

A Quick Guide to the Rules and Etiquette of Tournament Chess

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The following is a quick guide to the rules and etiquette of tournament chess, for those tournaments conducted with a **sudden death** time control. Citations are made, by section number (§ = section), to the *U.S. Chess Federation's Official Rules of Chess* (5th edition) edited by Tim Just and Daniel B. Burg (Random House: 2003). This *Quick Guide* is not meant to be a substitute for the official rule book, it is only a quick overview which I wrote for my students attending scholastic tournaments. For a fuller understanding of the rules, one should read the official rule book.

Before the Start of the Game

- The player with the black pieces gets to decide which set and board will be used for the game, as long as Black shows up before the start of the round, and as long as Black chooses a standard set and board (§39A).
- Black may also choose which clock to use unless White has a “preferable” clock. A digital clock with time delay activated is preferable over any other type of clock in a game with a sudden death time control (§42D).
- Black determines which side of the board the clock is on unless Black is late for the start of the game (§16L & §39A1).
- If Black is late, White can setup his or her equipment (§39A1).

Setting the Clock

- Non-digital clocks are set so as to end at six o'clock. For a G/60 time control, the clocks are set at 5:00, and for a G/30 time control, the clocks are set at 5:30 (§16B).
- Time delay clocks are usually set with a shorter basic time control. For example, with a G/60 time control, time delay clocks are usually set at 55 minutes with a 5-second time delay. With a G/30 time control, time delay clocks are usually set at 25 minutes with a 5-second time delay (§5Fa).

At the Start of the Game

- When the tournament director announces that it is time to start the clocks, it is proper to first shake hands and then the player with the black pieces starts White's clock.
- If the player with the white pieces is not present, Black should start White's clock.
- If the player with the black pieces is not present, White should start his or her own clock, make a move, and then start Black's clock (§16J).

Conduct During the Game

- During the game, players should never discuss their game with anyone (§20I). Players are allowed to get up and walk around (e.g. to use the restroom or go out or get a drink of water).
- Announcing check is not required, on the other hand, it is not prohibited. Announcing check is usually a sign that one is a beginner. At higher level tournaments it is rare to hear anyone announce check (§12F).

- Aside from writing down your next move on your score sheet, one is not allowed to make notes or write down chess analysis. Also, one should not read chess literature during a game (§20).
- One is allowed to wear headphones in order to listen to music, but it should not disturb anyone near you. If anyone asks you to turn down the volume, you should turn it down, or turn it off.
- You are allowed to ask your opponent to turn down the volume on his or her music.

Stopping Clocks to Flag Down a Director

- The rules clearly state: “A player who wishes to make a claim of any sort or see a director for any legitimate reason may stop both sides of the clock before claiming and/or finding a director” (§5I).

Touch-Move (§10)

- If you touch a piece *intending to move it*, you must move it; if you touch your opponent’s piece *intending to capture it*, you must capture it; and if you move a piece from one square to another and remove your hand from it, you must leave it where it is — assuming, of course, it is your turn to move and the move made is legal. If you knock over a piece with the cuff of your sleeve, or the back of your hand, say “I adjust” (or “*j’adoube*”) and restore the piece to its proper position.
- If it is your turn to move and you wish to adjust a piece on the board or remove a speck from the board, first say, “I adjust” (or “*j’adoube*”), and only then adjust the set and board. But you are only allowed to touch the board and/or pieces when it is your turn to move.

An Illegal Move (§11)

- If your opponent makes an illegal move and starts your clock, you may stop the clock and flag down the tournament director (or assistant) and ask for two minutes to be added to your clock because of the illegal move (§11D).
- If an illegal move is only discovered later, but before ten moves have been played by both sides, one should stop the clock and flag down the tournament director (or assistant) and ask for the position before the illegal move to be restored (§11A). Two minutes are to be added to the clock of the opponent of the player who made the first illegal move (§11D). But if it is found that an illegal move was made prior to each player’s last ten moves, the illegal moves shall stand and the game shall continue (§11B).
- If during sudden death time pressure (when either player has less than five minutes on their clock) an illegal move is discovered after two additional moves played by the player making the illegal move, then the illegal moves stands, and there is no time adjustment (§16D1).

Promoting a Pawn

- If when one goes to promote a pawn to a piece and the desired piece is not available, the player may stop both clocks in order to borrow a piece and place it on the board (§8F7).

Sudden Death Time Pressure

- Sudden death time pressure is defined as either player having less than five minutes remaining (§16D).

- If either player has less than five minutes remaining, both players are allowed to stop keeping score (= recording moves on score sheet). On the other hand, one may continue to keep score if one wishes (§15C).
- During sudden death time pressure, each player must operate the clock with the same hand that moves the pieces (§16C1).
- During sudden death time pressure, one should not pick up the clock (§16C2).

Flag Down

- Only the players of the game are allowed to call attention to a fallen flag (or time expired) on their clocks (§13C1). A director should never initiate a time-forfeit claim (§13C1). And spectators should never say (or hint) at anything about a game.
- A flag is considered to have fallen only when a fallen flag is pointed out by either player. If your flag falls and then you play a move which checkmates your opponent's king, and then your opponent points out that your flag has fallen, you have still won. On the other hand, if your opponent points out that your flag has fallen before you play the move which checkmates your opponent, you lose (or draw if your opponent has insufficient material, see below).
- If a player claims that both flags are down (while they are indeed down), prior to a checkmate, the game is drawn (§14G1).
- Only after both flags have fallen, a director is allowed to rule the game as drawn in order to avoid delaying the tournament (§14G2).
- If your flag falls and your opponent has insufficient material to win on time, the game is a draw. Insufficient material is when (1) one's opponent has only a lone king; (2) one's opponent has only king and bishop or king and knight, and does not have a forced win; or when (3) one has no pawns and one's opponent has only king and two knights and no forced win (§14E).

Resignation

- The proper way to resign a game is to either say "I resign" or by tipping over one's king (§13B), one may then also stop both clocks.
- Then one should shake hands with one's opponent, and congratulate him or her for a won game.
- It is rude and unsportsmanlike to abandon a lost position without resigning so as to allow your clock to run out of time (§20H1).
- It is generally considered proper chess etiquette to resign clearly lost positions. The proper time to resign should vary with one's chess ability. Most beginners should probably play on until they are checkmated. But more advanced players should resign clearly lost positions when they are certain that if they were on the other side of the position, they could beat even a master.

Withdrawing from a Tournament or Missing a Round

- If you need to withdraw from a tournament, or miss a round, for any reason, you should notify the tournament director well in advance of the round you must skip (§13G). It is best to give such notice both verbally and written since tournament directors are very busy and are prone to forget such details unless written down.

Ten Types of a Drawn Game (§14)

- 1) **Stalemate** — the game is drawn when a player cannot make any legal moves and yet is not in check (§14A).
- 2) **Agreement** — the game is drawn when both players agree to a draw. The proper procedure for offering a draw is, (a) immediate after making one's move on the board, (b) say: "I offer a draw," and only after making one's move and announcing "I offer a draw," (c) press the button on one's clock so as to start your opponent's clock. After a draw has been offered, one's opponent has the option of accepting anytime before his or her next move. One rejects a draw offer simply by playing one's next move. To accept a draw which has been offered, one may stop the clocks and shake hands, thus signifying the acceptance of the draw offer (§14B).
- 3) **Triple occurrence of position** — the game can be claimed to be drawn when the same identical position occurs three times. Only a player on the move may claim a draw by triple occurrence of position. There are two ways to make such a claim. If a move is required to complete the third occurrence of the position, the player claiming the draw should write this move down on his or her score sheet (without making the move on the board) and then stop both clocks, and make the claim. If no move is needed to complete the third occurrence of the position, the player claiming the draw should stop both clocks. If the opponent agrees with the claim, the game is drawn. If the opponent does not agree with the claim, a director should be called over to make judgment. If the director denies the claim, the claimant is still obligated to play the move recorded on his or her score sheet, if one was made (§14C).
- 4) **Insufficient material to continue** — the game is drawn when one of the following endings arises: (a) king versus king; (b) king versus king with bishop or knight; (c) king and bishop versus king and bishop (when both bishops are on squares of the same color); or (d) any position where there are no longer any moves that could lead to any player being checkmated (§14D).
- 5) **Insufficient material to win on time** — the game is drawn when a player exceeds the time limit and yet his or her opponent has insufficient material to win on time, such as having a lone king, a king with a bishop or knight, or a king with two knights (§14E).
- 6) **50-move rule** — the game is drawn when 50 moves have been made by each side without any capture or pawn move (§14F).
- 7) **Both flags down in sudden death** — the game is drawn in a sudden death time control if one of the players points out that both flags are down and they are indeed down (§14G).
- 8) **Insufficient losing chances in sudden death** — in a sudden death time control **without a clock with time delay**, a player with two minutes or less of remaining time may stop the clocks and ask the director to declare the game drawn on the grounds that the player has insufficient losing chances (§14H1). This rule refers to more complex position than those under insufficient material to win on time (§14E). Examples of the type of positions which qualify as insufficient losing chances can be found in the rule book under §14I. The tournament director, if unsure of the claim, has the option of continuing the game with a clock which has time delay.
- 9) **Accepting the implied draw offer** — if one's opponent makes a draw claim (such as: triple occurrence of position, insufficient material to continue, insufficient material to win on time, the 50-move rule, both flags are down in sudden death, insufficient losing chances, etc.), one may accept the implied draw offer, thus ending the game drawn (§14).
- 10) **Draw declared by director** — on rare occasions the director may declare a game drawn (§14J).