment or delay of at least 30 seconds per move, **both players** are required to record moves at all times.
8. If the player moves a pawn to the last rank and presses the clock without replacing the pawn with a promotion piece, the player has completed an illegal move (see item 5 for implications) and **the pawn shall be replaced by a queen of the same color as the pawn**. By leaving the pawn on the last rank and pressing the clock, the player loses the right to choose a different promotion piece, even if promoting the pawn to a queen causes stalemate.
9. It is not necessary to have a complete scoresheet to win on time in a non-sudden death time control. Calling your own flag to

US Chess rule

- US Chess rule 15A requires the player to make the move first and only then record the move. However, a commonly used variation (often unannounced) allows a player using a paper scoresheet to write the move on the scoresheet before making the move on the board. (If you are in the habit of writing your move on the scoresheet before executing the move on the board, you are well advised to check whether this variation is in use for the tournament.) US Chess rules allow a player to claim a draw by triple occurrence or the 50-move rule after moving (*determining* the move) but before pressing the clock (*completing* the move).
- The penalty for an illegal move is to add two minutes to the opponent's clock. There is no limit on the number of illegal moves a player may make in a game.
- If an illegal move is not corrected within ten moves (or within two moves in a time pressure situation), the illegal move stands.
- A player may stop recording moves for the rest of the time control if either player has less than five minutes remaining. If the time control has an increment or delay of at least 30 seconds per move, **both players** are required to record moves at all times.
- If a player does not replace a pawn on the last rank with a promotion piece and presses the clock, the opponent may immediately press the clock or stop the clock (stopping the clock is preferable if the time control includes increment) and summon a director. The player does not lose the right of choice of promotion piece, and this is not treated as an illegal move.
- To claim a win on time in a non-sudden death time control, the opponent must have a reasonably complete scoresheet with no more

FIDE rule

prevent the opponent from filling in moves on an incomplete score sheet won't help.

The arbiter may use all available evidence (including the scoresheets of both players) to determine whether the required number of moves have been made.

10. When castling, the player must touch the king first. If the player touches the rook first, castling with that rook is **not allowed**, and the touch move rule is applied to the rook.
11. Using both hands to make a move is considered an **illegal move**. Pressing the clock without making a move is considered an **illegal move**. Both of these violations count toward the "second illegal move results in loss of game" rule (see item 5 above).

US Chess rule

than three missing or incorrect move pairs for the time control. A player may call his own flag as a means of preventing the opponent from filling in missing moves on the scoresheet. (Once the flag has been called, the opponent may not update the scoresheet.)

Only the scoresheet of the player making the claim that the opponent overstepped the time limit may be used to prove that the required number of moves was not made. However, the opponent's scoresheet may be used to prove the claim is incorrect.

When castling, the player must touch the king first (or the king and rook at the same time). However, a variation of rule 10I2 allows the player to touch the rook first.

The US Chess rules do not have an explicit rule requiring moves to be made with one hand (except in blitz). This is implied, however, by rule 16C1. The director may assess a penalty for using both hands to move or for pressing the clock without moving (unless the rules explicitly allow the player to press the clock, such as forcing the opponent to replace a promoted pawn with a piece on his own time). The penalty is likely to be a warning for the first infraction.

Obscure Differences

FIDE rule

1. The regulations of an event shall specify a default time in advance. (The "default time" is the amount of time by which a player may be late for the start of the round.) If the regulations of the event do not specify a default time, then the default time is zero.

If the rules of the competition allow players to arrive late and both players are late, all the elapsed time comes off **White's clock**.

2. If claiming a draw by triple occurrence of position or the 50-move rule, you **must** write

US Chess rule

The game is lost by a player who arrives at the chessboard more than one hour late.

(Organizers may specify a different default time.) If both players are late, the elapsed time from the start of the round until the first player arrives is divided in half, and that time is subtracted from **each player's** clock. (So, for instance, if the first player is forty minutes late, twenty minutes should be subtracted from both sides of the clock.)

If claiming a draw by triple occurrence of position and the player's next move would

FIDE rule

your move on the score sheet **without** making the move on the board. If you make the move on the board, you are no longer considered to be “on the move” (even if your clock is still running), and a draw claim will be rejected.

3. Score sheets **must** be brought up to date at the end of a non-sudden death time control. If one player must complete his score sheet, he does so while his clock is running before he makes a move in the new time control. If both players must complete score sheets, the arbiter may assist, and both clocks are stopped during the reconstruction.
4. It is not allowed to use an inverted rook to mean “queen” when promoting a pawn. If a promotion piece is not readily available, the player must stop the clocks and ask the arbiter for assistance. An upside-down rook is treated as promotion to a rook. If the arbiter sees this, he will turn the rook right side up and the game continues with the pawn promoted to a rook.
5. It is possible to lose on time in situations that are a draw under US Chess rules. For instance, GM Friedel (IM Friedel at the time) lost on time with a king and rook vs. king and knight. Under the FIDE laws of chess, the game is drawn when one player runs out of time only if there is **no legal sequence of moves** by which the opponent could checkmate the player. Since there is a helpmate that allows a king and one knight to checkmate a player with a king and rook, GM Friedel lost the game. (Note: Earlier versions of this page incorrectly attributed this loss to GM Nakamura. The game in question is IM J. Friedel - GM S. Halkias, Bad Wiessee

US Chess rule

cause the third occurrence, the correct procedure is to write the move on the scoresheet but **not** to execute the move on the board. However, under US Chess rules, a player is considered to be “on the move” until the player presses the clock. So, if the player (incorrectly) makes the move on the board but does not press the clock, the player does not lose the right to claim the draw. Also, to claim a draw by the 50-move rule, the player should make the move on the board (if needed to reach the count of 50 moves by both sides) and must claim the draw before pressing the clock.

The director may waive the requirement to bring scoresheets up to date at the end of a non-sudden death time control. In practice, this requirement is almost never enforced.

The US Chess rules explicitly state that, when promoting a pawn, an upside-down rook is to be considered to be a queen.

US Chess rule 14E (insufficient material to win on time) specifies cases where the game is drawn even if one player runs out of time. One of the cases listed in rule 14E is the opponent having only a king and knight (and not having a forced win).

FIDE rule

US Chess rule

Open, Germany, 2007. See [this story on Chess Life Online](#) for more details.)

6. When correcting illegal moves, the arbiter may use his best judgment to determine the time on each clock. (This includes the right of the arbiter to choose not to adjust the clocks at all.)
7. If the players start the game with the colors reversed, before ten moves have been made by both players, the game is annulled and a new game is started. (After ten moves, the game continues with no change.) If the game started with the pieces incorrectly set up, the game is canceled and a new game played in its place, regardless of how many moves have been made when the error has been noticed. (While it is a common fix, it is **incorrect** to fix a reversed king and queen [the most common case of an incorrect initial position] by just swapping the king and queen back to their correct squares.)
8. The game is drawn **without either player making a claim** if the same position occurs on the board after five occurrences of the same position with the same player on the move each time and the same possible moves each time (“five-fold repetition”) or if both players have completed 75 moves without a capture or a pawn move.

In the case of an illegal move, the players do not recover the elapsed time on the clock. The two-minute penalty only applies if the opponent claims the illegal move before determining a move himself.

Starting the game with the colors reversed is treated as an illegal move at the start of the game, as is starting the game with the pieces set up incorrectly. In both cases, the mistake must be corrected within the first ten moves by both players, or the game will continue as is. (While it is a common fix, it is **incorrect** to fix a reversed king and queen [the most common case of an incorrect initial position] by just swapping the king and queen back to their correct squares.)

The TD *may* declare the game drawn if the same position occurs on the board after five consecutive pairs of moves for each player (“five-fold repetition”) or if both players have completed 75 moves without a capture or a pawn move. However, the draw is not automatic, and the TD is not obligated to call the draw. (This is a weaker form of the FIDE rule.)

In the original form of the five-fold occurrence rule, the repetitions had to occur in consecutive four move blocks (one move by each player away from the repeated position and then one move by each player to return to the repeated position). The Laws of Chess have removed that restriction, but the restriction remains in the US Chess rules.

9. A time penalty of two minutes will be added to the clock of the opponent of a player who completes an illegal move regardless of when in the game the illegal move was discovered.

Two minutes will be added to the clock of the opponent of a player who completes an illegal move only if the opponent has not determined a move subsequent to the illegal move.