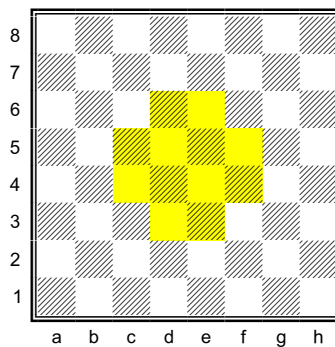


## Basic Chess Opening Theory Concepts and Theory

There are several things that one should keep in mind when starting a game of chess. In chess terms, this is known as "Opening Theory". If you follow these concepts when making the first eight or ten moves, you will likely have a more comfortable game and now allow yourself to be subject to a quick attack by your opponent. In no particular order are:

### Controlling the center

This is a fundamental concept in chess. The four square in the middle of the board, and the eight squares that touch them are typically described as the "center".

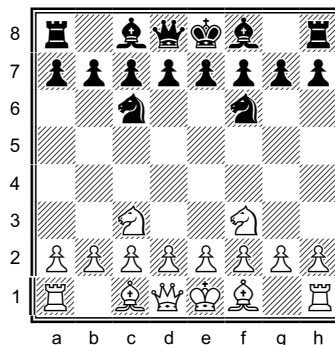


In the opening of the game, you will wish to control the center of the board by either occupying it with pawns, or attacking it with pieces. Ideally both. It is said, "Whoever controls the center of the board will control the game."

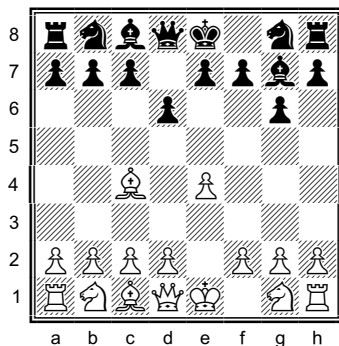
### Developing your pieces

The concept of development is to move your pieces (the queen, rooks, bishops and knights are pieces) off of their home squares and into the game on squares where their influence will be greater.

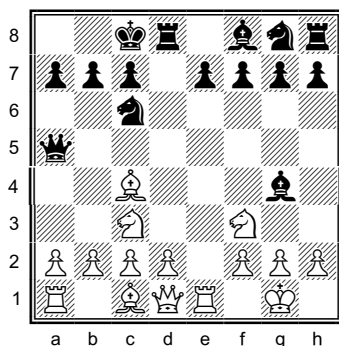
The **knights** typically end up on c3/c6 and f3/f6, (but not always). From these squares the knights bring influence over the four center squares.



For the **bishops** to have the most influence, they need to be developed onto the longer diagonals. A bishop on c4 controls the a2-g8 diagonal, as well as the f1-a6 diagonal. A bishop may also be fianchettoed, onto g2 or, in this case, g7 (by first moving the g-pawn up one square), where it will control the "long" diagonal a1-h8.



**Rooks** should be developed along the back rank to files that are "open" or "half open" (an open file is a file with no pawns, and a half open file only has pawns of your opponent). You also want to "connect" your rooks by castling, and then moving any pieces between the rooks until they can "see" each other.



The **queen** should not be moved too early in the opening, as it can easily be subject to harassment by your opponent. Plus, it helps to see where your opponent is placing his pieces in order to decide for the best square for your queen.

### Coordinating your pieces

Try to make moves that allow your pieces and pawns to support each other, and work in tandem towards a goal (for instance, control of a key center square). Most opening theory has a goal of controlling, or at least disputing, a key center square.

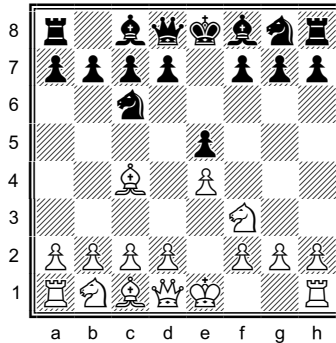
### Protecting your king

In most games of chess, both players will use the castling maneuver in the opening. It has two advantages: 1) it tends to put the king on a safer square where it will be free from attack, and, 2) it brings one of the rooks out of the corner, closer to the center of the board where it can be of use attacking deep into the enemy position.

## Some Popular Openings

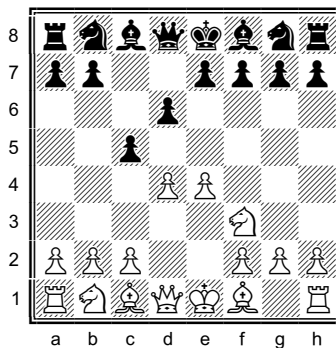
There are hundreds of named openings. Here are a few of the more common, along with some of the immediate goals.

The Italian Game: Play starts 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 Bc4



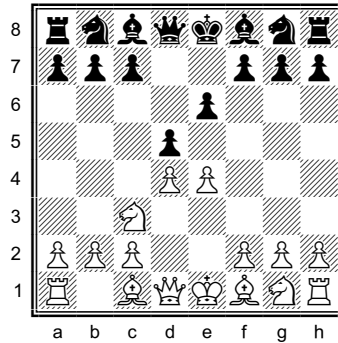
In three moves, white has occupied the center with a pawn, attacked black's center pawn with his knight, and developed his bishop to attack d5, e6 and f7. White is also ready to castle here. Black has several possibilities here, among them the standard 3...Bc5 or the tricky 3...Nf6 (the Two Knights Defence). After 3...Nf6 4 Ng5 the position can get particularly hairy.

The Sicilian Defence: Play starts 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4



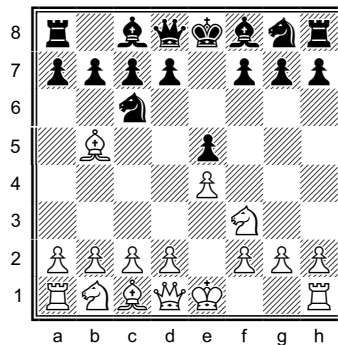
Here white and black are battling over the square d4. Black can bring other men into play with moves like ...Nc6, ...g6 and ...Bg7, ...Qb6. In this position, play almost always continues 3...cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3. Note that the players are developing their knights before bishops, as the knights *almost* always end up in front of the bishops, but the squares for the bishops is less certain, so the decision is delayed.

The French Defence: Play starts 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3



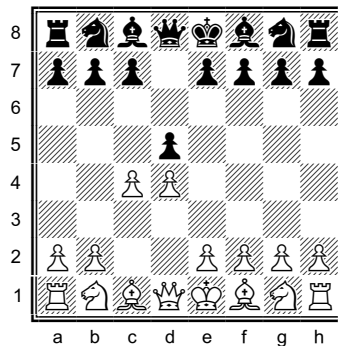
Here the struggle is for square e4. Black has several options in this position, including 3...Bb4, 3...Nf6 and 3...dxe4. The first two threaten to capture on e4, and the third does this outright. If you only study one opening, I recommend the French Defence, as the ideas and concepts found in this opening also show up in many other openings.

The Ruy Lopez: Play starts 1 e4, e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5



Note that this is similar to the Italian Game, except the bishop moves to b5, threatening to capture the knight on c6 (which would remove the defender of the pawn on e5). It would be premature to attempt this combination by white before getting the king safely castled. This opening is named after the 16th century Catholic priest who authored one of the first books about modern chess in Europe. The Ruy Lopez has been analyzed exhaustively, and yet it still shows up at the topmost levels of play.

The Queen's Gambit: Play starts 1 d4 d5 2 c4



White wants to eliminate black's d-pawn, which is controlling e4 at the moment. White offers his c-pawn, knowing that if it is captured, that white can recover it without too much effort, and white will be able to control e4 in time. Typical play continues 2...e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5, with both sides trying to contest the e4 square.

All this said, it cannot be overstated that you must pay attention to the moves of your opponent. You may know a particular opening very well, but if he deviates early, then there's every likelihood that you can get an even bigger advantage out of the opening, and you should consider the move he made, versus the move he failed to make and decide how that changes the position.

The study of chess opening theory is necessary for any player wanting to excel at the game. Both general principles and theory must be learned and adhered to, as well as the memorization of lines that you are prepared to play. Early in my chess career, I chose to play 1 d4 as white, because most (but not all) of the openings shared similar strategies, and I could ignore all of the lines in the Ruy Lopez, the French, The Italian Game, the Three Knights Game, the Four Knights game, etc, etc, as those are all responses to 1 e4. I did have to learn the Sicilian Defence and the Center Counter Defence in order that I could play black *against* 1 e4.

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