

Chess for Beginners

Chess is played on a square board which is sub-divided into 64 squares of alternating light and dark colours. Some of the more common colours used for the chess board squares are white (or off-white) and green, white and black, and tan and brown; but regardless of their actual colours, they are typically referred to as “light” and “dark” or “white” and “black.” The 64 squares of the chess board are arranged in an 8 by 8 grid, the horizontal rows of which are referred to as “ranks”, the vertical columns as “files”, and the diagonal lines as “diagonals.”

Chess Pieces

The game is played with 32 pieces, divided into two sets of 16 pieces each. Each set of 16 pieces is comprised of one king, one queen, two rooks, two bishops, two knights, and eight pawns. One set is light-coloured (most often white or cream) and the other set is dark-coloured (most often black or brown); but regardless of their actual colours, they are typically referred to as “white” and “black.”

The Players

The player who has the white pieces is typically referred to as the white player or just plain “White.” The player who has the black pieces is typically referred to as the black player or just plain “Black.” The player with the white pieces moves first. Moves are alternated until the end of the game. No player may make more than one move per turn, and no player may “pass” or skip a turn: moving is mandatory.

Who Moves First?

For casual games, it is customary to use some random method to decide who gets the white pieces. A common method is for one player to take a different coloured pawn in each hand and place them behind his or her back, having the other player choose a hand, and thereby a colour.

How the Pieces Move

Each type of chess piece has its own way of moving, but there are a few things they all have in common. The pieces move in straight lines along the ranks, files, and/or diagonals of the board (the knight is an exception, as we shall see). If one of your own pieces lies along the path of the piece which you are currently moving, you must stop before reaching the occupied square: you may not jump over your own pieces (again, the knight is an exception, as is a special move called “castling,” both of which we will learn shortly), nor may you place more than one piece on the same square.