ChessDepth

Think Deep. Play Deeper!

FREE BOOK

Opening Basics

Every major opening, explained from both sides

21 openings · the ideas for White and Black · traps to know

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Learn ideas, not just moves

This book shows the 21 most important chess openings. For each one you get the main moves, the position on the board, and the plans **both** sides should follow, so it helps whichever colour you play. Each opening ends with a trap or tip worth knowing.

Set up each line on a board and play it through. Then ask yourself: why was each move played? Once you know the ideas, you will still play good moves when your opponent goes off the main line.

The six opening principles

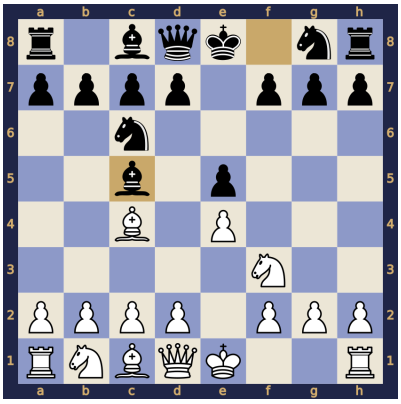
1. **Fight for the centre**
   Put pawns on e4, d4 (or e5, d5) or control those squares with pieces. The centre is where pieces are strongest.
2. **Develop your pieces**
   Bring knights and bishops out before moving any piece twice. Knights usually go before bishops.
3. **Castle early**
   Get your king to safety, usually within the first 10 moves, and connect your rooks.
4. **Don't bring the queen out too soon**
   She can be chased around, and every chase gives your opponent a free developing move.
5. **Learn ideas, not just moves**
   If you know why a move is played, you'll find good moves when your opponent leaves the book.
6. **Watch your opponent's threats**
   Before every move, ask: what does my opponent want? Most opening disasters come from missing a simple threat.

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Flank openings	English Opening, Réti Opening

1.e4 e5: the Open Games

Both sides put a pawn in the centre. Quick development and fights over the e5 and f7 squares.



Italian Game

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5

A calm, healthy position for both sides: the perfect first opening to learn.

♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- Aim the bishop at f7, the weakest point near Black's king.
- Build the centre with c3 and d4, or play slowly with d3, O-O and Re1.
- Later, re-route a knight via d2-f1-g3 towards the kingside.

♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Develop with ...Nf6, ...d6 and ...O-O, mirroring White's set-up.
- Keep the bishop with ...a6 and ...Ba7 so it can't be swapped off by Na4.
- Strike back with ...d5 when the centre allows it.

⚠ **Fried Liver Attack:** If Black plays 3...Nf6 and later recaptures 5...Nxd5?!, White sacrifices on f7 and gets a fierce attack. 5...Na5 is safer.
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.Ng5 d5 5.exd5 Nxd5 6.Nxf7 Kxf7 7.Qf3+



Ruy Lopez (Spanish)

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.O-O Be7

Long, strategic games. White keeps a slight edge; Black has very solid choices.

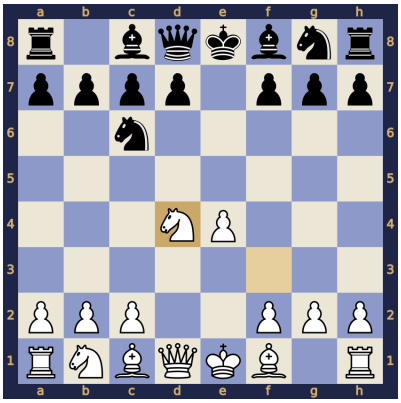
♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- Pressure the knight that defends e5.
- Build the ideal centre with c3 and d4, supported by Re1.
- Manoeuvre Nb1-d2-f1-g3 and play on both wings.

♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Kick the bishop with ...a6 and ...b5 when needed.
- Hold e5 with ...d6, then castle.
- Play on the queenside with ...Na5 and ...c5, or go sharp with ...d5 (the Marshall).

⚠ **Noah's Ark Trap:** White grabs a pawn with 8.Qxd4??, and Black's queenside pawns trap the bishop on b3.
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 d6 5.d4 b5 6.Bb3 Nxd4 7.Nxd4 exd4 8.Qxd4 c5 9.Qd5 Be6 10.Qc6+ Bd7 11.Qd5 c4



Scotch Game

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 exd4 4.Nxd4

Open, active chess with fewer long theoretical lines than the Ruy Lopez.

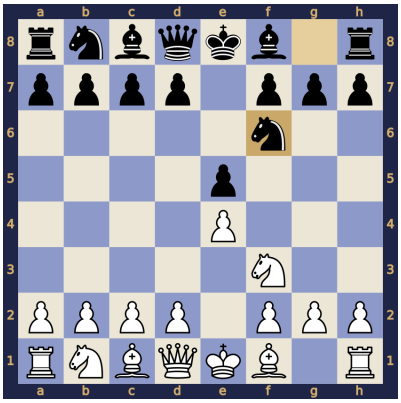
♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- Open the centre straight away and develop fast.
- Use the knight on d4 and the pawn on e4 to gain space.
- Push e4-e5 to drive away Black's knight on f6.

♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Hit the knight with ...Bc5 or the e4-pawn with ...Nf6.
- Free the position with ...d5 at the right moment.
- Use the open lines for quick piece play.

⚠ **Tip:** After 4...Nf6 5.Nxc6 bxc6 6.e5, Black's knight must move. Know where it goes (6...Qe7 or 6...Nd5) before you play this line.



Petroff Defence

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6

Very solid for Black. Learn the move-order trick below and it's easy to play.

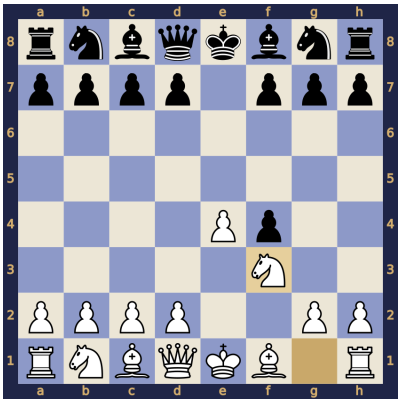
♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- After 3.Nxe5 d6 4.Nf3 Nxe4 5.d4, aim for a small space edge.
- Develop quickly and castle; Black's position is symmetrical, so look for a lead in development.
- Avoid trading everything if you want winning chances.

♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Counter-attack e4 instead of defending e5.
- Copy White's moves carefully, but never too long.
- Reach a solid, balanced middlegame. Many top players use it to draw with Black.

⚠ **Petroff Trap:** Copying White with 3...Nxe4? is a mistake: after 4.Qe2, the natural 4...Nf6?? allows 5.Nc6+, a discovered check that wins the queen. Play 3...d6 first.
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.Nxe5 Nxe4 4.Qe2 Nf6 5.Nc6+



King's Gambit

1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Nf3

Romantic, attacking chess. Rare at the top today, but great for learning to attack.

♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- Give a pawn to open the f-file and pull Black's e-pawn away.
- Build the centre with d4 and develop with Bc4.
- Attack f7 with the bishop, the knight and the rook on the f-file.

♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Keep the pawn with ...g5, or give it back with ...d5 for easy development.
- Develop quickly: ...Nf6, ...d5 and ...Bd6 are natural.
- Watch White's king: it is open too after f4.

⚠ **Tip:** The simple answer 3...d5 (returning the pawn) gives Black easy development and avoids most of White's tricks.

Other replies to 1.e4

Black avoids the symmetrical 1...e5 and fights for the centre another way.



Sicilian Defence

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6

Unbalanced and sharp: the most popular answer to 1.e4. This is the Najdorf (5...a6).

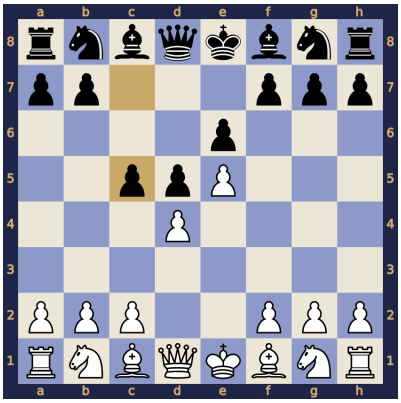
♔ **WHITE'S IDEAS**

- Use the lead in development and the extra space.
- Attack the king, often with f3, Be3, Qd2, O-O-O and g4.
- Use the d5 square for a knight.

♚ **BLACK'S IDEAS**

- Swap a wing pawn (c5) for White's centre pawn: Black gets two central pawns to one.
- Use the half-open c-file for rooks and pressure on c3.
- Counter-attack on the queenside with ...b5.

⚠ **Tip:** If you play White and don't want to learn long lines, try 2.c3 (the Alapin): it aims for d4 and avoids the main theory.



French Defence

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5

Closed centre, plans on opposite wings. This is the Advance Variation (3.e5).

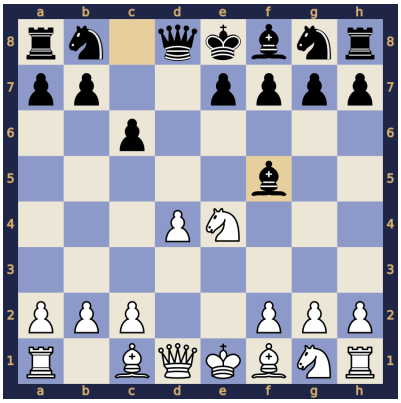
♔ **WHITE'S IDEAS**

- Gain space with e5 and attack on the kingside.
- Defend d4 with c3 and Nf3.
- Keep Black's light-squared bishop locked in behind its pawns.

♚ **BLACK'S IDEAS**

- Attack White's pawn chain from the bottom with ...c5.
- Add pressure on d4 with ...Nc6 and ...Qb6.
- Later, hit the head of the chain with ...f6.

⚠ **Tip:** Black's light-squared bishop on c8 is often the problem piece. Plan to trade it (for example via ...b6 and ...Ba6) or free it with ...f6.



Caro-Kann Defence

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Bf5

Solid and reliable for Black, with fewer weaknesses than the French.

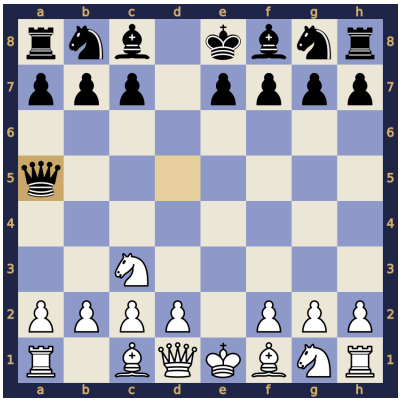
♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- Gain time by chasing the bishop with Ng3 and h4-h5.
- Grab space and often castle queenside.
- Use the extra central pawn on d4.

♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Develop the light-squared bishop before playing ...e6.
- Build a rock-solid pawn structure: c6, e6 and d5 squares well covered.
- Strike later with ...c5 and aim for a good endgame.

⚠ **Smothered mate trap:** In the 4...Nd7 line, after 5.Qe2 the natural 5...Ngf6?? walks into 6.Nd6 checkmate: the e7-pawn is pinned.
1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nd7 5.Qe2 Ngf6 6.Nd6#



Scandinavian Defence

1.e4 d5 2.exd5 Qxd5 3.Nc3 Qa5

Easy to learn, and White can't avoid it after 1.e4.

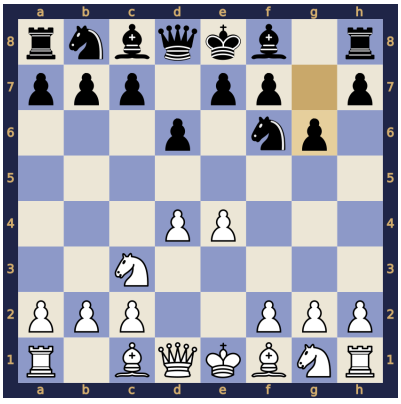
♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- Gain time by attacking the queen with Nc3.
- Build the centre with d4 and develop quickly.
- Use the lead in development before Black catches up.

♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Hit the centre at once and force White's hand.
- Put the queen on a5 or d6, then develop with ...Nf6, ...c6 and ...Bf5.
- Aim for a simple, solid set-up like the Caro-Kann.

⚠ **Tip:** Don't move the queen again and again. After ...Qa5, finish development before starting any queen adventures.



Pirc Defence

1.e4 d6 2.d4 Nf6 3.Nc3 g6

Hypermodern chess: Black gives up space now for counterplay later.

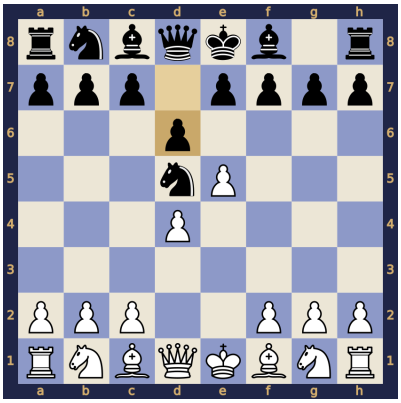
♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- Build a big centre with e4, d4 and often f4 (the Austrian Attack).
- Attack with Be3, Qd2, O-O-O and h4-h5.
- Push e4-e5 to drive the knight away.

♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Let White have the centre, then attack it from a distance.
- Fianchetto the bishop on g7, where it presses on d4 and b2.
- Strike with ...c5 or ...e5 at the right moment.

⚠ **Tip:** Against the Austrian Attack (4.f4), don't wait too long: Black needs a quick ...c5 or ...e5 before White's e5 push.



Alekhine's Defence

1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6

Provocative: Black invites a big pawn centre and tries to prove it is a weakness.

♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- Use the extra space and the pawn on e5.
- Chase the knight only if it doesn't overstretch your centre.
- A calm 4.Nf3 is simple and good.

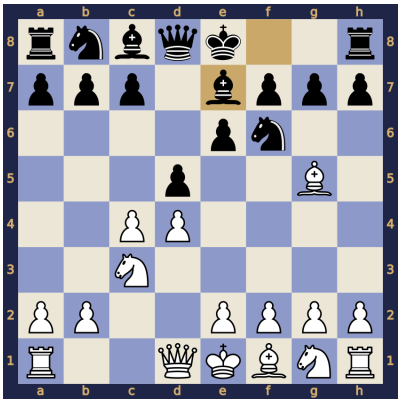
♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Tempt White's pawns forward, then attack them.
- Undermine the centre with ...d6, ...Bg4 and ...c5.
- Use your pieces on the squares the pawns leave behind.

⚠ **Tip:** The Four Pawns Attack (4.c4 Nb6 5.f4) is White's most ambitious try. Black must hit back fast with ...dxe5 and ...Nc6.

1.d4: the Closed Games

Slower, more strategic openings. Pawn structures matter as much as tactics.



Queen's Gambit Declined

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bg5 Be7

Classical and solid: one of the best defences to learn for life.

♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- Pressure d5 with c4, Nc3 and Bg5.
- In the Exchange structure, play the minority attack: b4-b5 to weaken Black's queenside.
- Use the half-open c-file.

♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Hold d5 firmly with ...e6 and develop calmly.
- Free the position with ...c5 or ...e5 later.
- Find a good square for the light-squared bishop (often ...b6 and ...Bb7).

⚠ **Elephant Trap:** 6.Nxd5?? seems to win a pawn because the knight on f6 is pinned, but 6...Nxd5! gives up the queen and wins a piece back with interest.
1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bg5 Nbd7 5.cxd5 exd5 6.Nxd5 Nxd5 7.Bxd8 Bb4+ 8.Qd2 Bxd2+ 9.Kxd2 Kxd8



Queen's Gambit Accepted

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.e3 e6 5.Bxc4 c5

Black gives up the centre for a moment in exchange for free, active development.

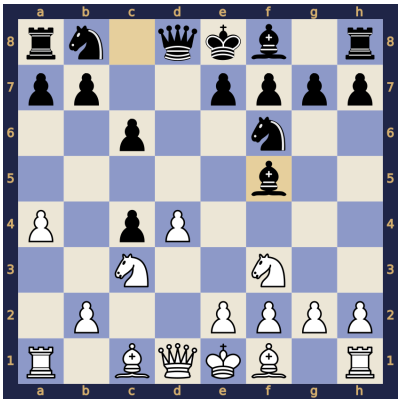
♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- Win the pawn back with e3 and Bxc4.
- Take the centre with e4 when possible.
- Play for an attack with the isolated d-pawn if Black exchanges on d4.

♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Take on c4, but don't try to keep the pawn.
- Use the time to develop and strike with ...c5.
- Expand with ...a6 and ...b5 on the queenside.

⚠ **Don't keep the pawn:** Trying to hold the pawn with 3...b5? 4.a4 c6 5.axb5 cxb5 runs into 6.Qf3, attacking the rook on a8 down the long diagonal, and Black loses material.
1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 b5 4.a4 c6 5.axb5 cxb5 6.Qf3



Slav Defence

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.Nc3 dxc4 5.a4 Bf5

Solid like the QGD, but the c8-bishop gets out easily.

♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- Win back the c4-pawn, often with a4 and e3.
- Aim for a strong centre with e4.
- Play against Black's queenside if it overextends.

♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Support d5 with ...c6, keeping the light-squared bishop free.
- Develop the bishop to f5 or g4 before playing ...e6.
- Use the b4 square for the bishop or a knight after a4.

⚠ **Tip:** After 4...dxc4, don't hold on with ...b5 if White can play a4 and b3: that usually just loses time.



London System

1.d4 d5 2.Bf4 Nf6 3.e3 c5 4.c3 Nc6 5.Nd2

A system rather than an opening: little theory, clear plans.

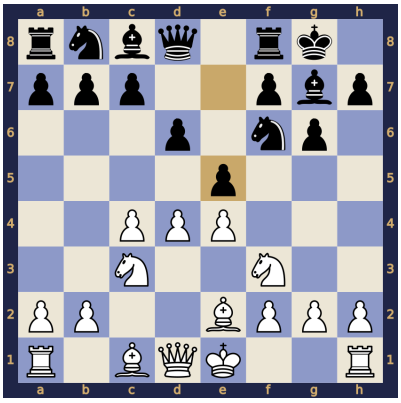
♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- Build the same solid set-up every game: d4, Bf4, e3, c3, Nf3, Bd3, Nbd2.
- Use Ne5 and attack the kingside.
- Keep the bishop on f4 safe: it can drop back to g3 or h2.

♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Hit d4 at once with ...c5 and ...Nc6.
- Attack b2 with ...Qb6 to unsettle White.
- Trade off White's strong bishop with ...Bd6.

⚠ **Watch b2:** After ...c5 and ...Qb6, White's b2-pawn is attacked. Defend it with Qb3 or Qc1, or White just loses a pawn.



King's Indian Defence

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.Nf3 O-O 6.Be2 e5

A race: White on the queenside, Black on the kingside. Sharp and fighting.

♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- Take space with c4, d4 and e4.
- After d5 closes the centre, attack on the queenside with b4 and c5.
- Keep your king safe from Black's pawn storm.

♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Let White build a centre, then challenge it with ...e5 or ...c5.
- When the centre closes, storm the kingside with ...f5, ...f4 and ...g5.
- The bishop on g7 and the knights join the attack.

⚠ **Tip:** When White plays d5, the centre locks. From then on, count moves: whose attack arrives first usually wins.



Nimzo-Indian Defence

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4

Flexible and strategic: a favourite of world champions.

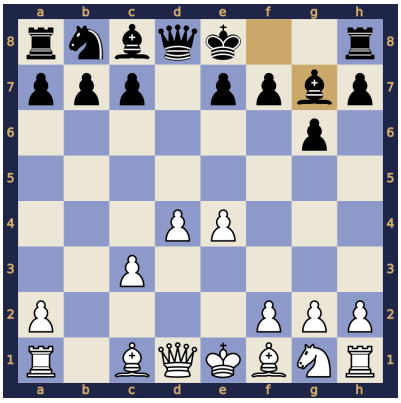
♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- Use the bishop pair if Black takes on c3.
- Build the centre with e3, Bd3 and a later e4.
- Use the doubled c-pawns to control d4 and b4.

♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Pin the knight to stop e4.
- Take on c3 to double White's pawns, then attack them.
- Control the light squares with ...b6 and ...Bb7, or ...d5 and ...c5.

⚠ **Tip:** Don't hurry to take on c3: wait until White spends a move on a3 or the trade really helps you.



Grünfeld Defence

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.e4 Nxc3 6.bxc3 Bg7

Dynamic: Black lets White grab space and hits it with pieces.

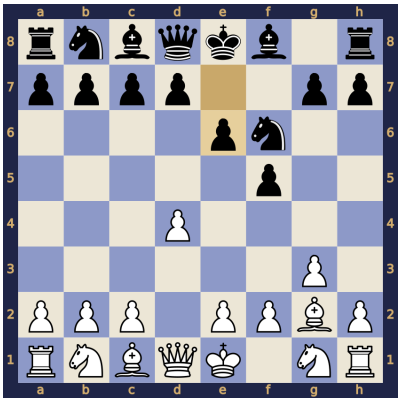
♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- Build a huge centre with d4 and e4.
- Push d4-d5 to gain space.
- Use the centre to attack on the kingside.

♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Give White the centre, then attack it.
- The bishop on g7 targets d4 and c3.
- Add pressure with ...c5, ...Nc6 and ...Qa5.

⚠ **Tip:** The c5 break is Black's key move. Without it, White's big centre just rolls forward.



Dutch Defence

1.d4 f5 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 e6

Unbalanced from move one: Black plays for a kingside attack.

♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- Fianchetto the bishop on g2 to fight for e4.
- Prepare the e4 break.
- Use the weakness on e6 and the open e8-h5 diagonal.

♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Grab control of e4 with the f-pawn.
- Attack on the kingside with ...Qe8-h5 or ...g5.
- Choose a set-up: Stonewall (...d5), Leningrad (...g6) or Classical (...e6).

⚠ **Trap:** After 2.Bg5, chasing the bishop with ...h6, ...g5, ...f4 and ...h5 weakens Black's king. After 6...Rh6?, 7.Qxh5+! Rxh5 8.Bg6 is mate.
1.d4 f5 2.Bg5 h6 3.Bh4 g5 4.Bg3 f4 5.e3 h5 6.Bd3 Rh6 7.Qxh5+ Rxh5 8.Bg6#

Flank openings

White controls the centre from the side, keeping the position flexible.



English Opening

1.c4 e5 2.Nc3 Nf6 3.g3

Flexible and positional. Can turn into many other openings.

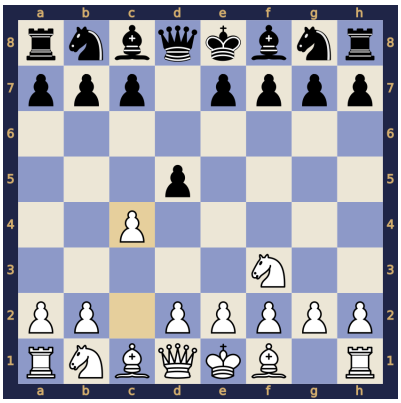
♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- Control d5 with c4 and Nc3.
- Fianchetto the bishop to g2, where it rakes the long diagonal.
- Play on the queenside with Rb1 and b4.

♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Take the centre with ...e5 and ...d5.
- Develop naturally: ...Nc6, ...Bb4 or ...Bc5.
- Treat it like a reversed Sicilian, with an extra move for White.

⚠ **Tip:** Against 1...e5, White is playing a Sicilian with colours reversed and an extra move. Sicilian ideas work here too.



Réti Opening

1.Nf3 d5 2.c4

Hypermodern: White waits to see Black's set-up before deciding.

♔ WHITE'S IDEAS

- Attack d5 from the side with c4.
- Fianchetto on g2, castle, and choose the pawn structure later.
- Keep options open to switch into the Queen's Gambit or English.

♚ BLACK'S IDEAS

- Hold d5 with ...c6 or ...e6, or push ...d4 for space.
- Develop simply and castle.
- Don't overextend in the centre: White's pieces target it.

⚠ **Tip:** If Black pushes 2...d4, White plays e3 or b4 to challenge it. That pawn is strong but can become a target.

WHERE TO START

Which openings should I play?

You only need one opening with White, one answer to 1.e4 and one answer to 1.d4. Pick from the row that sounds most like you, play it for a few months, and learn from every game.

If you...	With White, try	With Black, try
Beginner (up to 1000)	Italian Game, London System	Italian Game (1.e4 e5), Queen's Gambit Declined
Like solid, safe positions	London System, Queen's Gambit	Caro-Kann, Queen's Gambit Declined, Slav
Like sharp, attacking chess	King's Gambit, Scotch Game	Sicilian, King's Indian, Dutch
Want little theory	London System, Réti	Scandinavian, Caro-Kann

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