



C&O Family Chess Center

“Chess Can Make You Smarter”

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Tournament Basics for Beginning Tournament Players (and Parents)

Chess tournaments are the next step for players who want competition beyond their immediate family and friends. Before deciding to play in tournaments a player should make sure that he, or she, knows all the chess rules, including “en passant” pawn captures, rules of castling, all parts of the “touch-move” rule, and how to record the moves on a standard score-sheet. Most of these may be found in the *C&O* reprint “Chess Basics for New Players.”

With chess tournaments you begin to meet players from a wider area and with a much wider range of experience. Tournaments may be held on a grade, school, or club level, or on wider levels from town or county to state, national, and international events.

At these higher levels, tournament competition in the U.S. is overseen by the U.S. Chess Federation (USCF), official U.S. representative to the World Chess Federation (F.I.D.E. – Fédération Internationale Des Échecs). Players in these tournaments receive “ratings” calculated using a mathematical formula

and based on a player’s performance in tournament games. The better a player is, the higher his rating will be.

All players in *C&O* scholastic programs are given a “club rating” (their Chess.com Live-Rapid rating) which corresponds somewhat to the official USCF ratings.

Players wishing to participate in USCF rated tournaments must be members of the USCF. Membership for scholastic players is inexpensive, and is available directly from the USCF at uschess.org.

There are two major types of chess tournament, “round-robin” (RR) tournaments and “Swiss-system” (SS) tournaments. In both of these players are not eliminated and play every round. Here are more details of both, and of other common tournament rules and practices. Any questions about the rules or procedures should be asked of the Tournament Director (TD) or his assistants.

Round Robin Tournaments

Round-robin tournament sections are those in which every player plays against every other player. They are the “fairest” kind of tournament but not as practical with a large number of players.

The most common RR tournaments are “quads” (with four player sections) which have three rounds (3RR). Every section is an independent tournament with players who have roughly similar ratings. Another benefit is that the pairings are pre-determined for each round and players do not have to wait between rounds for the next pairings to be made. This can speed things up a lot

for younger players.

Swiss System Tournaments

Swiss-system tournament sections pool all the players and make pairings according to official guidelines. They are particularly useful when a winner must be determined in a few rounds but there are a lot of players.

In a Swiss system tournament, a clear winner may be determined from a field of 32-64 players in as few as five rounds. However, those at the bottom of the ratings are paired against those at the top during the first few rounds, usually resulting in one, or more, early round losses. Even without being eliminated this is a tough experience for young, or inexperienced, players.

Swiss-system tournaments tend to last longer than round-robin sections as each round after the first cannot be paired until the results of the previous round are in and recorded. If some games drag on to the limit, everyone must wait.

Writing the Moves

Recording the moves *is required* in all USCF rated tournaments (except “quick” and “blitz” time controls). Information on how to do this is available in the *C&O* summary “How to Read and Write Chess Notation.”

We used to teach this skill in all of our scholastic programs (being able to go over one’s games is essential to the improvement of one’s abilities), but since Chess.com games are recorded automatically we now teach this only to more advanced players. In club-rated

tournaments we ask players in 2nd grade or above to record their moves, *if they know how*. Players *not* recording may have a time penalty imposed upon them at the tournament director’s discretion.

Using a Chess Timer

Chess timers, or chess clocks, are used to ensure that games are finished in the allotted time. Time is normally divided evenly between the two players. On Chess.com all games have a “time control.” A player who runs out of time on Chess.com loses.

Since many young players do not own a chess clock, lower level games are often played without one. The director reserves the right to place a clock on any game as soon as one becomes available. In such cases the remaining time is divided equally. Players with less than five minutes remaining on their clock are allowed to stop recording their moves.

Clock Rules

1. Black gets to decide on which side to place the clock.
2. Each player must push the button with the same hand that is used to move the pieces.
3. No one is permitted to touch the clock except when it is their turn, and only to push the button or pause it to call the TD (raise your hand).
4. When a player’s time expires no one except the player, or his opponent, is allowed to point this out.
5. The clocks may not be paused or stopped for any reason except to summon the TD (raise your hands).

Try to make sure you have gone to the bathroom before the round starts. If you make an error writing, we suggest moving to the next blank line and continuing from there. If you wish to correct your scoresheet, you may do it with your clock running, or after the game.

Common Abbreviations in Tournament Announcements

3RR or 5RR, etc. A round-robin tournament of 3 or 5 rounds, etc.

4SS or 5SS, etc. A Swiss-system tournament of 4 or 5 rounds, etc.

G/30 or G/45, etc. A time control of “game in 30 minutes,” “game in 45 minutes,” etc., meaning that each player gets 30 (or 45, etc.) minutes on his clock to make all of their moves.

30/90, SD/1 A primary time control of 30 moves in 90 minutes followed by a secondary time control of “sudden death” (all the rest of your moves) in an hour.

EF Entry Fee

\$\$ Prizes

\$\$b/x Prizes based on “x” (number of entries)

Tournament Restrictions

Parents and other spectators are not permitted in the playing area. Many children are distracted or intimidated by having their own, or an opponent’s parents (or

friends), watching a game. Please remain in the area provided while games are going on. Awards may also be given out in this area as sections finish.

Players who have finished their games are also requested to leave the playing area until their next round.

Parents who have been designated as volunteers may remain in the playing area but must follow all rules listed below. Players are permitted to stand and stretch their legs during their game. However, the following rules are to be strictly observed by players or other spectators who may be in the playing area at any given time.

1. **NO ONE**, but the Tournament Director (TD) or his assistants, is permitted to talk to the players during a game. If you witness an illegal move, or other irregularity, tell the TD, but **SAY NOTHING** to the players.

2. It is up to each player to observe his/her opponent’s moves, and the time left on the clock. When an infraction of the rules occurs, or the opponent runs out of time, it is the responsibility of each player to tell the opponent. If there is a dispute between the players, the clocks may be paused while the TD is found (raise your hands).

3. When a player announces “checkmate” or declares the game “drawn” **it is up to the opponent to verify the position.** You may leave the position on the board while the TD is summoned (raise your hands) to verify. After a game is over and the players have reset or removed the board it is too late to request the TD for a ruling. However, if you request the TD and your opponent disturbs the position, he/she may be subject to a penalty, including loss of the game.

4. When a game is over **both players** must report the results to the scorekeeper. Games with unreported results may be counted as lost by both players.

Be a responsible player!
Know the rules! Have fun!