



# Swindon Chess Club

## OTB Playing Guide

### About this Guide:

This guide is intended to give newcomers a flavour of how Over-The-Board (OTB) Chess is conducted when playing a formal rated game. What it is not trying to do, is replicate the official chess rules around tournament chess play. For the official chess rules, please see the references in the Appendix at the end of this document. Where there is an ambiguity/discrepancy between this document and the official rules, then the official rules take precedence.

### Starting the Game:

- All phones must be placed on silent with no vibration alert, or turned off completely before play commences. The same goes for all other electronic devices, including smart watches. If your phone or any other device makes a sound, vibrates, has a screen wake up etc. during a game, you forfeit the game. In some tournaments, phones must be fully off and placed on the table for the arbiter to see, or not on your person at all.
- In some very serious tournaments, even digital watches may not be permitted to be worn and metal detectors / pat-downs may be used as an anti-cheating procedure, but this is unlikely to be seen at the club level.
- The chess clock should be set to silent mode, so as not to disturb other players when its time runs out.
- Games are started with a customary hand-shake at the same time as the player with the black pieces starts the clock, often accompanied by a verbal "good luck". Games are often concluded with a hand-shake and a verbal "good game" or "well played". This is the etiquette to show good sportsmanship to your opponent and it is bad-form to reject the hand-shake. (there are however exceptions, for example for religious or personal contact health reasons)
- If the opponent does not turn-up to the board on time, it is common practice to start the clock without them. If playing with the white pieces, you can then make your move and press the clock, or if playing with the black pieces you just wait. In either case, their time will then tick down. In classical format tournaments, it is often the case that the opponent is "timed-out" after 30 minutes and their game defaulted (i.e. loses by default, allowing you to claim the win). Remember to still record the game on your scoresheet and your move if applicable, as explained below.

### Time Controls:

- **Standard** time control (also known as **Classical**) is when games have a thinking time of at least 60 minutes for each player.
- **Rapid** time control is when either all the moves must be completed in a fixed time of more than 10 minutes but less than 60 minutes for each player, or the time allotted plus 60 times any increment is of more than 10 minutes but less than 60 minutes for each player.
- **Blitz** time control is when either all the moves must be completed in a fixed time of 10 minutes or less for each player, or the allotted time plus 60 times any increment is 10 minutes or less for each player.



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### Recording the Game:

- For Classical time control rated games, you must record your and your opponent's moves as the game is played, on your scoresheet. You are not permitted to write your move down before you make your move, only after you have made your move and pressed the clock. You must not make another move until your previous move has been recorded.
- In Classical time control games, with either no time increment or a time increment of less than 30 seconds, you are permitted to stop recording moves once your clock's time drops below 5 minutes. You do not need to restart recording moves, if the time subsequently goes back over 5 minutes due to increment.
- In Classical time control games with a time increment of 30 seconds or more, then the move recording must be continued until the very end.
- In Rapid and Blitz time control games, then the recording of moves is not required (although you may still do so if you wish).
- In short algebraic notation, King side castling is recorded as "O-O" and Queen side castling as "O-O-O". Checks are noted by a "+" suffix and Check-Mate by a "#" suffix. Taking is denoted by "x", such as "exf" for the e-pawn taking the f-pawn, or "Nxb3" for a Knight taking something on b3. En-passant is denoted by the suffix "e.p." such as "exf (e.p.)". Simple moves are recorded as for example, "d4" for moving the pawn to d4, or "Ke2" for moving the King to e2. When there is ambiguity about which piece moved, the file and/or rank should be recorded, such as "Nbd2" to indicate that it was the Knight on the b-file that moved to d2, or "R1b7" to indicate that it was the Rook on the 1st rank that moved to the b7. In rare cases both file and rank may be needed to resolve the ambiguity. Pawn promotion is indicated by the new piece abbreviation as a suffix, such as "d8Q" or "exf8N". Draw offers must be recorded (by both players) with an "=" suffix. You must not make any other annotations, such as "!" and "?" on your scoresheet.
- The long algebraic format "e2-e4" is still acceptable (although rarely used these days), but the older descriptive format "P-Q4" is no longer permitted.
- It is not uncommon for a player to make a mistake recording the moves on their scoresheet and then realise their error some moves later. It is good sportsmanship in these situations, to offer your opponent your scoresheet, so that they can make the necessary amendments to their scoresheet.



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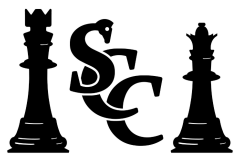
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### Making Moves:

- There are no "take-backs" in a rated chess game - it is a formal game with rating points at stake.
- You must move the pieces and then press the clock, all with the same hand. This is so there is no illegal time gain by a simultaneous (or reversed) moving of a piece and pressing of the clock.
- Your move is only officially completed when you press the clock. While not required, it is a sportsmanship courtesy to point at the clock if your opponent has forgotten to press it, in order to remind them, but don't press the clock for them since it is not yet your turn.
- When taking a piece, it is normal to move your piece first and then collect the taken piece. However, it is permitted to remove the opponent's piece first and then move your piece. Either way, you must use the same hand for both actions.

### Verbal Interaction:

- There is no need to say "Check" when you check your opponent. Indeed, this is usually not done as it can disturb other players. If the opponent misses the check and tries to make an illegal move, you can quietly say "You're in check".
- If you want to offer a draw, simply ask your opponent "Draw?" (quietly) after indicating your move by moving the pieces, but before you press your clock. Your opponent can either accept or decline the offer by a verbal response, or decline by simply playing their move. Don't offer a draw before moving the pieces or when it's not your turn. Only offer a draw once per turn and keep draw offers to a sensible amount so that it maintains sportsmanship and doesn't become distracting.
- If you want to resign, simply say to your opponent "I resign" (quietly), sometimes accompanied with turning your king on its side.
- A player is not required to point out any chess rules to their opponent, such as being in check, not needing to continue to record moves due to the 5-minute rule, the possibility of a draw by either 3 position repetitions or 50 move rule etc.
- Spectators must not interfere in any way, including pointing anything out to either player. Note that once your game has concluded, both players officially become spectators.



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### Illegal Play:

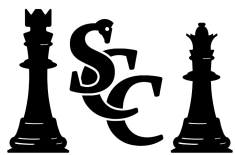
- If your opponent makes or tries to make an illegal move, such as moving a piece which is pinned to the king, you can quietly point this out to them verbally, such as "You can't..." and get them to try again.
- When a player makes or tries to make an illegal move, or breaks the rules in some other fashion, then the opponent can claim a time penalty of two minutes in Classical time control chess, or one minute in Rapid and Blitz time control chess. *(For how to adjust the DGT clocks to add a time penalty, please refer to the Appendix at the end of this document)*
- On making a second illegal move or breaching of the rules, the player forfeits their game.
- To claim any penalty for illegal play, the opponent must point out the illegal play before making their move - it cannot be claimed later in retrospect.

### Touch Move:

- All moves are "touch-move" - as soon as you touch a piece, you must move it if it is legal to do so. Once you release your hand from the piece, the piece has been deemed to be moved to that square, unless the move was illegal.
- If you realise you've made a mistake after moving, try to keep a poker face so your opponent doesn't realise. This kind of body language and psychology, is a big difference between playing over-the-board verses on-line. Likewise, you can monitor your opponent's body language.
- If you touch a piece and try to make an illegal move with it, you must still move the piece that you touched if there are any legal moves it can make. If that happens to be your king and you were trying to castle but it is illegal to castle, then you must still make a legal king move.
- If you touch an opponent's piece before your own piece, then you must take that piece if it is legal to do so.
- If you touch a piece but cannot legally make a move for that piece, then that constitutes trying to make an illegal move. In such a case, you may choose another piece / move, but the opponent may still claim a penalty / forfeit for the illegal play.

*Some examples of the above are: (a) you touch a piece which is pinned to your king (b) you are in check and you touch a piece that cannot resolve the check, perhaps because it is double-check (c) you touch an opponent's piece to take it, but cannot legally do so with any of your pieces.*

- When castling, you must move the king first and then the rook. If you touch the rook first, you must make a rook move and you can no longer castle on that side. You must use the same hand for all piece movement when castling - the use of both hands to castle constitutes an illegal move.



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### Piece Promotion:

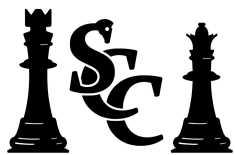
- When promoting, you must move the pawn to the promotion square, then replace it with the correct promotion piece of choice and only then press the clock.
- When promoting to a queen, you must use a real queen piece and not an up-turned rook. Using an up-turned rook it becomes a rook, regardless of the fact that it is upside down. Moving it diagonally would then be an illegal move.

### Keeping things Neat:

- If you wish to adjust either your piece(s) or your opponent's piece(s) to be more central, you should quietly say "I adjust", or the French equivalent "J'adoube", before doing so and must only do this when it is your move.
- You must ensure taken pieces are kept clear of the board / playing area and do not obstruct visibility of the clock.
- While it is your opponent's move, you must not touch the board, the clock or any of the pieces (either your or your opponent's pieces).
- Keep any drink you may have clear of the board / playing area and do not obstruct visibility of the clock with it. It is not good form to eat food at the board and this may be prohibited in some competitions.

### Moving Around:

- It is permitted to get up and walk around if done very discretely and quietly so as not to disturb others, but don't get up and down from your game too often that it becomes annoying to your opponent or others. Note that if your opponent makes their move and presses the clock while you are away from the board, you will be losing time.
- Similarly, use of the toilets is permitted, but be careful not to raise concerns of cheating - it has been known for a phone to be hidden in the toilets!



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### Arbitration:

- Note that arbiters have to follow strict rules and cannot give advice on what to do, only inform you of the rules.
- If there is an issue that you cannot resolve, pause the clock and raise your hand to beckon an arbiter to come over to decide what to do.
- If you are unsure of a rule, it is valid to pause the clock and ask the arbiter to clarify the rule.
- In club competitions, for practical reasons there is often no arbiter, so if the issue cannot be resolved with your opponent, instead pause the clock and try to get the attention of the club night organiser and/or your team captain if playing in a team (e.g. the Wiltshire League).

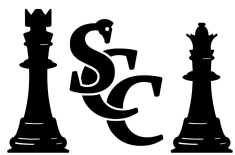


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### Concluding the Game:

- If your opponent has run out of time (known as "flagging" or "has flagged"), you may point this out and terminate the game. Your opponent is not required to point this out to you however.
- If you wish to draw the game by the rules of chess (e.g. 3 position repetitions or 50 move rule etc.), record your move on your scoresheet (which cannot subsequently be changed), pause the clock and beckon the arbiter to adjudicate on the draw. Note that if the arbiter deems the draw declaration as incorrect, a time penalty will be incurred as is the case for illegal play.
- While it is entirely within your rights to continue, there is no need to play out a lost position to completion. It is a sign of good sportsmanship and respect to your opponent, to simply resign when it becomes clear that only a large blunder could cause your opponent to draw or loose the game.
- When a game is terminated (e.g. by draw, resignation, flagging etc.), mark the outcome on the scoresheet by some appropriate text.
- If there is a dedicated space on the scoresheet for the game result, fill this out so that the event organiser can easily see and register it when the scoresheet is handed in. A common notation is "1 - 0" if the player with the white pieces won, since it is customary to put their name on the left, "0 - 1" if black won or " $\frac{1}{2}$  -  $\frac{1}{2}$ " for a draw.
- If playing on a digital smart chess-board, place the kings in the centre to indicate the result. Kings on d5/e4 indicate white won; Kings on d4/e5 indicate black won; Kings on d4/d5 or e4/e5 indicate a draw.
- In a formal competition, it is often required that each player signs both scoresheets to approve them. This tends to happen less in club competitions but may still be performed.
- Once the scoresheets have been signed by both players, the result is fixed, such that if there is subsequently a challenge to the result, this is unlikely to be successful (e.g. the realisation by a player that it was not actually checkmate as believed at the time).
- Once the game is concluded, let the tournament organiser know of the outcome so that they can record it and later submit your game to the ECF / FIDE for rating updates. Similarly, once the game result is submitted to the organiser, even if the scoresheets are not signed, a challenge is unlikely to be successful.
- For internal rated games at Swindon Chess Club, a summary sheet will be found on the table at the front of the room, onto which you should record the game result, allowing you to then retain your scoresheet for your own use.



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### Post Game Courtesy:

- It is very common to go through the game with your opponent after the game is over, which is something you don't get with on-line chess or studying with an engine or book. This is often the most enlightening part of OTB chess and you can learn a lot from this dialogue. This is best done well away from the playing area, so as not to disturb other players whose games are still in progress.
- It is good practice to (quietly) set the board up again after your game. This helps the organiser to ensure all of the pieces are collected when they pack away and that none have been lost. Also, if more games are yet to be played, this is a courtesy to the next competitors who will use that board.
- It is good practice to turn the clock off after it is no longer required, in order to save the battery.
- Please refrain from packing anything away until ALL games have completed, so as not to disturb any other players still playing, even if only one game remains in play. However, once ALL games have been completed, feel free to offer your help to the organiser to pack away - they are generally volunteers so help is appreciated.





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### APPENDIX:

#### Official Chess Rules:

For the formal chess rules please refer to the main chess institutional bodies, which are:

- United Kingdom = ECF (English Chess Federation)
- International = FIDE (Federation Internationale des Echecs)

The ECF Tournament Rules can be found here:

<https://www.englishchess.org.uk/ecf-tournament-rules>

<https://www.englishchess.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Tournament-Rules-V03-Nov-2024-1.pdf>

The FIDE "Laws of Chess" Rules can be found (in Section E of the document) here:

<https://handbook.fide.com>

<https://handbook.fide.com/chapter/E012023> (FIDE "Laws of Chess" taking effect from 1 January 2023)

***NB: Internal rated games in Swindon Chess Club are played to the FIDE "Laws of Chess" (which describe the game play rules for chess), and are supported by the ECF Tournament Rules (which describe other supplementary rules to the game play rules stipulated by FIDE).***

For the Wiltshire League, the WCCA (Wiltshire County Chess Association) also expands on the official FIDE Rules here:

[https://www.wiltshirechess.org.uk/wilts\\_rules.html](https://www.wiltshirechess.org.uk/wilts_rules.html)