

Summary of differences between the FIDE Laws of Chess and the US Chess Official Rules of Chess, 7th edition

Last updated: January 1, 2023

This document provides a summary of selected differences between the *FIDE Laws of Chess* (effective Jan 1, 2023) and the *US Chess Official Rules of Chess* (7th Ed.). 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) as well as selected differences that are more obscure.

There are three sections: “important” differences, “obscure” differences, and differences in Online Chess.

Credit for the original version of this document goes to IA/NTD Kenneth (Ken) Robert Ballou (1961-2021).

Important Differences

| | Topic / Area | FIDE rule | US Chess rule |
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| 1. | Calling a Fallen Flag | The arbiter can call fallen flags without a claim by the player or the opponent. The arbiter must call any observed fallen flag. | Only the players may call a fallen flag. |
| 2. | Correcting Rules Violations | 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. | Electronic Devices | <p>Effective 1/1/2023, players may use a “<i>FIDE certified ‘electronic scoresheet’ prescribed for the competition</i>” (see FIDE Laws of Chess, Section 8.1.1.2). This means electronic scoresheets provided by the Organizer or Arbiter, not players’ own personal electronic scoresheets.</p> <p>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. 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.</p> | 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. |
| <p>(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.)</p> | | | |

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| 4. | Electronic Notation Devices (ENDs) | FIDE considers ENDs a type of electronic device, FIDE calls them “electronic scoresheets”, see #3 above. FIDE is considering the use of ENDs (new Laws to come into effect on August 1, 2022), but only when provided to players by the organizer. | US Chess has reviewed and certified several electronic notation devices for use in US Chess-rated events. US Chess’s certification is not a mandate. Organizers and TDs have the ability to not allow players to use ENDs. ENDs may not be used in any national-level events organized by US Chess (click here to see the US Chess policy) ENDs may not be used in any US Chess-rated event that also is FIDE-rated any national-level events organized by US Chess (click here to see the US Chess policy) |
| 5. | Recording of Chess Moves | 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. | 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). |
| 6. | Penalty for Illegal Moves | 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. | 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. |
| 7. | Correcting Illegal Moves or Positions | There is no limit how far back in the game an illegal move may be corrected. | If an illegal move is not corrected within ten moves (or within two moves in a time pressure situation), the illegal move stands. |
| 8. | Requirement to Record Moves | 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. | 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. |
| 9. | Pawn Promotion | 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 6 for implications) and the pawn shall be replaced by a queen of the same color as the pawn. | 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 |

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| | | 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. | does not lose the right of choice of promotion piece, and this is not treated as an illegal move. |
| 10. | <i>Claiming a Win On Time, Non Sudden Death Time Control</i> | 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 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. | To claim a win on time in a non-sudden death time control, the opponent must have a reasonably complete scoresheet with no more than three missing or incorrect move pairs for the time control. A player may call his/her 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. |
| 11. | <i>Castling</i> | 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. | 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. |
| 12. | <i>Using Two Hands to make a Move and Pressing the Clock without Moving</i> | 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 types of violations count toward the "second illegal move results in loss of game" rule (see item 5 above). | 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 16B1. 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/her own time). The penalty is likely to be a warning for the first infraction. |

Obscure Differences

| | Topic / Area | FIDE rule | US Chess rule |
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| 1. | <i>Default Time (No-Show Time)</i> | The rules for a competition shall specify a default time in pre-event publicity if the default time is other than zero or if US Chess Rules shall be used for the default time. (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. | 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.) |

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| | | For example, if the pre-event publicity states “30 minutes” as the default time, and both players are late, all the elapsed time comes off White’s clock. When US Chess Rules are specified in pre-event announcements, follow the procedure shown on the right. | |
| 2. | <i>Draw Claim by Triple Occurrence of Position or 50-Move Rule</i> | If claiming a draw by triple occurrence of position or the 50-move rule, you must write 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. | If claiming a draw by triple occurrence of position and the player’s next move would 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. |
| 3. | <i>Updating Scoresheet at End of Non Sudden Death Time Control</i> | Score sheets must be brought up to date at the end of a non-sudden death time control. If one player must complete his/her score sheet, he does so while his/her 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. | 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. |
| 4. | <i>Using an Inverted Rook to Represent a Queen</i> | 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. | The US Chess rules explicitly state that, when promoting a pawn, an upside-down rook is to be considered to be a queen. |
| 5. | <i>Loss On Time Situations</i> | 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 | 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). |

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| | | versions of this page incorrectly attributed this loss to GM Nakamura. The game in question is IM J. Friedel - GM S. Halkias, Bad Wiessee Open, Germany, 2007. See this story on Chess Life Online for more details.) | |
| 6. | Illegal Move Rulings and Adjusting Remaining Time on Clocks | When correcting illegal moves, the arbiter may use his/her/her 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.) | 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. |
| 7. | Players Playing the Wrong Colors | 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.) | 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.) |
| 8. | 5-Fold Repetition and 75-move Rule | 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. | 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.) |
| <i>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.</i> | | | |
| 9. | Illegal Move Penalty | 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. In Blitz games the penalty is one (1) minute. | 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. Same as FIDE. |

Differences in Online Chess

| Topic / Area | FIDE rule | US Chess rule |
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| 1. | <i>Rating of Online Games</i> | The only online (ONL) chess tournaments allowed for rating by FIDE are events played under strict “hybrid” conditions. FIDE defines “hybrid chess” as games in which all players are physically supervised on-site by an Arbiter while they play online. Remote supervision of players by Arbiters is not sufficient to allow ONL games to be rated by FIDE. Unlike the US Chess Federation, FIDE does not have separate rating systems for ONL and over-the-board chess. | US Chess has separate rating systems for ONL and OTB play under regular, quick and blitz time controls. A game may not be rated under both ONL and OTB systems. Games submitted for rating must have been supervised by a certified tournament director. Directors may supervise online events in any of several ways: 1) Physical presence: A director is present at every site from which play originates 2) Remote presence: Using video monitoring capabilities such as Zoom 3) Game monitoring: Use of automated or computer-assisted observation of all moves during and/or after the event US Chess strongly encourages directors and organizers to use multiple fair play monitoring methods during events and also to conduct post-event analysis of games. |
| 2. | <i>Choice of Online Platforms</i> | FIDE does not have rules governing or requiring the use of specific platforms. | US Chess has reviewed and certified the fair play methods used by several online chess vendors as appropriate for use by tournament directors and organizers in online events to be rated as US Chess ONL play. As of Dec 1, 2021, the certified vendor fair play methods are those applied by Chess.com / Chesskid.com, ICC, and Lichess. Other platforms may be approved in the future. US Chess also has certified the fair play detection method developed by Prof. Kenneth Regan which can be used post-event as a method for reviewing suspect games. Directors may use other (e.g., non-certified) platforms, but incur the risks associated with their decision. NOTE: The US Chess Ethics Committee does not consider US Chess certification of a platform’s fair play method as absolute proof that a player has cheated online. Rather, it is merely an item of evidence. The full burden of proof still rests with the claimant. |
| 3. | <i>Use of Cameras to Monitor Players</i> | FIDE considers the use of “video supervision” through use of webcams or other cameras as optional. The use of microphones is also optional. | Same as FIDE. |
| 4. | <i>Time to Submit Games for Rating</i> | The standards for an Arbiter to submit the results of a FIDE Hybrid ONL event are no different than the standards for an OTB event. | US Chess allows a director up to three (3) weeks to conduct post-event analysis of ONL games that will be submitted for rating. The director may request an extension from US Chess. |

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