

Keeping Score!

How to Read and Write Chess Notation

Chess players have invented a variety of systems of *notation* so they can record the moves of their games. We will introduce you to two of the most popular ones.

There are excellent reasons for knowing how to use notation. Many people like to replay their games so they will learn from both their good and bad moves. Most players also enjoy looking at games played by other people.

Players need to know chess notation to play in tournaments. Each player must complete a certain number of moves within a specified time limit. A written record of the game proves that you have made the required number of moves, or that your opponent hasn't! It's easy to learn these systems once you know a few basic chess terms. A *file* is an up-and-down row of squares; the kings begin the game on the same file. A *rank* is a side-to-side row of squares; all the white pawns start on the same rank. The *kingside* is the half of the board (right half from white's point of view, left half from black's) on which each player's king starts. The other half of the board is called the *queenside*.

Algebraic

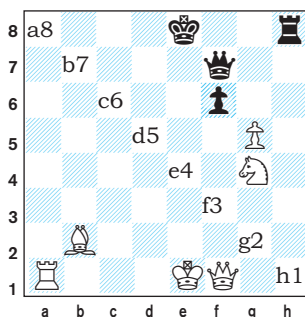
Algebraic notation is the most widely used system in the world. It is the official notation system of the World Chess Federation (FIDE). Most people find it simple to learn and use.

In this system, each *file*, or up-and-down row of squares, is assigned a letter, starting from *a* on White's left and running through *h* on his right. The *ranks*, or side-to-side rows, are numbered 1 through 8, starting from the row of squares nearest White and proceeding up the board towards Black. Diagram A shows how to find the name of each square easily.

What square is the white bishop on? First, find out what file it is on: the *b* file. Then check its rank: it's on rank 2. Put these two together and you have *b2*—that's where the bishop is! How about White's king? Try *e1*. Similarly, the white

rook is on *a1*, the white knight is on *g4*, the white pawn is on *g5*, the white queen is on *f1*, the black queen is on *f7*, the black pawn is on *f6*, the black rook is on *h8*, and the black king is on *e8*.

Black



White Diagram A

To identify the pieces, we use the first letter of each word, except the knight is shown as *N*, because *K* is used for the King. No symbol is needed for the pawns.

To record a move, we write the letter for the piece and the name of the square to which it is moving. In the diagram, for example, White could move his king one square toward his rook. This is written as *Kd1*. Moving the rook forward one square would be written *Ra2*.

When a pawn moves, we need only record the square it moves to. For example, if the black pawn moved forward one square, we write *f5*. (Remember, Black is moving down from the top of the board.)

Captures are recorded using an *x* after the letter for the capturing piece. For instance, if White's Bishop captured the black pawn, we would write *Bxf6*. When a pawn captures something, we name the file the pawn was on and the square where it makes the capture. If White's pawn captured Black's pawn, the move would be *gxf6*. If Black's pawn captured White's it would be *fxg5*. It is also acceptable to omit the *x*; *Nxf6* can also be written

as *Nf6* and *gxf6* as *gf*, etc.

The symbol to check for is a plus sign. In the example, Black could play *Qe6+*. How would we record the white knight taking the black pawn with check? The answer is *Nxf6+*.

Castling on the *kingside* (as Black may do in our example) is written *O-O*. White may castle *queenside*, which is written *O-O-O*. Here's an easy way to remember which is which. In each case, the number of zeros is the same as the number of squares the rook moves in castling.

When a player promotes a pawn, we follow the move with an equal sign and the letter for the piece into which the pawn changes. If Black had a pawn on *h2*, he could promote it to a queen with *h1=Q*, to a knight with *h1=N*, and so forth.

When it is possible for a player to move more than one of the same type of piece to a square, we must also identify which piece is moving. For example, let's say White also had a rook on *d1*. If he wanted to move one of his Rooks to *c1*, we would write either *Rac1* or *Rdc1*, depending on which rook he chose to move. Similarly, if Black had a rook on *h5* and played one of them to *h7*, we would write *R5h7* or *R8h7*.

That's all there is to algebraic notation! See the sample game for some easy practice.

Long Algebraic

Some players, publications, and chess computers use a system known as "long algebraic." This notation is identical to algebraic, with the addition of identifying the square a piece moved *from* as well as the one it moved *to*, with a hyphen between the two. For example, in algebraic, the first move for each player might be recorded as 1. *d4 Nf6*; in long algebraic, this would be written 1. *d2-d4 Ng8-f6*.

Figurine Algebraic

Chess is a sort of international language, and people of all cultures use chess notation with one another. But

Kings



Queens



Bishops



Knights



Rooks

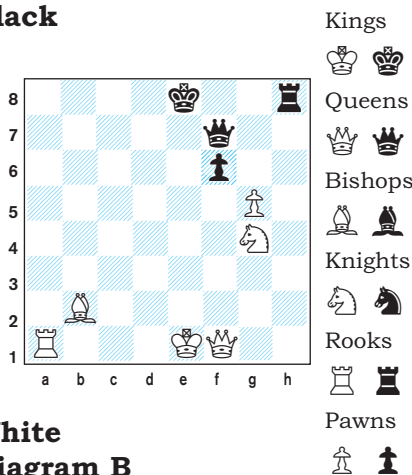


Pawns



each language has different names for the pieces. The move we know as *Bd3* in algebraic notation would be *Fd3* in French and *Ld3* in German. Figurine algebraic notation makes it possible to overcome the language differences.

Black



White
Diagram B

This system employs the symbols used in diagrams of chess positions. They are printed to the right of our diagram. These standard symbols—silhouettes of the chessmen—can be recognized by players from anywhere in the world.

To identify the move we know as *Bd3*, figurine algebraic would use ♗*d3* or ♘*d3*. Other moves are expressed in similar fashion. As in algebraic notation, the symbol for “pawn” is never used; *1. e4* is the same in these two systems.

Many publishers have begun to use figurine algebraic so they can reach a larger audience. Knowing this system will open up a world of chess information for you.

Computer Algebraic

When the first chessplaying microcomputers were sold, they required the player to type his move into the machine. To do so, the players needed to identify, using the principles of algebraic notation, the square his piece was moving from, and the one to which it was moving. In this way, it was similar to long algebraic. But the computer did not need to know the symbol of the piece, since it was aware of what piece occupied each square. The player therefore employed what came to be known as “computer algebraic” notation. Thus, *1. d4 Nf6* would be *1. d2d4 g8f6* in this system. Hyphens are sometimes inserted to make this notation easier to read: *1. d3-d4 g8-f6*.

Descriptive Notation

Descriptive notation uses the same letters as algebraic for the pieces with the

addition of *P* for all pawn moves. The major difference is in the way each system identifies the square to which a piece is moving.

In descriptive, the files are named for the pieces that stand on them at the beginning of the game. The file on which the kings start, the *e-file* in algebraic, is the *K-file* in descriptive. Similarly, the algebraic *d-file* is the descriptive *Q-file*. The remaining files are identified as being on the “Queenside” (*a-, b-, and c-files* become *QR-, QN-, and QB-files*) or the “Kingside” (*f-, g-, and h-files* become *KB-, KN-, and KR-files*).

Each rank has two names in descriptive notation. They are numbered 1-8 from each side of the board, depending on which player is moving. The square that is *a1* in algebraic, would be *QR1* for White and *QR8* for Black in descriptive.

Moves are simplified whenever possible by omitting the *K* (for Kingside) and the *Q* (for Queenside). In our diagram, moving White’s pawn forward (*g6* in algebraic) would be *P-N6*; *P-KN6* isn’t necessary, since White cannot play *P-QN6*. For the same reason, moving Black’s Queen to that square (*Qg6*) would be *Q-N3*, because there is no need to distinguish it from the (impossible) *Q-QN3*.

Check, which is written “+” in algebraic, is *ch* in descriptive. Captures are written in three steps: the symbol for the piece being moved, an *x* (for “captures” or “takes”), and the letter (not the square as in algebraic) of the piece being captured. Look once again at our diagram: White’s possible captures are *BxP*, *PxP*, *QxP*, and *NxPch*, while Black has only one *PxP*.

Castling is the same as in algebraic: *0-0* on the Kingside, *0-0-0* on the Queenside. Promoting a pawn requires parentheses rather than “=”, for example, *P-R8(Q)*.

If identical pieces can move to the same square, we must identify which one is moved. In the diagram, a second White Rook on White’s *QR4* would force us to write *R/1-R2* or *R/4-R2*. A White Rook on White’s *QB1* instead would make it possible to play *R/R-N1* or *R/BN1*. A White pawn on White’s *K5* would make us use *KPxP* or *NPxP* for capturing Black’s pawn on *KB3*.

An Example

Here is a sample opening in algebraic and descriptive notation:

Algebraic	Descriptive
1. d4 Nf6	1. P-Q4 N-KB3

In descriptive, we must indicate which B3 we mean, because each Knight can reach a B3 square.

2. c4 e6	2. P-QB4 P-K3
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3. Nf3 Bb4+ 3. N-KB3 B-N5ch

Notice the difference in the way check is written.

4. Nc3 d5 4. N-B3 P-Q4

Here, N-B3 is sufficient in description because only one Knight can move to a B3 square.

5. e3 Bxc3+ 5. P-K3 BxNch

Remember, algebraic uses the square a piece is captured on, while descriptive gives the symbol for the captured piece.

6. bxc3 c5 6. PxB P-B4
7. cxd5 exd5 7. BPxP KPxP

There were two pawn captures possible for each player, so we had to make them absolutely clear in descriptive.

If you have followed the game correctly, the resulting position should look like diagram C:

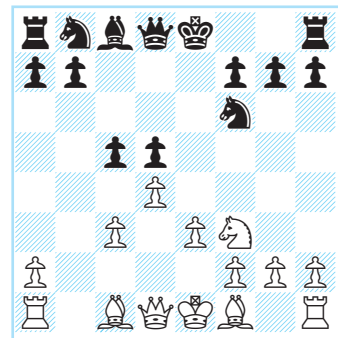


Diagram C

In all systems of chess notation, we sometimes comment on the quality of a player’s moves by adding exclamation points and question marks:

- !! An excellent move**
- ! A good move**
- ! ? An interesting move that may not be the best**
- ? ! An interesting move that is probably bad**
- ? A bad move**
- ? ? A very bad move**

Now you need to get started keeping score. A little practice will make you a master of chess notation!