

Introduction To Chess

By Brad Horne.

Tactics

It's important to know tactics. Tactics are forcing moves that give you an advantage. The better your tactics are, the better you will be able to calculate and spot winning moves. This is a brief introduction to tactics.

Hanging Piece

This is the most basic form of tactic. This is where a piece is left unprotected and can simply be captured on the next move.



Black has just played Nd4. White can now capture either the bishop on b4 or the pawn on e5. Both of them are "hanging".

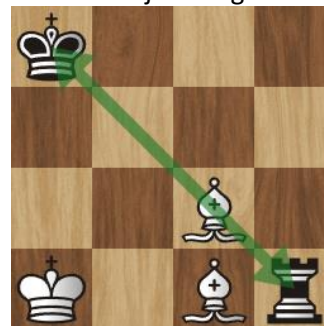
Forks / Double attacks

A fork, or double attack is where a piece attacks more than one thing at the same time.

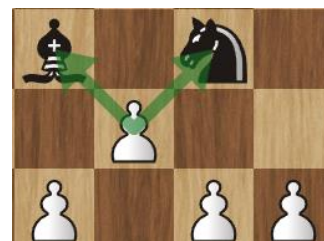


White has just taken the pawn on f7. The result is a fork. The white knight attacks both the queen and the rook and one of them will be captured on the next move.

It's not just knights!



A bishop forking a king and rook.



A pawn forking a bishop and knight.

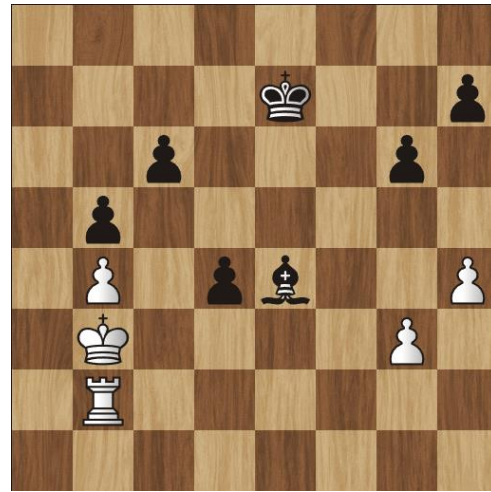
Even Kings can fork things!

Pins

The pin is where a piece is immobilised because it is shielding a higher value piece from attack.



The white bishop pins the black knight to the black queen. The knight cannot move without exposing the queen to attack. If it moves, white will capture the black queen.



White to move and win.

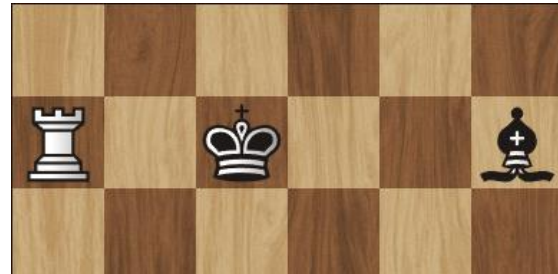
Skewers

A skewer is when a higher value piece that is attacked must move out of the way, revealing an attack on another piece behind it.

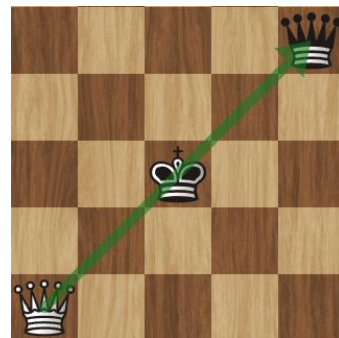


The white bishop attacks the black queen, so it must move. No matter where the black queen goes, the white bishop will be able to capture the black rook. This is a skewer.

Again, many types of skewers work. A queen, rook or bishop can all skewer through a higher value piece to get another piece behind it.



Rook skewer.



A queen skewer.

Discovered Attack

This tactic occurs when a piece moves, it uncovers an attack from a piece that was behind it.



Here, black has just captured a knight on d4 with the queen. White can now win the black queen with a discovered attack and a handy check. Bb5+ Black must deal with the check and at the same time the unprotected black queen is now attacked by the white queen.

Removing the Defender

This tactic arises when a key defender can be captured. With the removal of the defender, the defended piece can then be captured.



White has a mate in 2. Can you find it? What is preventing white from taking the pawn on h7 with the queen?

Back Rank Mate

This all too common situation costs a great many players their games. Even stronger players sometimes fall victim to back rank mates. This is where the defender's pawns (usually) prevent the king from moving off of the back rank and a rook or queen arrives on that same rank.



Black is three pieces up! It is white's turn. White wins with a simple back rank mate. Even though many pieces can get to the back rank to cover, none of them will be defended (they will be hanging) and can be captured.

Ra8+, Bb8, Rxb8+, Rc8, Rxc8+, Nd8, Rxd8+, Be8, Rxe8#. Yes, I know I haven't put the co-ordinates on the board. You should learn to identify squares without having to use a reference! It makes studying a lot easier 😊

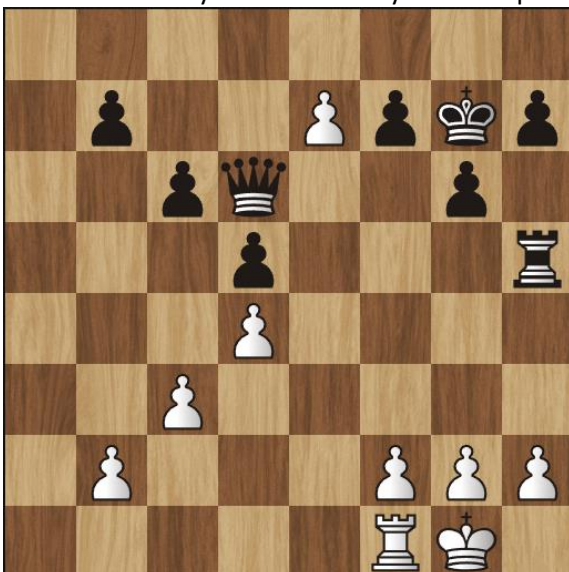
Also notice that if it were black's turn, the same back rank mate idea is available since the h2 square is controlled by the black bishop!

There are a great many more tactical patterns you should get to know ... and know well. These examples are an introduction only. You should practice your tactics by studying them and using tools like tactics trainers on websites like lichess.org or chesstempo.com.

Know the Game

Pawn Promotion

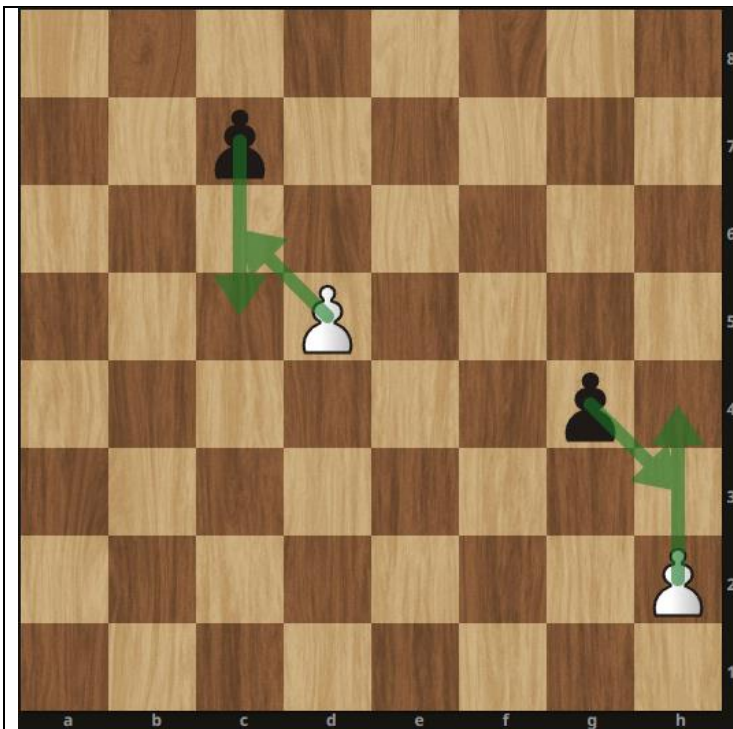
Remember that you do not always have to promote to a queen! Sometimes promoting to a knight is better.



White can promote the e pawn. If white promotes it to a queen, then black will win with Qxh2, checkmate. If white promotes to a knight, it's check to the black king and it forks the white queen. White will emerge a piece up.

En Passant

Make sure you know this. If a pawn moves 2 squares forward from its starting position, passing an enemy pawn, then the enemy pawn can capture that pawn as if it had only moved one square forward.



If black plays the pawn two squares forward to c5, “passing” the white pawn, then white can play dxc6 (pawn takes c6) as if the black pawn had only advanced one square.

Equally, if white plays h4, then black can play gxh3.

But remember, there is one catch: you can only do it on the following move. If you do not capture the pawn en passant immediately, the option is no longer available. You cannot do it later!

“En Passant” is French for “in passing”.

Castling

You must know how to castle. Whether you castle kingside or queenside, the same thing happens – the king moves two squares toward the rook and then the rook jumps over it to sit next to the king.



White before castling kingside (noted as 0-0) and also called castling “short” and black before castling queenside (noted as 0-0-0) and also called castling “long”.



The position after white castles kingside and black castles queenside.

There are a few limitations. You cannot castle out of check. You cannot castle if the king has moved. You cannot castle if the rook you are castling with has moved. Finally, you cannot castle through check. White could not castle queenside because the black bishop covers d1 and black could not castle kingside because the white bishop covers f8.

Opening Principles

Learning openings at the beginner level is almost pointless. You could spend hours on all the variations of the Ruy Lopez opening, memorising many lines, but your opponent is unlikely to play the correct lines anyway, so it's not advisable for beginners to memorise openings to much depth. However, studying openings will not be harmful and can only help you.

In the beginning you are better off studying only opening principles which you can apply any time to get through the opening unscathed. The following principles are a guide to how to start thinking about playing the opening well enough to start with.

Development

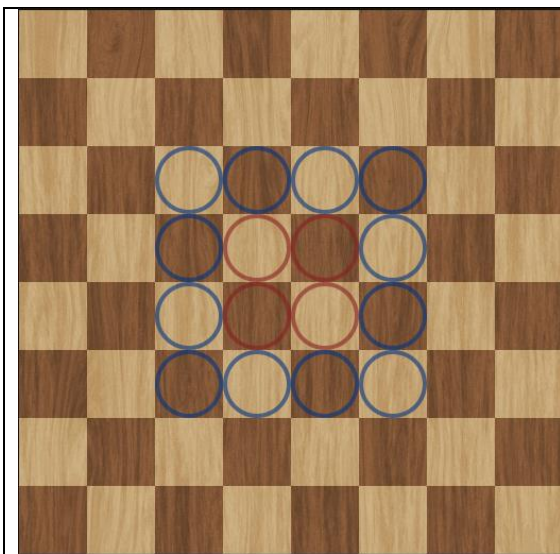
The number 1 goal of the opening is getting all your pieces out and involved in the game. If you neglect this, you will be fighting against an army with only half an army! Develop your pieces towards the centre, knights especially.

A knight in the corner of the board controls just 2 squares. On the edge of the board, a knight controls 4 squares. A knight in the centre controls 8 squares. Developing your pieces towards the centre makes them more powerful and you will have better control of the centre.

The player with superior development will often win the game. Gambits are opening variations where a player sacrifices a pawn in order to get a significant lead in development. That lead in development usually results in an attack, getting the pawn back or even winning the game.

Controlling the Centre

The centre of the board is important to control. In the opening you often end up fighting for control of the centre. Why? If you control the centre, you can use it for your pieces where they will be more powerful and your opponent cannot use the centre for their pieces.



The red circles are in the centre of the board (e4, d4, e5, d5). These are the most important squares to fight for.

The blue circles are in the centre too, but these squares are not quite as important as the red ones, but don't neglect them.

You will find that many opening moves are where you place pieces or pawns inside the centre area.

Don't Move the Same Piece More Than Once

If you develop a piece and then move that same piece again, you are wasting moves! There are exceptions to this, but generally, in the opening you want to get each piece into the game and the fastest way to do that is using one turn each! If you play Bc4, you should not then "change your mind" and play the same bishop to b5. This is related to another topic called tempo (time). If your opponent makes a move and you can develop a piece and at the same time attack something that they must respond to, then you are winning a tempo.

Don't Bring Your Queen Out Too Early

In the early game, bringing your queen out too early makes it easy for your opponent to develop with tempo by attacking your queen. In the following example, black wins many tempi and is in a winning position out of the opening.



In this crazy line, white has suffered badly because of bringing the queen out too early and then allowing black to develop all of their pieces with each developing move attacking the white queen again. Don't do this!

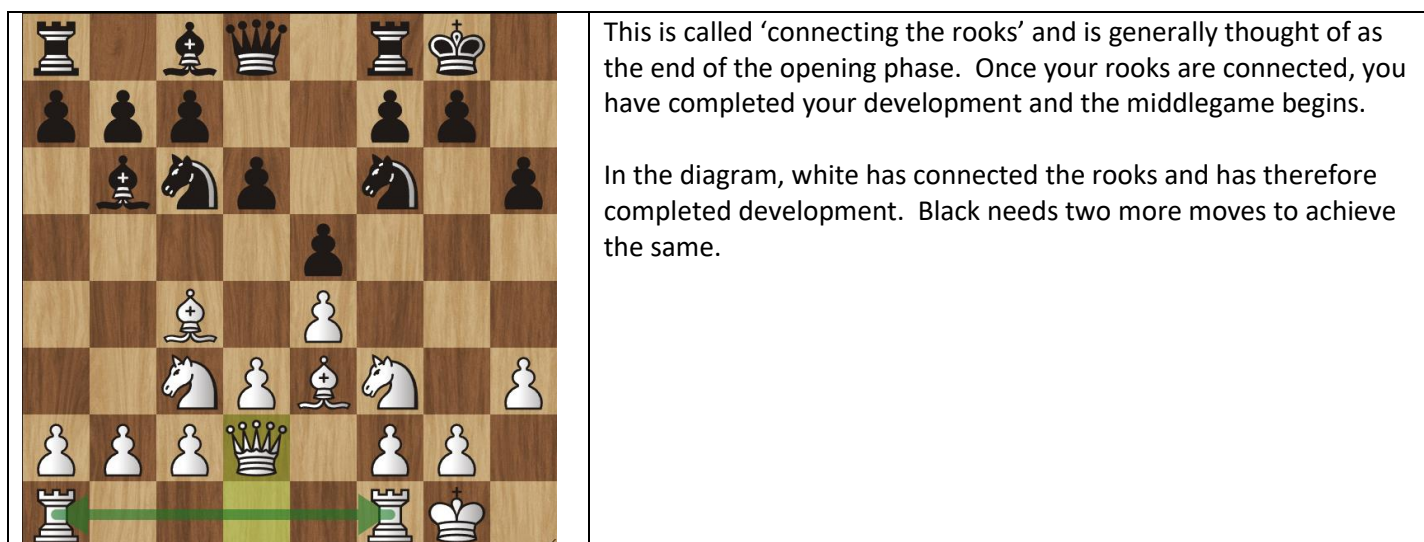
There are exceptions of course. In the Scandinavian Defense, it is perfectly ok to capture a pawn with your queen, but then it is often brought straight back to a square where it cannot be attacked again... at least, not quickly.

Get Castled!

Getting your king to safety by castling is an important step in the opening. Failing to castle can result in lost games due to unexpected checks or attacks to the unsafe king. Again, there are exceptions, but as a general rule, you should be sure to castle fairly quickly.

Connect Your Rooks to Complete Development

Once you have developed all your pieces and castled, only the queen need to be developed somewhere useful so that the rooks can see each other.



Dealing With Common Beginner Traps


You will encounter players who try to finish the game early with quick traps. It's important that you know how to deal with the most common attempts to finish you off right out of the opening.

Openings are filled with lots of traps, some openings more than others. As you improve, you will learn to deal with them... or at least be able to know which moves might be really risky.

The first one, the Fool's mate is just something to be aware of so you don't blunder the game in 2 moves! Knowing it might even allow you to win in 2 moves!


Fool's Mate

The fool's mate arises when the g and f pawns are pushed allowing a diagonal check from the h file. Either side can make this mistake, which only a fool would play! Guess why it's called the Fool's mate?!

	<p>White has played the worst two possible opening moves, g4 and f3 (or f4) in either order. The black queen arrives on h4 and the game is over. It's checkmate.</p> <p>Black can do the same mistake</p> <p>This is only here to show you the quickest checkmate possible so you don't make the mistake! If you were following the opening principles, you wouldn't make these moves anyway, but it's still good to know, just in case your opponent doesn't!</p>
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Scholars Mate

This is one of the first opening attacks that new players learn. And online, it appears to be quite successful.

	<p>The game goes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1.e4... e52.Bc4... Nc63.Qh5 (white is threatening checkmate) ...Nf6?? (a losing blunder)4.Qxf7# <p>Don't let yourself get checkmated like this. In lichess, 3...Nf6?? Has been played over 28 thousand times!!</p> <p>How do you avoid it? Play 3... g6, but only because the e5 pawn is defended by the black knight. White might try 4.Qf3, again threatening to win immediately with Qxf7 checkmate. At that point, 4... Nf6 is perfectly ok now and the game goes on.</p>
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If black plays Bc5 instead of Nc6 there is another danger:



- 1.e4... e5
- 2.Bc4... Bc5
- 3.Qh5.

Now not only is mate threatened on f7, the black e pawn is also undefended and attacked. Many new players will play

3...g6??

Can you see what is wrong with that move?! Something about a fork!

Instead, the only real equaliser is 3...Qe7. Black may even be a little better since white's queen is a target and it must be moved again, which violates two opening principles. Do you know which 2?

Wayward Queen Attack

Similar to the scholar's mate, the wayward queen attack is when white tries Qh5 immediately after e4:



- 1.e4... e5
- 2.Qh5

There is no mate threat, but a LOT of new players immediately want to attack that queen. However, doing so loses. If you play 2...g6, again, there's a tactic that wins a pawn and a rook for white.

If you play 2...Nf6, you still lose the pawn because it's hanging.

The correct move here is 2...Nc6, developing a piece and defending the hanging pawn. Again, that white queen is a target.

White then often transposes back into the scholar's mate with 3.Bc4.

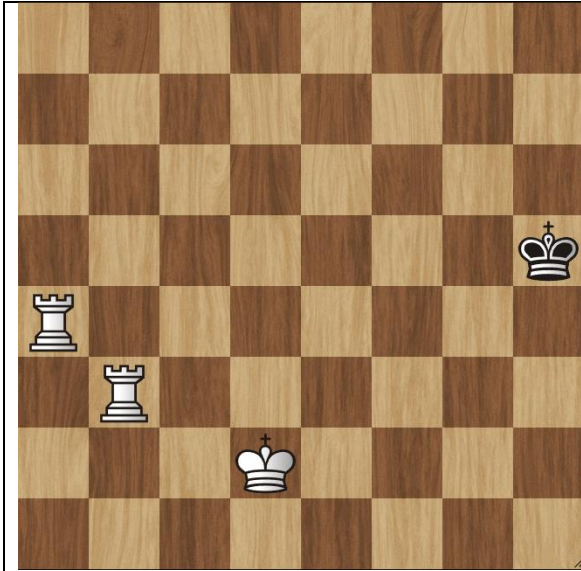
You should play out the wayward queen attack and the scholar's mate with a friend so that you get to know the correct moves to defend off this premature attack!

Endgame Checkmates

The next thing you should know about is how to checkmate your opponent when the game is nearly over. You have played well, taken advantage of your opponent's mistakes and you have a rook left and your opponent has only a king, but your opponent is not resigning. That's ok, they are under no obligation to resign. Now you have to checkmate them. Can you do it? Well, this section is an introduction to doing so.

2 Rooks or Rook and Queen (Ladder Mate)

The easiest of checkmates against a lone king is when you have 2 rooks or a rook and queen.



Because a rook controls an entire rank and an entire file, the idea is to use that to take line after line away from the defending king. Like walking up a ladder.

Starting from the diagram, the mate is

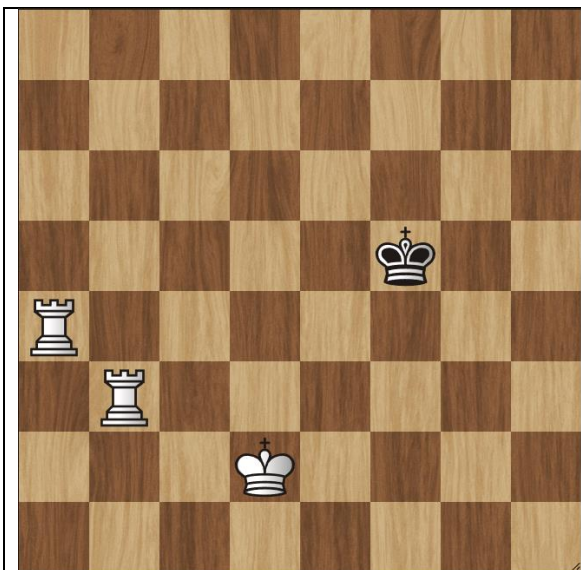
Rb5+... Kg6
Ra6+... Kf7
Rb7+... Ke8
Ra8#

A classic ladder mate.

There is actually a quicker mate, but it's a little harder to see.

Can you see it? I'll give you a hint... it's not even check!

The only trick is if the king is closer, you don't lose a rook by blindly checking. If the king starts off at f5 instead, then you have to adjust your approach!



If the king gets close to your rooks, you still have to be careful.

Rb5+... Ke6
Ra6+... Kd7
Rb7+... Kc8

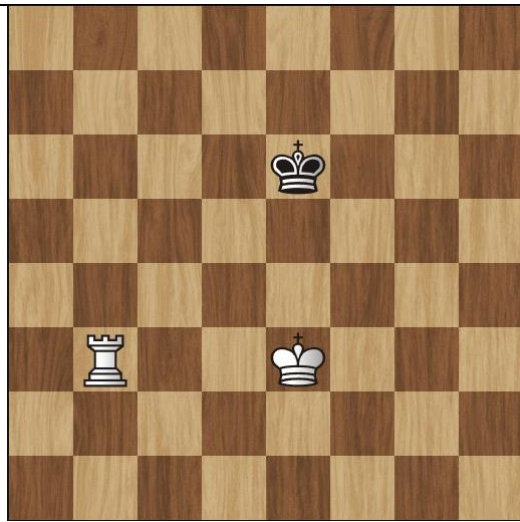
The black king is attacking the b rook, so Ra8+ doesn't checkmate, instead it loses a rook.

Rg7... Kb8 (preventing Ra8 checkmate)
Rh6... Kc8
Rh8#

Note that if the A rook was a queen, you don't need to worry since the queen would defend the rook.

1 Rook

You can checkmate with a single rook vs a lone king, but it is beyond the scope of these notes to detail every way to do it. There are two methods... the box method (which is quicker but a bit harder to do) and the standard one. Here I will detail a "standard" method from a given position.



I want to push the black king back to the 8th rank and checkmate it there.

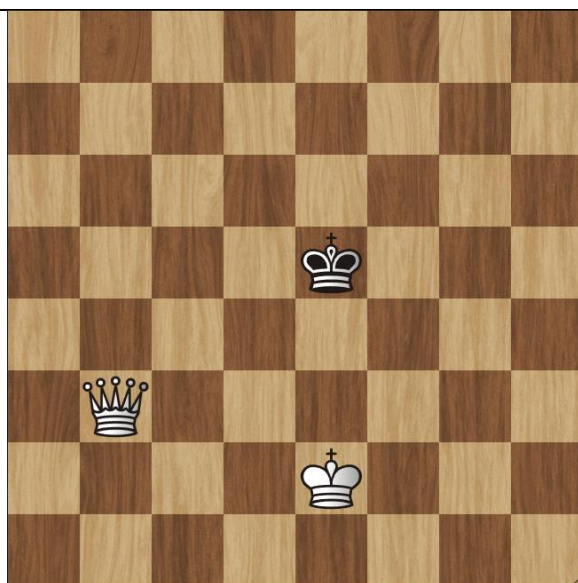
- 1.Rb5... cutting the king off at the 5th rank.
- 1...Kd6
- 2.Kd4. The kings are lined up, facing each other. Whichever way it moves, we put the rook as far away as possible on the opposite side the king went.
- 2...Ke6. The king went right, so we move left with the rook.
- 3.Ra5...Kf6 (if Kd6, we play Ra6 immediately and the black king is cut off from another rank)
- 4.Ke4...Kg6
- 5.Kf4...Kh6
- 6.Kg4... Kg6
- 7.Ra6+ forcing the king back another rank.

Continuing on, 7...Kf7. 8.Kf5. Again the kings are lined up. 8...Kg7. The king went right, so we place our rook as far left as we can... even though it's already there. 9.Rb6...Kh7. 10.Kg5... Rg7. 11.Rb7+ and another rank is cut off to the black king. It should have run left! 11...Kf8. 12.Kf6...Ke8. This time black is running left, toward the rook. Since it went left, we put our rook all the way to the right as far as we can. 13.Rh7... Kd8. 14.Ke6...Kc8. 15.Kd6...Kb8. 16.Kc6...Ka8. 17.Kb6...Kc8 and 18.Rh8 is checkmate. This standard pattern is relatively easy to learn. You should try practicing it against a computer or train it with a friend.

Queen

You can checkmate your opponent with a queen in exactly the same way as you would a rook. Or, you can do it faster with what I call the "knight's distance" method. I use this method as it's really easy to do, even under blitz conditions and it doesn't take too many moves.

The first step is to get your queen a knight's distance away from the defending king and then copy the move that the king makes. If it goes right one square, you go right one square with your queen. If it goes forward one square, so do you. You do this until the opponent is in a 2 square box and then you bring in your king to help deliver the checkmate. Just be careful not to stalemate the opponent!

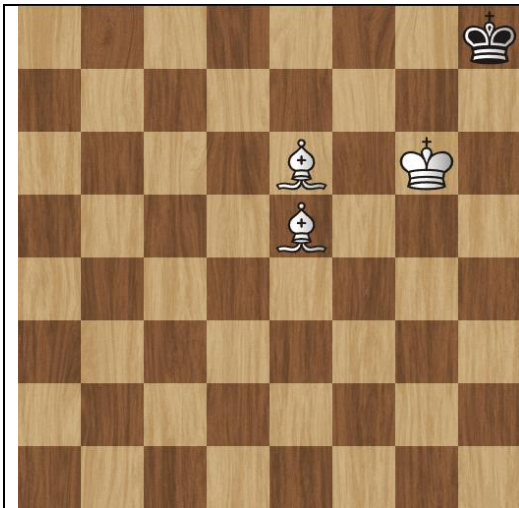


Starting from the position at the left:

1. Qc4 (getting a knight's distance from the king) ... Kf5
2. Qd4 (the king went right, so does the queen)...Ke6
3. Qc5 (the king went up and left, so does the queen) ...Kf6
4. Qd5...Ke7
5. Qc6...Kd8
6. Qb7...Ke8
7. Qc7...Kf8
8. Qd7...Kg8
9. Qe7 (the black king has only 2 squares left, g8 and h8) ...Kh8
10. Kf3 (and definitely NOT Qf7 or it would be stalemate. It's time to bring the king in to finish the job.)... Kg8
11. Kg4...Kh8
12. Kg5...Kg8
13. Kg6...Kh8
14. Qg7#

2 Bishops

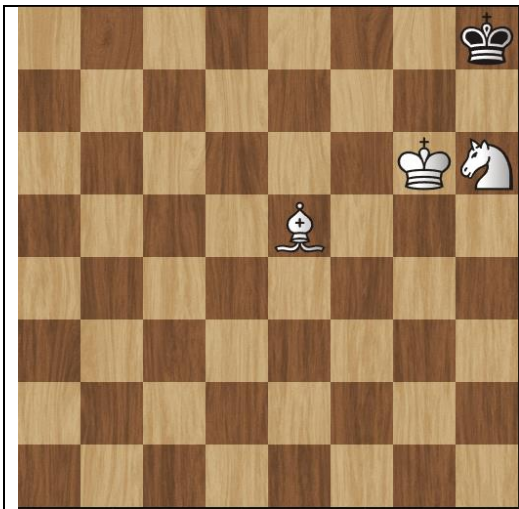
This is definitely possible, but outside the scope of these notes.



It is possible to force this kind of position, but the variations are lengthy. This is best left to a study dedicated to it.

Bishop and Knight

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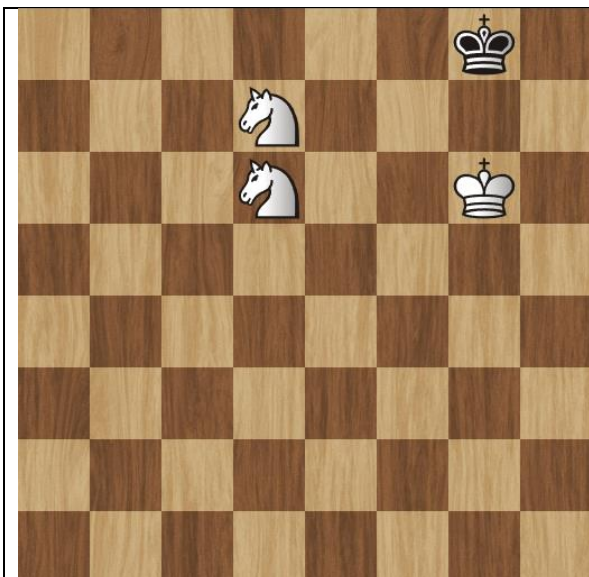


It is possible to force this kind of position, but the variations are lengthy. This is even more difficult than 2 bishops.

This is best left to a study dedicated to it.

2 Knights

This is only possible if the defender has a pawn as well and it's incredibly tricky... and beyond the scope of these notes. It is impossible to force checkmate with just two knights. Unless the defender blunders!



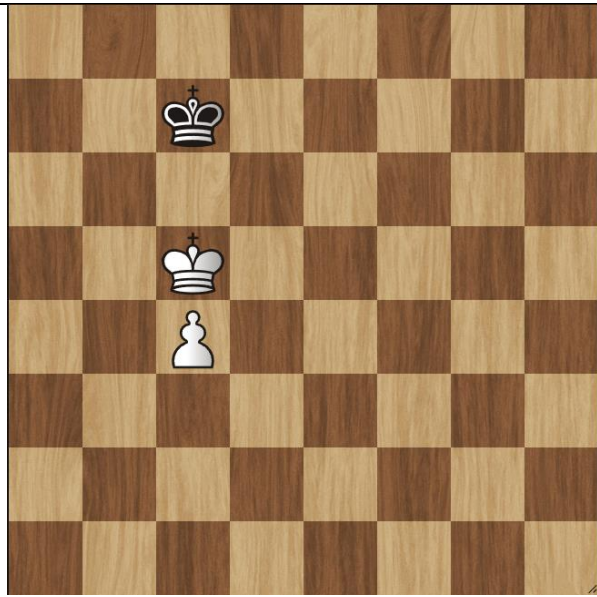
The only way to deliver a checkmate requires black to blunder it.

As an example, from the position at the left, white can play Nf6+

At that point, the black king should go to f8. If instead black blunders by going to h8, white can checkmate with Nf7.

King and Pawn

You should know how to win when you have just a pawn and the opponent doesn't. You should also know when it's a draw and how to draw when you are defending. King and pawn endgames are quite common, so it is good to know. However, it is surprisingly difficult to master! Again, this is only an introduction and you should study this in more detail when you can.



Black to move, it's a win for white.

White to move, it's a draw.

At this moment, the kings are in "opposition". Whoever has to move has the disadvantage when the kings are in opposition.

Let's assume it's black to move. Black must give way.

1...Kd7 (if Kc8, white plays Kc6 regaining the opposition)

2.Kb6...Kc8.

3.Kc6...Kd8.

4.Kb7...Kd7.

5.c5 followed by c6, c7 and c8=Q

The black king had to move and the white king advances to a point where it controls the queening square.

Now let's start again, this time, with white to move. This is a draw.

1.Kb5...Kb7 (black gets the opposition, white must move).

2.Kc5... Kc7. 3.Kd5...Kd7. White is making no progress. If white tries to go too far (such as Ke5), the black king will jump forward, closer to the pawn (Kc6) and white will have to come back to defend the pawn. The only other options white has is to move back or push the pawn. They both equate to the same thing. If white takes a step back with the king, black follows and again takes the opposition. It's the same position as if the pawn had moved forward, so let's look at that.

4.c5... Kc7. The black king stays directly in front of the pawn. What now?! It's either back with the king or forward with the pawn again.

5.c6... Kc8. Again, the king stays directly in front of the pawn. And that's the key to defending this. The defending king either grabs the opposition if the king comes up, or stays directly in front of the pawn.

6.Kd6 the king steps up, so ...Kd8 grabbing the opposition once again.

7.c7...Kc8. And white has the miserable choice of either abandoning the pawn letting it be captured, or play

8.Kc6 and it's stalemate.

General Tips

- Practice! Play online or over the board. Playing definitely helps you improve. Try to apply what you learn in your study time. Analyse your games and find out what was good and what was bad. When you find something you are failing at, study it so you don't fail next time!
- Mix study with play. Studying too much isn't as effective as it sounds. Always try to practice what you learn in your games. Try to balance your studying and playing. Don't play too much and forget about learning!
- Do not be concerned about your rating. Just learn, play and enjoy!
- Don't play only blitz. Blitz is fun, sure, and so is bullet, but these do not teach you anything. When someone asks "how do you improve at blitz", one very correct answer is "don't play it". There is truth in that. The way to improve is to first slow down and think hard about your moves. Take your time. Calculate correctly. When you do this, and the more you do it, the better your blitz becomes. If you lose on time in a winning position, it's better for your learning than blundering into a completely lost position and winning on time.
- Practice tactics online with tactics trainers on lichess.org or chesstempo.com. I can't stress this enough!