



101 TACTICAL TIPS

*Tips, Tricks, & Thoughts
on Chess Tactics*

By Tim Brennan
TacticsTime.com

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<http://tacticstime.com>

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INTRODUCTION

The following will give you some of my best thoughts, tips and tricks on the study of chess tactics. This report tries to avoid all of the common clichés like “put your rooks on open files” or “a knight on the rim is dim” that most chess players have heard a million times before. Instead, I offer my own personal ideas about chess tactics, and point you at some of the resources I have found to be most helpful on the subject. Included are traditional chess ideas learned from various teachers, ideas from my own years of tournament and playing experience, as well as ideas from the world of computer science, personal development, and psychology. I hope you enjoy my 101 Tactical Tips. Feedback and comments are very welcome.



OPENINGS AND TACTICS

- 1. Be on the lookout for tactics in all phases of the game, including the opening.** I recently missed that a pawn was hanging against an opponent of mine in a rated game in Pueblo, because I was mistaking the position for a more typical position that occurs in that opening. After the game he told me “I think you could have won a pawn on move 3”. I was shocked when I looked at the position to see a hanging pawn that I completely overlooked.
- 2. The squares f2 and f7 are especially weak in the opening, because they are only protected by the king.** When playing an opening that moves the f pawn, such as the King’s Gambit, Bird, Dutch, etc, always be on the lookout for tactics involving a queen check on the H file. Openings such as the “Fried Liver Attack” also try to take advantage of the weakness of the f7 pawn.
- 3. When playing much weaker opponents (300 rating points below you at least) try to make the game as tactical as possible.** Avoid openings where the opponent can lock up the board, or make rote, mindless moves that are safe.
- 4. Don’t be afraid to play gambits. Gambits** are a great way to open up lines of attack, and create lots of great tactical possibilities. Gambits can be especially fun to play with the black pieces.
- 5. Don’t be afraid to mix up your openings.** Playing the same openings over and over again can really hinder your growth as a chess player. Tactical openings such as the King’s Gambit , “The Fishing Pole”, or even The Killer Grob can really help build your tactical muscles.
- 6. If you are looking for a tactical opening to play as black against 1. d4, I recommend the Budapest defense.** Most 1. d4 players are not happy to see this response, and it allows black to control the flow of the game.

- 7. Don't under estimate "bad" openings.** Many openings such as The Grob and The Orangutan contain many tactical tricks and traps in them. Consider playing these openings yourself to explore new patterns and methods of development.

- 8.** GM Larry Evans once said "The only way to refute a gambit is to accept it". This may be true at the Grandmaster level, but **at the class player level it can be very dangerous to accept a gambit if you have never seen it before**, especially in games that have a fast time control.

- 9. Certain openings tend to have certain opening traps and common tactics associated with them.** For example the Budapest defense (which I play) has a few smothered mates that black can unleash if white isn't careful. It is good to learn these traps and common tactics in the openings that you play.

- 10. Certain areas of the country also tend to develop cult followings for certain openings.** For example, in Colorado everyone knows the "Fishing Pole" opening, which has been popularized by local Life Master Brian Wall. This opening contains a ton of traps and tactics in it. My friend Francisco Baltier (a 1500 rated player) even beat Grandmaster Walter Browne with this opening in a simul. It is good to know which openings are popular in your area, and what the common tactics are in those openings, as you are likely to see them on a regular basis.

- 11. If you are looking to find tactics in a certain opening, one way to do it is to sort games in a chess database by the ECO number**, which is the unique number for different categories of openings. You can also do a positional search to find a certain pattern, such as the starting position of "The Fishing Pole", and then play through all the games which are matched.

BOOKS AND TACTICS

- 12. Be sure and check your local library for chess books.** The best way to do it is to go to their website, and search their catalog. The last two cities I have lived in have had great chess collections. The key is to reserve the book, since most libraries have many branches. They will notify you when the book is ready to be picked up. This is also good because it puts you on a timeline, normally about 3 weeks, before you have to return the materials. This will force you to go through the book, and not wait and do it later. This will also save you money as well, as the cost of chess books can add up.
- 13. Don't be afraid to use tactics books that are marked "for kids".** "How to Beat Your Dad at Chess" is one example of a book that is clearly marketed towards kids and parents, but contains an excellent layout and examples of 50 different tactical patterns that every chess player needs to know.
- 14. Also don't overlook older chess tactics books, or books with the answers in descriptive notation.** For 10 dollars the Fred Reinfeld 1001 books are a great value, and I played over mine until the books literally fell apart. Be careful because there are often errors in the solutions since they were written in the days before computer analysis was available.
- 15. Be aware that the chess publishing industry is very good at giving the public what it wants, and not necessarily what it needs.** The chess publishers every year publish dozens of books on openings. Most of these books will have very little impact on players actually increasing their ratings. It is similar to the diet industry. No one can publish a book that just says "Eat less food, and you will lose weight". Instead they need to come up with clever "diets" like "The Zone", "Low Carb Atkins", "The South Beach Diet" or the "Caveman diet", etc. It is the same with chess. No one can publish a chess book that just says "Study tactics and your rating will go up". They need to fill a 300 page book with tons of games and analysis in order to get your money.

- 16.** Another secret of the book publishing industry is that 90% of the books that are sold are never read past the first chapter. **If you do buy a book, make a promise to yourself that you will go through it.** Most of the chess books I own are tactics books, and I have gone through them several times each.
- 17.** While researching this paper I discovered a lot of online debates in various forums about what is “The Best” chess tactics book. While I admit that discussions like this can be interesting, **don’t waste a lot of time trying to find “The Best” chess tactics resource.** Find one that works for you, and start working on puzzles. Most are fairly inexpensive, so it is hard to go wrong with anything under 20 dollars, and should keep you busy for quite some time.

COMPUTERS AND TACTICS

- 18. Review your games with Fritz or similar chess programs.** I like to use the “Full analysis” feature which will annotate the games with marks such as “?” and “!!”. You want to first figure out how many mistakes that you are making in a game. If your typical game contains two or more “??” moves, try to get to the point where you are only averaging one “??” per game. Once there try to get down to only having “?” moves in your game, etc, until you are at the point that you are not making blunders.
- 19. The “Blunder Check” feature is also useful.** This will print the material evaluation after each move. A plus score means that white is ahead, a negative score means that black is ahead. For example +2.01 means that white is ahead about 2 pawns. -0.5 means that black is winning by about half a pawn. You can run both types of analysis on a game, but not at the same time. If you want to run both, make sure that you do not check “Erase old annotations”.
- 20. You can run analysis of more than one game by first selecting them in a database list, and then hitting the analysis button.** Once Fritz is done with analysis of the first game, it will move to the second game, and so on. This can be great for doing analysis of a large number of games, such as a collection of blitz games.
- 21. When solving chess problems make sure you turn off anything that will help suggest moves.** Some programs such as Fritz or Chessbase will show an arrow to indicate which move it thinks is best. In my version of Fritz these are called “Dynamic Hints” and “Spy” features.
- 22. If you do plan on entering your game into a computer program manually, do it as soon as you can after the game is over.** Being a former editor of a chess magazine, I know that most score sheets (even from high rated players) are often riddled with errors. If you enter the game soon after it is completed, you will have a much better chance of filling in the missing pieces.

- 23.** While entering a game in by hand, **I like to leave the engine running**, so I can get an idea of how it is evaluating the position as I go.
- 24.** **I have found that there is not a great deal of difference in the various new releases of the chess engines.** A version of Fritz from a few years ago (such as version 6) is going to find the same blunders and tactical mistakes that Fritz 12 will.
- 25.** **I have also found that there is not a great deal of difference between letting Fritz think for 30 seconds per move (the default) and only 2-5 seconds per move,** assuming that you have reasonably powerful computer hardware to begin with. The older your computer is, the more time you want to let the program have for analysis.
- 26.** **Make sure that you have an opening book loaded when running analysis of your game in Fritz.** Otherwise the program will be wasting time doing an analysis of what the first best move is, 1. e4 vs. 1. d4, which you don't want. Some people like to use a giant database as a reference database, which will print out similar games, but personally I think that this just adds too much clutter, and sometimes the games it uses are not very high quality. This can be interesting to find out what the "Novelty" was in the game, but I prefer the clean look when it just says "last book move".
- 27.** **If money is not an issue, an electronic score sheet, such as the Monroi, can save you a lot of time and energy during a rated chess game in recording your moves.** It will also provide a more accurate record of the game, and allow you to record more of the game, since it is easy to continue to record the game even if you are in time trouble. This will make your analysis of your games afterwards more productive and fruitful, and save you the time of entering the moves by hand, which can get tedious.
- 28.** **Although no one likes to read manuals, if you do use Chessbase and/or Fritz it is worth the time to read the manuals.** Both programs have a lot of powerful features, which can really help your chess game, but they are not always easy or intuitive to use.

- 29. If you use Fritz and Chessbase products, make sure that you run the software updates.** The versions on the CD will often freeze up for no reason. This can be very frustrating if you are planning on having Fritz do an analysis of your games overnight while you sleep, only to wake up in the morning to find it froze and crashed.
- 30. One popular problem in computer science is the “8 queens” problem.** The idea is to place 8 queens on the board so that no queen attacks one of the other queens. This is a fun idea to try, and can help reinforce how powerful the queen is.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eight_queens_puzzle.
- 31. If you really want an even more accurate analysis of your chess games, tend to end up in a lot of endgames, and have lots of hard drive space on your computer, you can consider installing the chess endgame tablebases.** These will play perfectly all endgames with 6 pieces or fewer. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Endgame_tablebase.



QUOTES ABOUT TACTICS

32. From Reuben Fine's "Chess Marches On" in 1942:

"Thirty years ago, Teichmann said that chess is 99% tactics. And despite the enormous strides of chess theory since then, his percentage can only be reduced a few points.

Many amateurs think that master games are usually decided by some deeply-laid plan covering all possibilities for at least ten moves. That is what they conceive the grand strategy of tournaments to be. Actually, however, strategical considerations, while quite important, do not cover a range or depth at all comparable to the popular notion. Very often, in fact, sound strategy can dispense with seeing ahead at all, except in a negative or trivial sense. And it is still true that most games, even between the greatest of the great, are decided by tactics or combinations which have little or nothing to do with the fundamental structure of the game.

To take one striking example, look at the games of the Euwe-Alekhine matches. Euwe is a player who analyzes openings ad infinitum, i.e., one who wants to settle everything strategically. Alekhine is likewise adept at the art of building up an overwhelming position. And yet in almost all cases the outcome depended not on the inherent structure of the play, but on some chance combination which one side saw and the other side did not. Tactics is still more than 90% of chess."

33. Nick de Firmian, in "How to get Better at Chess: Chess Masters On Their Art" by GM Larry Evans, IM Jeremy B Silman and Betty Roberts

"...one other thing is the GM's superiority in tactics. For example Christiansen can find tactics in any position. If you're a GM you should be able to overpower the IM tactically. The GM will often blow out the IM in this area. "

34. John Nunn, in "Secrets of Practical Chess":

"Once I played 100 games against Mike Cook at 10 minutes (for him) vs 5 minutes (for me). At that time, Mike was about 2300 strength. About half-way through the series (which I eventually won 88-12) he explained his disappointment:

"I thought that I would see lots of advanced strategic concepts in these games, but actually all I've learnt is LDPO."

"LDPO?"

"Loose Pieces Drop Off."

During the remaining games, I saw what he meant. Most of the games were decided by relatively simple tactics involving undefended pieces, when the LP would duly DO."

35. Nigel Davies, KingPin No.28 Spring 1998:

"I really find all this [opening preparation by club players] quite amazing, not least because the games concerned are almost invariably decided much later on and often by rather unsophisticated means."

36. Euwe, Strategy and Tactics in Chess:

"Let us repeat once more the methods by which we can increase our combinative skill:

(1) by careful examination of the different types and by a clear understanding of their motives and their premises

(2) By memorizing a number of outstanding as well as of common examples and solutions

(3) Frequent repetition (in thought, if possible) of important combinations, so as to develop the imagination."

37. Michael de la Maza:

*“A class player should never forget the Material Rule:
He who has the material, rules.”*

TACTICS IMPROVEMENT

- 38.** Tony Robbins says “**Repetition is the mother of skill**”. People often forget up to 90% of something they learned only 30 days after learning it. The only way to avoid this is to use repetition.
- 39.** **Ask your chess friends what they think of your tactical abilities**, and ask them to be honest. If they say anything other than “great”, keep studying tactics.
- 40.** **These two articles totally changed my outlook on the importance of studying tactics.** Don’t get too wrapped up on the exact specifics of his “Seven Circles” program, but the tangible progress that he made in his rating.
www.chesscafe.com/text/skittles150.pdf
His rating history speaks for itself: <http://www.uschess.org/msa/MbrDtlMain.php?12775875>, including a first place finish in the World Open under 2000 section.
He has his own Wikipedia page as well: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_De_La_Maza.
- 41.** **Another important point from de la Maza is the idea between “Chess knowledge” and “Chess ability”.** Focus on “Chess ability”. Don’t be one of these people who knows all the theory of the Sicilian Najdorf poisoned pawn variation, but loses a piece on move 30 to a 2 move combination.
- 42.** An excellent interview with my tactics hero Michael de la Maza is found here: <http://mandelamaza.blogspot.com/2004/12/its-small-world-but-i-wouldnt-want-to.html>
Lots of great quotes and insights in this article about **the importance of studying nothing but tactics until you reach the expert level.**
- 43.** In his book “Outliers”, Malcolm Gladwell discusses what he calls **the “10,000 Hour Rule”**. This rule basically means that **it takes about 10,000 hours to get REALLY good at something.** This is the amount of time most players have spent to get to the Grandmaster/International Master level. The most important thing isn’t being a “genius”

(although this helps), but the sheer amount of time doing quality practice. The more time you spend studying tactics, the better you will get at them. There are no shortcuts.

44. Certain Grandmasters tend to earn reputations such as being a “positional player”, or an “opening specialist”. But all of these Grandmasters are also unbelievably amazing at tactics. **If you want to play like your favorite Grandmaster you must first master tactics.**

45. Life Master Brian Wall advocates **looking at every legal move**. If you are missing tactics or good moves, this might be something that you want to try.

TACTICS AND PSYCHOLOGY

- 46.** In the book “Secrets of the Millionaire Mind” T. Harv Eker says that **the 3 most dangerous words in the English language are “I know that”**. Don’t think to yourself “I know what a knight fork is”, and then think that you don’t need to study them for example.
- 47. Don’t underestimate the importance of good quality sleep.** Read “Brain Rules” by John Medina for more information about how the brain is processing what it learned during the day while it sleeps. Naps are also very important, and undervalued in our society. Even rats who are trained to run in a maze, will run the maze much better the next day if they get a good night sleep, than if their sleep is disturbed.
- 48. Eliminate distractions while playing chess.** Turn off your iPod, cell phone, and anything else that makes noise. People think that they are good multi-taskers, but in reality they are not. The brain can only focus on one thing at a time. Even if you think it is “in the background” it will affect your problem solving ability. The book “Peopleware” discusses this issue.
- 49. Be aware of the “Dunning-Kruger effect” in psychology.** I see this a lot in chess. A new person will show up at a chess club thinking that they are really good, because they are able to beat their cousins or immediate family members, so they have an idea that they are “good at chess”. They proceed to be stomped on by the tournament players. Wikipedia does a great job explaining it, so I will not repeat their definition and examples here. It is interesting that they specifically mention chess.
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunning%E2%80%93Kruger_effect
- 50. Questions:** How many sides are there on a stop sign? What color is a stop sign? How many sides are there to a yield sign? What color is it? *See answers at end.*
Note: This is not a trick question.

- 51. The real key to tactics is pattern recognition.** The more patterns that you know, the more successful you will be. If you can just “see” the pattern, such as a smothered mate, that is 4 less ply that you brain has to calculate, and you will be able to see that whole thing as one “chunk” in your brain. “Chunking” like this allows a lot of the processing to be done in your subconscious, rather than conscious mind. Josh Waitzkin has some very interesting ideas about this subject, and how he has applied them, in his very interesting book “The Art of Learning”.
- 52. There is something to be said about having the desire to win, and never give up in a game.** My friend Francisco loves to quote Rambo who said “NOTHING IS OVER!” and is known for his comebacks in games. There is even an award named for him in which the person is down a queen, and still manages to win a game.
- 53. If you are really out of shape consider starting some sort of exercise program.** Even if it is just walking the health benefits and additional energy can only help your chess game. “Brain Rules” lists many benefits that exercise has on the brain.

“Your body has to be in top condition. Your Chess deteriorates as your body does. You can't separate body from mind.” - Bobby Fischer

TACTICS PROBLEMS

- 54. If you like verbal explanations check out <http://www.chestactics.org/>,** which is Ward Farnsworth's Predator at the Chessboard site (Farnsworth). This labor of love is an amazing resource that really breaks down tactics. He uses a lot of classical examples from Fred Reinfeld and other tactics books and really explains what makes them work. I was a fan of this site from the beginning and even sent in a few corrections for problems I found on his site.
- 55. The nice thing about studying chess tactics is that you can do it almost anywhere.** I have studied tactics on the bus, on an airplane, in the bathroom, during a lunch break, and while exercising. Anytime that you have some downtime, even if it is just a few minutes, it is a great opportunity to study tactics.
- 56. Personally I am not a fan of "composed problems".** These problems are often very unrealistic, and often contain some sort of "trick" in them. I can see why people enjoy them, but I think studying positions from real games will be more beneficial if you are interested in raising your rating.
- 57. When solving problems, especially on a computer, avoid just guessing at the moves.** Try to really figure out what is going on, what the threats are, and what the objective is before just moving pieces around. At the other extreme, if you are spending more than 5 minutes on a typical chess problem, it probably would be better to just look at the answer, and move on to another problem to get the most out of your time.
- 58. If you are weak in mating patterns I recommend "The Brick", Polgar's 5334 Problems, Combinations, and Games.** If you can get the large hardback, it is a beautiful book. The first chapter is all mate in one problems. You want to be able to do all of these just by glancing at them, without even having to think.

TACTICAL MOTIFS

- 59. The back rank mate is a critically important tactical motif.** I have not seen a better source on this than “Bobby Fischer teaches chess”. I love the format of this book, and after going through it 2-3 times you will never miss a back rank mate again.
- 60. Try to really learn how the knight moves** (and not just the clichés like “A knight on the rim is dim”). For example if the knight is on a dark square, you know it can only attack light squares. De la Maza recommends some “knight sight” exercises in his article and book as well, which can help if you are missing knight moves.
- 61. The “Greek gift sacrifice” where you play Bxh7+ (or Bxh2+ as black) is an important chess tactic to know,** and even has its own Wikipedia page - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_gift_sacrifice - and book devoted to it.
- 62. One tactic that is rare and often overlooked is the interference tactic.** This occurs when “occurs when the line between an attacked piece and its defender is interrupted by sacrificially interposing a piece”. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interference_\(chess\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interference_(chess)).
- 63. Wikipedia also has a very interesting section describing chess problem terminology.** Many of these terms were unfamiliar to me:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chess_problem_terminology.
Some of these problem ideas can help you to “think outside the box”.
- 64. Be careful when calculating tactics that involve or may contain “in between moves”,** also known as a *zwischenzug* (German for intermediate move) - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zwischenzug>. Brian Wall says that “in between moves” cause more tactical mistakes among class players than any other tactic.

- 65. To get really powerful tactical combinations you often have to combine more than one idea.** For example you start with a deflection followed by a clearance move, which makes room for a knight fork. The key is to picture where you want your opponent's pieces to be, then figure out a way to get them there. By studying lots of tactical building blocks, putting together these types of combinations becomes easier.
- 66. Try to take advantage of your opponent's king safety if it is poor.** Look for ways to exploit weak squares around the king. Look for ways to remove or deflect the defenders of the king. Look for ways to add additional attackers with tempo. Look for ways to open lines against the king, even if it involves a pawn or even a piece sacrifice.
- 67.** Positions in which each side castled on a different wing often end up with pawn storm races. **Try to avoid making defensive moves when you can make an offensive one instead.** Push the pawns that are on the same side as your opponents king as fast and furious as you can.
- 68. When a player develops their queenside bishop early, it will often leave their "b" pawn weak.** A queen move to b3 (for white) or b6 (for black) can often attack this pawn, and force the opponent to make an awkward move to defend it. You have to be careful actually grabbing this pawn with the queen though. Your opponent can often get compensation for the pawn in terms of time gained with tempos against the pawn grabbing queen.

TACTICS AND TOURNAMENT PLAY

- 69. There are no moral victories in chess.** You either get 1 point, half a point or no points for each game. Losing on time is no nobler than getting checkmated on move 2. They both result in you writing a zero score down on the results sheet.
- 70. Beware of “psychological tactics” that your opponent might be doing during a tournament game, especially if it is a kid.** Kids will do all sorts of annoying things, sometimes on purpose, and sometimes not. This will include, constant draw offers, hovering over the board or in your personal space, making constant “adjustments”, fidgeting or making noises, complaining about minor things, etc. Don’t hesitate to get the tournament director involved if necessary.
- 71. Be prepared for various logistics when going to a chess tournament.** Have a sweatshirt in case it is too cold. Have earplugs in case it is too loud. Have a snack in case there is no food available, or your games run long. Have money in case you have to buy your food there, etc. You don’t want there to be any reasons to lose a game, other than the moves on the board.
- 72. One huge advantage that being a tactical player can give you is the ability to finish games quickly and conserve your energy.** I have had games where I won very quickly because of a tactic. This gave me time to relax between rounds of a tournament. If you have ever had a game go really long, and then have the next round start as soon as your game is over, you know how difficult that can be.
- 73. Be careful of the moves you make right after reaching a time control in a low game.** Often blunders are made on the 41st move of a long tournament game where the person gets 2 hours for the first 40 moves, then an additional hour for the remaining moves. I have done this myself. It is easy to feel a sense of relief that you made the time control, and then not take as much time as you should on the next move.

74. Try not to get too stressed out over your games. I have had several friends who quit playing tournament chess because they could not handle the sleep. I used to have problems sleeping if I lost a close game. Realize that you are not going to win every game, and that we play chess for fun. It is great to be competitive, but if you are constantly upset, you need to take a step back and realize it is just a game, and not take it quite as seriously.

TACTICS IN THE ENDGAMES

- 75. Be sure to look for tactics in the endgame as well.** Many positions that look “drawish” contain hidden tactical possibilities. Don’t accept early draws unless you feel that you are losing. And beware draw offers from kids. That is often a sign that they think they are losing if they offer you one.
- 76.** I once was watching a lecture at the Dallas Chess Club given by a local Master John Jacobs. He said “**Class players aren’t triangulating each other to death**” referring to a type of endgame technique that you may have to use only a few times in your career.
- 77. A few of my friends like to promote multiple pawns if an opponent will not resign.** I personally like to get a game over with as quickly as possible, but they enjoy doing this. If you choose to promote multiple pawns, the main thing to be careful of is stalemating your opponent. This is what they are trying for. Always make sure your opponent has a legal move. I have even see Master level players get swindled into giving a class player would refused to resign a stalemate.
- 78. Make sure that you know “The basics” of endgames.** Can you mate with King and Queen versus King? King and Rook versus Queen? If not practice against a computer. You need to be able to do both of these mates with just an increment of 5 seconds per move without stalemating your opponent, and in less than 50 moves.
- 79. For “extra credit” you can learn how to checkmate with just a bishop and knight, and with 2 bishops.** Personally I think that these scenarios are so rare, that it is better just to study general tactics instead if your study time is limited. If you end up on the “losing” side of one of these endgames, make your opponent play it out. Many class players do not know how to do it.
- 80.** Although it is somewhat rare, **I have met some players who tend to resign too early.** I do not advocate playing every game out until mate, but being down a pawn or two, or even a piece it is often worth it to continue to play.

TACTICS IN BLITZ AND CORRESPONDENCE CHESS

- 81. Playing correspondence chess can be a way to improve your game.** I play in both USCF rated matches, and on redhotpawn.com. These types of games allow you to look deep into a position, and check your moves instead of having to do all of the calculations in your head. I have had some very interesting tactical combinations in correspondence chess.
- 82.** When playing on redhotpawn.com or any other correspondence site that allows it, **if I am in the middle of a forced combination, I will submit my next move as a “conditional move”.** This makes sure that I don’t miss the next move when I load the position the next time, such as forgetting to recapture, and instead making a positional move, such as castling. It is easy to drop a piece in correspondence chess if you play too quickly, and there is a long time between moves. You can forget what is going on in the position.
- 83.** Some people say that blitz will improve your tactics. I am not sure that this is totally true. **I think that blitz is a great way to demonstrate your already existing tactical abilities,** but I am not sure that it makes you better at tactics. I think that studying tactical problems is the best way to get better at tactics, which in turn will make you better at blitz.
- 84.** If you play blitz games on the internet, these can also be fed into a computer for analysis to **look for weaknesses in your game.**

STUDYING TACTICS

- 85. It is important to try and study tactics on a daily basis if possible, even if it is only for 10 minutes a day.** One website that I like is www.habitforge.com. This was recommended by Tim Ferriss in “The Four Hour Body” as a great site for building new habits in to your life. What you do is set up a new habit such as “Study tactics for at least 10 minutes” and every day the website will email you asking if you did it or not. You answer “yes” or “no” and it will track how many days you have completed your goal.
- 86. There are many ways to study chess tactics.** I personally have used books, websites, magazines, software and videos. There is no right or wrong way. The key is focus and repetition. If I had to choose one method, I would probably choose software. The key advantage of software is that it is interactive, less likely to contain mistakes, and allows you to use computer analysis to understand the position if needed.
- 87. Studying tactics should be fun.** If they are not fun, try a different approach. Some tactics are amazingly beautiful such as windmill tactics, under promotions or smothered mates.
- 88. Look for patterns in your games,** and in the tactical puzzles that you solve for the types of tactics that you miss. For example I tend to miss pawn forks. Another friend of mine is weak on mating nets. Once you identify a weakness, work on that area to eliminate it.
- 89. Teach the basic chess tactics to a friend or child** that is interested in learning the game. When you teach something, two people learn. Being able to teach it, will ensure that you really understand the concept yourself.
- 90. Publish tactics from your own games, and the games of others.** I first started “Tactics Time” as a column in the Colorado Chess Informant, which is the official state magazine of the Colorado State Chess Association. I would publish 9 positions from games played in Colorado with a “White to Move” or “Black to Move”, and would try to give funny/amusing answers to each question. Writing a tactics column forced me to go

through a lot of chess player games, and see what kind of tactical mistakes they were making.

91. Dan Heisman wrote an interesting “Novice Nook” article on “Tactical Sets and Goals” - <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman109.pdf>. He discusses his **idea that there are four different levels of understanding to a chess tactic** starting with being able to figure it out, to knowing it when presented as a problem, to being able to see it in a game (without having the added knowledge that a tactic is in fact there), etc. I like his analogies of chess problems to math problems such as “knowing that $8 \times 7 = 56$ ” versus having to compute it.
92. Another good Heisman article where he **stresses the importance of preventing your opponent’s tactics**, and not just offensive tactics, and how to tell if a move is safe or not. <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman106.pdf>

TACTICS RULES OF THUMB

- 93.** There are many well documented “rules of thumb” that chess players know. However, they often don’t realize that they are failing to follow these rules. For example, a player might “know” the rule that you should not trade down material when losing. However, they might still trade down because they want to “simplify” the position. **Try to follow these rules, unless there is a really good reason not to.**
- 94. When determining if a piece is safe to take, use Dan Heisman’s method of counting.** This is probably the most fundamental tactic there is, and is a basic skill that you must be able to do correctly, and is often overlooked in tactics study. He describes this in his “Novice Nook” column on chesscafe.com <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman119.pdf> and also in <http://www.chesscafe.com/text/heisman75.pdf> . Dan’s Novice Nook contains excellent advice, and The Chess Cafe archives have hundreds of his articles and are not just for “novices”.
- 95. Look for “loose” pieces in your opponent’s position.** These are often the targets that can be picked up at the end of a combination.
- 96. Always look at the checks in a given position.** Since the king is forced to get out of check, they limit the options that your opponent will have.
- 97. Make sure you look at your opponent’s tactical threats as well.** Beginners especially tend to get wrapped up in their own plans, and fail to look at what their opponent is threatening to do.
- 98.** Tony Robbins talks a lot about **asking yourself “The Right Questions”**. He says that the brain is super powerful, but you have to ask it the right questions, and it will find an answer. You can use this technique during a game to force your brain to look at the position in different ways. You could ask yourself “What is my opponent threatening?”, “What are the weak squares?”, “Which pieces are undefended?”, etc, etc.

99. Don't be afraid to question that advice that you read (including the advice given here).

Many teachers advocate “playing up in tournaments”. Personally I think this is a bad idea. I've never played up in my life. Others say “study endgames first”. I also disagree with this idea, and think that you get to 1800 USCF with a minimal amount of endgame knowledge. Again, because I have done this myself.

100. Getting good at tactics is the same as “How do you get to Carnegie Hall?” **PRACTICE!**

101. Mastering tactics is the biggest shortcut there is to chess improvement. Make it a focus, and you will see the benefits.

Good Luck!!

ANSWERS

Questions in Tip #50:

Stop sign: 8 sides. Red in Color.

Yield sign: 3 sides. Red in Color. Did you say yellow? Most of us are running around on auto pilot, not really observing the things we see all the time. Don't let this be you over the chessboard!



PRODUCT INFORMATION



Tactics Time is the single most effective way to raise your chess rating, FAST. It is no coincidence that every strong chess player you know has been a master of tactics. This program will show you how to make this powerful skill a permanent and natural part of your game, quickly and easily. It's filled with thousands of positions that you can start using TONIGHT to win games... from tactics that will blow out your opponent in the openings, to clever combinations in the middlegame, to subtle pawn pushes in the endgame, you'll learn something for every situation. This program contains over 4000 tactics, plus bonuses you will love.

For more details go here: http://tacticstime.com/?page_id=2

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