

11. How to Open a Chess Game

Objectives:

1. Recall the three principles governing opening play
2. Begin demonstrating understanding of opening strategy

The main goal of this lesson is to teach the opening principles and to guide students' application and understanding of these principles. The students should come away with the knowledge of why the opening principles are good guidelines to follow, and begin obeying the opening principles in competition with other students.

From this lesson, the students should learn to pay constant attention to the basic opening strategies of controlling the center, developing pieces toward the center, and keeping the king safe. All mistakes in the opening violate one of these principles, and such violations should be pointed out by the teacher at every available opportunity.

It is important to understand that these general principles are just that: principles. It is sometimes a good idea to violate a principle if something unusual occurs. Again, **the position ultimately determines** whether an opening move, or any move, is a good move. The principles should be relied upon and generally followed as a guide to opening play, but they are not absolute laws that should be followed without thought.

Outline of lesson:

1. Three stages of a chess game
2. Three general principles
3. What to do and what not to do in the opening
4. Examples of opening play

PART 1: THREE STAGES OF A CHESS GAME

Introduce the three stages of a chess game, in order of importance, as the Endgame, the Middlegame and the Opening. There are principles to guide play in each stage of the game. This lesson concerns the principles that guide play in the opening stage of the game.

PART 2: THREE GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Solicit from the students some ideas of what a player might try to accomplish in the beginning of the game. Students should have enough experience to come up with the main ideas themselves. Give hints to help if necessary. As each principle is described by a student, list the principle in the student's words, then summarize with the ideas listed below:

Control the center

Pieces are stronger toward the center. Center squares are more important. Whoever controls the center usually controls the game.

Develop pieces

The pieces (not pawns) are weak on the back rank. Pieces on the back rank cannot attack at all and are weak defenders. Mobility of the pieces is critical in the opening.

Keep the king safe

Checkmating the king is the ultimate goal, so it must be kept safe from attack. An exposed king is open to attack. This means that players should usually **castle the king** to help keep it safe.

A student must have a good reason for violating opening principles

Emphasize that these are general principles and not absolute laws. There are times when a player's king is safe right where it is and need not be moved. There are times when immediate attack is better than developing pieces that are not yet developed. Students should be advised to violate an opening principle **only** if they **have a good reason**, one they can explain in words, for doing so. Such reasons are few.

PART 3: WHAT TO DO AND WHAT NOT TO DO IN THE OPENING

On the next page is a chart of opening DO'S AND DON'T'S that follow naturally from the three opening principles. The students should be able to provide the reasons behind the DO'S AND DON'T'S by referring to the three opening principles. Try to get students to explain **why** these DO'S AND DON'T'S make sense.

