

# An Introduction to Chess Jargon

As you get deeper and more involved in the game of chess, you start to learn words and phrases that have special meanings to the chess player. I have selected around 50 of the words I feel every chess player should know and have in his or her vocabulary. I have added definitions (most times serious, some times light-hearted) for you.

**Adjournment** - the suspension of a chess game in order to continue it at another time. Instead of making his next move, a player writes it on paper and that is sealed in an envelope to be opened when the game is resumed. In this manner, each player knows his last move, but not his opponent's.

**Adjudication** - analysis of an unfinished chess game in order to determine the likely outcome when time does not permit finishing the game presently (often when the next round of a tournament is starting and games from the previous round are still underway).

**Annotations** - character sequences made up of "!" and "?" to indicate the nature or quality of a move.

"!" = a good move

"!!" = an excellent move

"?" = a mistake

"??" = a blunder

"!?" = an interesting move

"?!" = a dubious move.

**Amaurosis Shacchistica** - Latin for "chess blindness", the inability at times to see obvious things on the chess board.

**Blitz** - chess played rapidly, typically each opponent having five minutes on a chess clock to make all of his moves.

**Castling** - the only maneuver in chess where two chessmen (the king and a rook) are moved at the same time.

**Check** - an attack on the king by one of the opponent's men.

**Checkmate** - an attack on the king by one or more of the opponent's men from which the king cannot escape.

**Chess Clock** - a special clock with two faces and two buttons that stop and start the timers alternately. Each player accumulates time only when thinking on his own turn.

**Desperado** - a chess piece trapped behind enemy lines that tries to capture as much material as possible before being captured itself.

**Development** - moving pawns and pieces off of their home squares and into the center of the board. This takes place in the opening.

**Discovered Check** - moving a man that allows a piece behind it to give check.

**Double Check** - an attack on the king by two of the opponent's men simultaneously (a check and a discovered check).

**Doubled Pawn** - two pawns of the same color on the same file (after a capture).

**En passant** - French for "in passing". A special pawn capture of a pawn that has just moved two squares by an enemy pawn, who captures onto the empty square behind the pawn.

**End Game** - the point in the game at which much material has come off the board and players start trying to promote a pawn.

**Exchange** - the difference in value between a rook and a knight, or a rook and a bishop. If you capture your opponent's rook with your bishop, you are said to be "up the exchange" or "have won an exchange".

**Family Fork** - a knight simultaneously attacking the king, the queen and a rook.

**Fianchetto** - moving the pawn in front of a knight up one square, then developing the adjacent bishop to the square in front of the knight.

**File** - one of the eight vertical columns, lettered 'a'-'h', going left-to-right from white's point of view.

**Fork** - a knight simultaneously attacking the enemy king and an enemy piece, or two enemy pieces.

**Gambit** - giving up material (typically a pawn) for development and initiative.

**Grandmaster** - the highest title awarded to chess players by the International Chess Federation (FIDE).

**Isolated Pawn** - a pawn for which there are no pawns of the same color on the adjacent files.

**J'Adoube** - French for "I adjust", said when you want to touch a man on the board without the obligation of moving it. Some say it's French for "What have I done? I don't want to move that!"

**Key** - the first move to the solution of a chess problem.

**Kriegspiel** - a chess variant where you cannot see your opponent's men.

**Men** - short for chessmen. This includes all of them, the king, queen, bishops, knights, rooks and pawns.

**Middle Game**- the portion of the game after the opening and before the endgame.

**Major Piece** - a queen or a rook.

**Minor Piece** - a bishop or a knight.

**Opening** - the beginning of the game where pieces are developed off of their home squares and castling typically takes place.

**Opposition** - when two kings are separated by one square on the rank or file, and one king must necessarily yield to the other. The one not yielding (not on the move) is said to have the "opposition".

**Patzer** - an inept chess player. This is a relative term. When you use it, it's a friendly term used to describe anyone that you can beat easily. However, it's an insulting epithet when used by certain wiseacres to describe you.

**Passed Pawn** - a pawn which has no pawns of the opposite color in front of him in his own file, or in the adjacent files.

**Piece** - a queen, rook, bishop or knight. The king and pawns are not pieces.

**Problem** - a chess position with an associated task attached. "White to move and mate in two", perhaps.

**Promotion** - getting a pawn to the 8th rank and exchanging it for a piece (typically a queen).

**Rank** - one of the eight horizontal rows, numbered '1'-'8', going from the white side to the black side of the board.

**Resignation** - ceding the game to your opponent.

**Stalemate** - a position achieved when a player has no legal moves, but his king is not in check. This is a draw.

**Swindle** - a purposeful move (which probably could have been prevented) that turns a loss into a draw, or even a win.

**Tempo** - time; typically the time to make one move. Moving a pawn from e2 to e3, then from e3 to e4 on the next move loses a tempo, as this could have been accomplished in one move instead of two.

**Touch Move** - under tournament conditions, if you touch a man, you must move it. Under even casual conditions, if you release a man from your grasp, then that is your move.

**Underpromotion** - get a pawn to the 8th rank, but promote to a knight, rook or bishop instead of a queen. This is only done to prevent stalemate.

**Zugzwang** - the condition where your position would be sound if you didn't have to move, but because you must take your turn, any move made will weaken your position.

**Zwischenzug** - an in-between move. A check or other threat (which must be addressed) made in the middle of a sequence (typically after a capture and before the recapture of a piece).

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