

# Chess Rules Guide

*A Beginner's Guide for Game Night*

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| PLAYERS | DIFFICULTY      | BOARD      |
|---------|-----------------|------------|
| 2       | ■ Easy to Learn | 8 × 8 Grid |

## About This Game

Chess is a two-player strategy game played on an 8×8 board, each side commanding 16 pieces. The goal is simple to state, if not always simple to achieve: trap your opponent's king so it can't escape capture — known as **checkmate**. This guide covers everything needed to play a relaxed, casual game at a get-together or game night.

## Setting Up the Board

Position the board so each player has a light-coloured square in their near-right corner. Each side starts with 1 King, 1 Queen, 2 Rooks, 2 Bishops, 2 Knights, and 8 Pawns.

Place the back row left to right: Rook, Knight, Bishop, Queen, King, Bishop, Knight, Rook. A handy rule of thumb is “queen on her own colour” — the white queen starts on a light square, the black queen on a dark square. Pawns fill the row directly in front.

White always moves first, and players then alternate turns — there's no skipping a go.

## How the Pieces Move

- **King** — one square in any direction (horizontally, vertically, or diagonally).
- **Rook** — any number of open squares in a straight line, horizontally or vertically.
- **Bishop** — any number of open squares diagonally — so each bishop stays on one colour of square all game.
- **Queen** — combines the rook and bishop: any number of open squares in a straight or diagonal line. The most powerful piece on the board.
- **Knight** — moves in an “L” shape — two squares one way, then one square at a right angle. It's the only piece that can hop over others.
- **Pawn** — moves straight ahead one square (or two on its first move), but captures diagonally one square forward — never straight ahead.

### Quick Tip

Except for the knight, no piece can jump over another. Landing on a square held by an enemy piece captures it and removes it from the board for good.

## Three Special Moves

1 **Castling**. Once per game, a king and one of its own rooks move together: the king slides two squares toward the rook, and the rook hops to the square beside it on the other side. Only legal if neither piece has moved yet, nothing sits between them, and the king isn't in check, passing through, or landing on an attacked square.

2 **En passant** (“in passing”). If an enemy pawn's two-square opening move lands beside one of your pawns, you may capture it as if it had moved only one square — but only on your very next move, or the chance is gone.

3 **Promotion**. A pawn reaching the far end of the board is upgraded on the spot to a queen, rook, bishop, or knight of the player's choice — most players choose a queen.

## Check and Checkmate

A king is **in check** when an enemy piece could capture it next move. A player in check must immediately get out of it by:

- Moving the king to a safe square,
- Capturing the attacking piece, or
- Blocking the attack with another piece (only works against rooks, bishops, and queens, which attack along a line).

It's illegal to make any move that leaves your own king in check. If a player is in check with no way out, that's **checkmate** — the game ends immediately and that player loses. The king is never actually captured. A player can also simply **resign** at any point.

## How Games End in a Draw

Not every game ends decisively. A draw can happen in a few ways:

- **Stalemate** — the player to move isn't in check but has no legal move at all — a draw, not a win, which surprises a lot of new players.
- **Agreement** — both players simply agree to call it a draw.
- **Dead position** — so few pieces remain that neither side could possibly deliver checkmate.
- **Threefold repetition** — the exact same position occurs three times in the game.
- **Fifty-move rule** — fifty moves pass in a row with no pawn move and no capture.

### Common Beginner Mistakes

Forgetting that stalemate is a draw, not a win for the player who isn't in check — and moving too fast on castling without checking every square the king passes through is safe first.

## A Couple of Friendly Ground Rules

- **Touch it, move it**. In more formal play, touching one of your own pieces means you're obliged to move it if legally possible — casual games often relax this, but it's worth agreeing beforehand.
- **One hand**. Make your move with a single hand rather than repositioning pieces mid-move.

That's everything needed to sit down and play a full, legal game of chess. Tournament time controls, official notation, and arbiter procedures only come into play once you're competing formally.

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