
chess games Rec.games.chess.play-by-email Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Posted by Paul_Morphy - 2009/07/17 06:44

Summary: This posting contains a list of Frequently Asked Questions (and their answers) about email chess. It should be read by anyone who wishes to post to the rec.games.chess.play-by-email newsgroup. (This FAQ is maintained by Paul Morphy, mailto:paul_morp...@coolgoose.com. It may be viewed online at URL:<http://chess.kearman.com/html/pbefaq.htm>.) *** Welcome to the rec.games.chess.play-by-email FAQ. Many of your questions about chess will be answered by the rec.games.chess.misc FAQ: <http://www.faqs.org/faqs/by-newsgroup/rec/rec.games.chess.misc.html> This FAQ seeks to answer questions specifically related to correspondence chess via email. This newsgroup is used as a dating service, for chessplayers to find opponents, and to discuss the subject of correspondence chess by email. Some email chess-program authors post here, as well as sponsors of web-based email chess sites. General chess-related postings are probably better posted to one or more of the other chess newsgroups: rec.games.chess.analysis rec.games.chess.computer rec.games.chess.misc rec.games.chess.politics You should also visit these websites, which are dedicated to correspondence chess: Andy Harris: <http://chess.aharris.org/> Correspondence Chess.com: <http://correspondencechess.com/> Correspondence Chess Message Board: <http://www.correspondencechess.com/bbs/> Correspondence Chess News: <http://ccn.correspondencechess.com> Dedicated to Email Chess: <http://chess.kearman.com/>

1. Brief History Email chess is a descendant of correspondence chess, where players use postal mail to send moves. While it follows the rules of chess, correspondence chess proceeds at a much slower pace, and encourages deep and detailed analysis before each move. Many of the sharp lines in chess openings were first discovered by correspondence players. You can try out lines on a board, search the books and databases, and give a great deal of consideration to your move before you commit to it. If you're a beginner, you don't have much analytical experience, but it comes with time. You'll have the chance to try a move, then turn the board around and try to figure out how your opponent will reply. You do this in any game, of course, but in correspondence chess (cc) you aren't under the same pressure and you can consult published works for ideas. (See below for information about the use of chess-playing programs.) In fact, the pace of cc lends itself to having several games going at once. Some postal cc players have hundreds of games going; the record is more than 1000 games at one time (held by Stan Vaughn). Most email chess players play 10-15 games at once.
2. What's So Great About Email Chess? Like postal correspondence chess, email chess takes place at a much slower rate than over-the-board chess, and certainly more slowly than online games. All you need is an email account; no postage required, and you don't have to wait months for the next move to arrive. The rate of play is up to the individuals. If you become involved in one of the email-chess organizations, they stipulate a certain number of moves in a period of time, but even then the pace is comfortable for most people. If you make two moves a week you can keep up.
3. Why Join A Group When I Can Pick Up Games Here? This newsgroup is a good place for beginning chess players to find games, but not many advanced players seem to show up here. Unfortunately, many people accept a game and simply disappear, or post looking for a game and never acknowledge replies. Someone who takes the trouble to get into an organization is probably more likely to see the game through. Each of the organizations listed below does a little training with you to make sure you understand algebraic notation, portable game notation, and the time controls. Like membership, the training is free and fun. You play a game with someone from the organization, and they coach you on the notations and time controls, but not on your play itself (unless you make an illegal move, I suppose). In no time at all you'll be welcomed to full membership, and they'll fix you up with other players of similar ability in tournaments. You can play as few as two games at a time (against a single opponent) or as many as you think you can comfortably handle. Below are the URLs of the major International email chess organizations. There are many national organizations that sponsor email chess tournaments and matches as well. Except as noted, all organizations are free to join and participate in.
International Correspondence Chess Federation <http://www.iccf.com> (Usually requires membership in a national society)
International Email Chess Club (IECC) <http://www.chess-iecc.com/>
International Email Chess Group (IECG) <http://www.iecg.org/>
World Correspondence Chess Federation (WCCF) <http://www.ewccf.com/>
4. I don't want to use email. What are some websites I can use to record and send moves instead of using chess-related software on my computer?
Casual Correspondence Chess Server <http://correspondencechess.com/cgi-bin/board.pl>
Chess Mail <http://www.chess-mail.com/>
ChessWorld.net <http://www.chessworld.net/>
Deepfrozen <http://deepfrozen.tripod.com> (a Java applet that also can be downloaded and used offline)
Gold Token <http://www.goldtoken.com/>
It's Your Turn <http://itsyourturn.com/>
Jim's Chess Club <http://playchess.kearman.com/>
Net-Chess <http://www.net-chess.com/>
PlayChess <http://www.playchess.de/playchess.shtm>
Postcard Chess <http://postcardchess.com/>
Soundchess <http://www.soundkeepers.com/chess>
5. What is PGN? PGN stands for Portable Game Notation, and is the most popular method on the Internet of representing the moves of a chess game. Most computer chess games and databases will read and write this format. PGN files can include any number of games, or only one. The header contains the players' names and other information about the game, such as the name of a tournament, location, and date, as well as the outcome. Most of this information is self explanatory. The game result is either * (in progress); 1-0 (White won); 0-1 (Black won); or 1/2-1/2 (draw). Here's an example of a PGN header: (ECO stands for Encyclopedia of Chess Openings, in which various opening lines are catalogued. D17 is the Queen's Gambit-Declined, Slav variation.)
Unknown data is replaced with ?. Here is the move list (score) from a game, in PGN: 1. g3 e5 2. Bg2 d5 3. c3 Nf6 4. d4 exd4 5. cxd4 Bd6 6. Nc3 c6 7. Qc2 O-O 8. Bf4 Bxf4 9. gxf4 g6 10. e3 Bf5 11. Qd2 Nbd7 12. Nge2 Nb6 13. b3 Qd7 14. h4 a5 15. a4 Rfe8 16. Ng3 Bg4 17. Kf1 Qe7 18. Kg1 Nc8 19. Re1 Nd6 20. f3 Bf5 21. Nxf5 Nxf5 22. e4 dxe4 23. fxe4 Rad8 24. Kh2 Ng4+ 0-1 The moves are given in English algebraic notation.
6. What is Algebraic Notation? I knew you were going to ask that. Algebraic notation is one way of textually representing the

moves in a chess game. From White's side of the board the rows are numbered 1-8 and the columns a-h. So White's Queen Rook sits on a1, and his King Rook is on h1. White's pawns are on a2-h2. When you move a piece from one square to another, you write it thus: Nd5, meaning you are moving a Knight to the square d5. If more than one of your knights can move to d5, you write it Ncd5 or N3d5, so as to remove the ambiguity. You don't use P for pawns. If a piece captures, it is written as Nxd5, Ncxd5, N3xd5 as necessary (pawn captures are sometimes abbreviated like this: cd, but cxd5 is preferred). It is not necessary to indicate en passant captures (I'm not telling you about en passant; get a beginner's chess book or search the Web) as they should be obvious if the proper information is given. Some programs will put the en passant information in the form of a comment, which is enclosed in curly brackets: 10. exf6 {ep}. O-O is a castle to the king side; O-O-O is a castle to the queen side. Use O (oh) not 0 (zero, zed). In English, the pieces are identified as: K=King; Q=Queen; R=Rook; B=Bishop; N=Knight. When you send a move to an opponent it's a good idea to include the entire game score each time. Many people play several games at once and this can prevent confusion. Keep a separate record of your moves, too. Computers and programs have been known to self destruct, taking only important files with them when they go. I keep the game files on my hard drive, on a floppy disk, and in a paper notebook.

7. What are good programs to use to record moves, etc. These are Windows programs. Some versions will run on Win 3.x, others require Win9x or NT. Linux/Unix and Macintosh programs are available, but not as many. A future version of this FAQ will contain information on obtaining them. ChessTool Pocket (free) http://www.download-free.programas-gratis.net/php/software.php?id_pro... ECTool Lite (free) <http://webs.ono.com/a.valverde/MailChess> (free) <http://www.mailchess.de/engl/indexe.html> Shareware versions of these programs are also available, have more features, and are recommended. People aren't going to keep writing software if they don't make some money at it. Another good program to have is WinBoard, which is also free. It is a PGN viewer and also comes with the GNU chess engine, a pretty good chess program considering it's free. You can also use WinBoard as an interface to Crafty, another good chess program that also analyzes chess positions. WinBoard is available from <http://www.tim-mann.org/chess.html> You probably want the Windows version (WinBoard), not the Unix version (XBoard). Crafty is available from <ftp://ftp.cis.uab.edu/pub/hyatt/> Read the notes on the WinBoard page before you install Crafty. (Linux users can download Xboard instead.)

8. May I Use A Computer To Help Me Select My Moves? The real question is, do you want to win or do you want your computer to win? Regardless of the rules, no one but you will truly know. Having said that, it is quite possible for a good correspondence chess player to beat a computer. Computer chess programs think in terms of tactics: winning as many pawns and pieces as possible. They don't do well at sorting out complicated positions and some of them perform poorly in endgames. Correspondence chess is really the art form of chess, and the time you have between moves allows you to do deep analysis of positions and perhaps discover new lines that will give you an advantage. Why deprive yourself of the pleasure and satisfaction? Using a computer to search a database for similar positions is acceptable. You are presented with several options from past games, and it's up to you to determine the best plan. You can play out games from the past and see which positions you prefer, or look for lines you might not have thought of. In this case it you who is making the move decision, not the computer.

9. What Are Ratings? Chess players are rated on a scale ranging from about 700 to about 2900 as this is written. The higher your rating the better your play. You want to compete against players rated slightly better than you, so you have a challenge. As you collect wins your own rating will increase, although a loss will diminish your rating. Right now, just get started playing and worry about the ratings later.

10. Okay, I'm Ready To Go. How Do I Request A Game on rec.games.chess.play-by-email? Well, you can simply post a request, giving your correct email address, or answer someone else's request (by email, not by posting). If you want to play White, post your first move, and let people know your level of play: Hi, I'm looking for a game. I'm a new player.

1. e4 If you reply to a post, make sure you're sending it as email and not back to the newsgroup! Most people who post want to start out as White, so if you don't want to play the Black pieces you'll have to stick your neck out and give your email address! Suggestion: Play two games against each opponent; one as White and one as Black. It's a good idea to include all the moves in the game in each reply, in case an email goes astray somewhere. If you use an email chess program it will do this for you. If you don't use an email chess program and your mail client supports HTML format, make sure you set the format to Text, as not all email programs support HTML and it will be difficult for your opponent to decipher your move. ***

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