

Prepare With Chess Strategy

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and Woman International Master of Chess*

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For James Eade, President of the U.S. Chess Trust, a former Boy Scout, and the author of my favorite chess primer,
Chess For Dummies.

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From *To take, or not to take*, there are two more rules:

4. Capture with your lowest-value chessman first.
5. If all the attackers are of higher value than all the defenders, do not capture.

Material Versus Activity

Force is usually the most important strategic element. That is, the side ahead on points is most often the winning side. However, there are exceptions. Count how many points White is ahead in Figure 2.6.

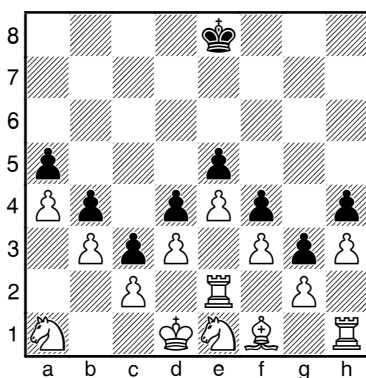


Figure 2.6. Exercise: Count the material, then play from here.
White to move.

Since each side has a king and the same number of pawns, White is ahead two rooks, one bishop, and two knights. Counting the bishop as three points, White is ahead 19 points ($5 + 5 + 3 + 3 + 3 = 19$). Normally, 19 points ahead in material would be winning. For Figure 2.2, the two-rook checkmate, just 10 points ahead was enough. Figure 2.6, however, is different from most positions.

To continue this exercise, play Figure 2.6 with a partner or play both sides yourself. White moves first. What happens after 10 moves (that is, 10 moves by White and 10 moves by Black)?

When chess campers ages 7-12 played out Figure 2.6, the most common first move played by White was 1. Re3. Black usually responded 1...dxe3 or 1...fxe3. White's rook sacrifice (1. Re3) is correct. After **1. Re3 dxe3 2. d4**, White activates the bishop on f1 (for example Bc4) as well as the knight on e1 (by moving it to d3). As the white chessmen become active, they will take the black pawns. Eventually, they will checkmate the black king.

After 1. Re3 (or any other move by White), Black should not capture. Instead, Black should move his king. Then Black should keep moving his king on every move, i.e. 1...Ke8, 2...Ke7, 3...Ke8, 4...Ke7. For Figure 2.6, Black should not capture any of White's chessmen, ever! When I presented the Figure 2.6 exercise to high school chess club students, they realized Black's correct strategy.

Material is useful only if it can become mobile (active). As previously noted, the values of the chessmen are based on their mobility. With mobility, 19 points ahead is a win. Without activity, as in Figure 2.6, White cannot win without mistakes from Black.

Although being ahead on *force* is often a winning advantage, sometimes you also need greater *space*, or a favorable *pawn structure*, or more *time*, or another strategic advantage. The common elements of strategy are intertwined. After seeing Figure 2.6, GM Valentin Yotov commented that Black's *space* advantage caused White's problems. *Space* is the topic of the next chapter. *Pawn structure* is also important in Figure 2.6. Pawn chains often hamper bishops and, in Figure 2.6, they disabled White's army. You will learn more about pawn chains in Chapter 4.

Chapter 8

In Chapter 7, I wrote about my first two wins in the UNT Spring Open. In round 3, I was paired with FIDE Master (FM) Keith Hayward. In past tournaments, I have drawn Hayward once and lost to him four times. By move 43, this game looked like loss number five for me. Then, on move 44, Hayward made a mistake, giving up a bishop for free. I was back in the game. Unfortunately, I was also in time trouble. The time control was game in 60 minutes with no delay. I had less than five minutes for the rest of my moves. As I took the bishop, I offered a draw. Hayward refused. Six moves later, we reached Figure 8.2 with me as Black to move.

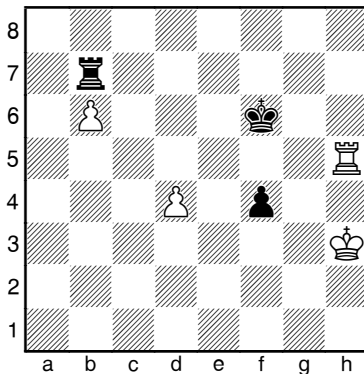


Figure 8.2. Exercise: Time trouble for Black. Black to move.

I picked up my rook on b7, touching the white pawn on b6 with it. I said, “I adjust” when I realized that 50...Rxb6 lost to 51. Rh6+, skewering my king to my rook. I started to move my rook to b8 instead. Hayward said that I’d touched his pawn. The tournament director, my son William, asked me if I touched the white pawn. I said that I had. William said, “Then you have to take it. It’s the same rule you teach to your students.” I took the pawn and resigned four moves later. After the tournament, I felt worse about my poor sportsmanship than about hanging my rook. I emailed Hayward that evening:

Time (on the clock)

I apologize for arguing the touch move. I was excited to be back in the game after you dropped the bishop. However, that's no excuse for not immediately resigning after I touched the b-pawn with my rook. Sorry about trying to, at least for a few seconds, play a different move with the rook instead. I was too excited by the win of the bishop and a bit hyped up from time trouble too. Congrats on winning the first-ever UNT rated tournament! I appreciate your supporting my son's first directing effort. (Alexey Root, personal communication, March 28, 2015)

As recommended by the *Pamphlet* (p. 76), “Be humble and respectful of your opponent (don't get too happy when you win), and be a good sport (don't get too upset when you lose).” My last game in the UNT Spring Open showed that I need to improve both the quality of my character and of my chess moves. The *Pamphlet* stated that staying true to the Scout Law will help you play chess. The Scout Law states, “A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.” These character traits are important for the challenges all of us face in our chess games and in our lives.

Quiz

The answers follow immediately after the quiz. Decide if each statement is true or false.

1. You can think on your opponent's time.
2. If you change your mind about moving a piece after touching it, say “I adjust” and move a different piece instead.