

THINK LIKE A STRONG PLAYER

Immediately after every move by your opponent, you should answer the following two questions:

1) What are your opponent's **THREATS**?

A threat can be:

- a mate attack or other threats against the king,
- a gain in material,
- gaining a very good position for a piece,
- getting control of an important square, line, or diagonal, or
- any other tactical or strategic advantage that the opponent can gain on the next move.

Then, you should evaluate which of the threats are real. Not all threats are REAL and in this regard many chess players often make mistakes. For example, if your opponent is threatening to gain the bishop-pair, you should evaluate whether this is really negative for you in the *concrete, exact* position that you have on the board. Only real threats should be taken into consideration.

2) What are the **CONSEQUENCES** of your opponent's last move?

Almost every move has a good effect and a collateral effect which may be negative (chess moves have pluses and minuses). For example, by moving the bishop from c8 to f5, Black gains control over the b1-h7 diagonal, BUT at the same time, he loses the protection of the b7-pawn.

Also, you should always evaluate the consequences of your own moves before playing them.

The consequences of moves usually have a geometrical nature and they can be:

- opening a file or a diagonal,
- blocking one piece with another,
- weakening a square or a pawn structure,
- leaving a piece undefended, and
- many others that you will learn to spot easily.

All our annotated games at ICS include questions and answers about the consequences of moves at all important moments, showing you again and again how to evaluate them and also how important this evaluation is in practice.

A strong chess player should be used to evaluating these consequences in a matter of few seconds or even in fractions of a second. It is something you should train your mind to

do in order for it to realize these evaluations automatically, and after a while, without you even being conscious of it. This will be a very big step forward in your chess improvement and we will insist on this during the course.

Most of the moves' consequences should be kept somewhere in your mind for future uses. *For example*, if at the 23rd move, your opponent weakens his king's protection by moving his knight away from f6, you can use this later when you decide to go for an attack with Qh5, at the 30th move.

The habit of evaluating the consequences of a move and recording them somewhere in your mind will help you a lot even in developing your calculation power (and also in avoiding oversights and blunders!). All elements, such as occupied squares, an open diagonal, an overloaded piece, a weak square somewhere, a pinned pawn, are very important during the game of chess and your mind's ability to use them will bring you satisfaction in practical games. In the case of complicated positions (and simpler positions too), your head won't be spinning anymore. Instead, the position's resources will reveal themselves in front of your eyes sooner and simpler.

So, you will be taught how to evaluate the consequences of chess moves as part of all our annotated games, but first you need to know some important elements:

- a) The most important consequences are given by the pawn moves because they cannot move backwards. The pawns defend two squares (or one square in the case of the marginal ones) and the move of a pawn will leave two undefended (or even weak) squares but it will defend two others. Also the pawns can block pieces behind and can fix the structure in the center for a long time. Pawn moves generally open files, ranks and diagonals for a long period. Therefore any pawn move must be very well evaluated.
- b) All moves have one common and very important consequence: Time. This is why all moves should bring you closer to your objective (see "to do list"). They can be useful to you and irritating to your opponent. *For example*, even a move which improves the position of one of your pieces may be bad, because that move might "eat" from the time allocated to a plan, which is more important than the actual move.
- c) Of course, a very important consequence is given by the side where you castle the king. Castling on a different side from your opponent may completely change the character of future play. Considering this (as well as point b), it might be good to delay castling in *some* situations.
- d) When playing a piece, some squares on the board become defended or attacked, but other squares become unprotected. These changes are a source of many blunders or oversights during practical chess; by seeing such consequences you can avoid many errors of your own and benefit from those of your opponent.

TO DO list

Once every 3-10 moves (this varies a lot according to the position's characteristics), in the key positions, you should make a "TO DO" list. In this list, you should add all you want to realize in the given position.

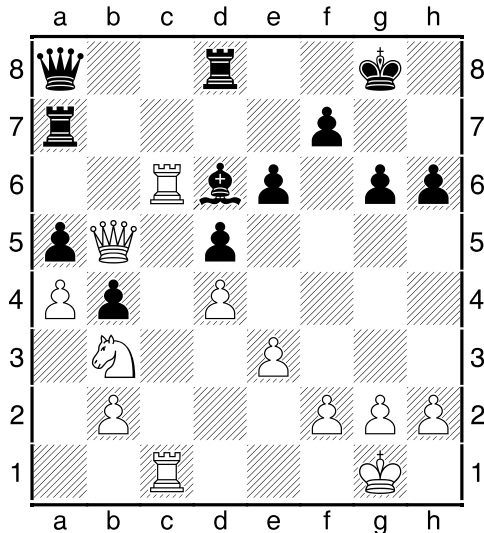
Therefore you might add:

- finishing development,
- occupation of an open file/diagonal,
- creating weaknesses in the opponent's position,
- improving the position of your pieces (one of the most important things to be taken into consideration) and so on.

While the first 2 questions (about threats and consequences) should be answered after every move of your opponent, the "TO DO" list should be created at some given moments, when the characteristics of the position have changed or when some of your "to do" tasks became "completed" jobs.

An excellent explanation on what this list is about is given in the following example:

EXAMPLE OF CREATING THE TO DO LIST:



In this position, White's advantage is clear. White has conquered the c-file and has an outpost on c5, while Black has a complex of weak squares (a5, b5, c5, c6) immobilizing his pieces in a passive defense. Even if White is so strong on the queenside, there is no possibility for him to improve his position or to force a win.

However, for an expert eye, the structure in front of the black king is weak too and White (the former World Chess Champion, Petrosian) will use this weakness to win the game by a direct attack on king. In order to attack the king with major pieces, White needs open files, so he needs to advance the pawns on that side.

Advancing the pawns on the kingside would weaken the white king's position too, complicating the position with an unclear outcome. So, Petrosian is making up his "TO DO" list:

- 1) Make the king safe by bringing him to the queenside (a maneuver which is possible due to the total control of the only open file on the board);
- 2) Advance the kingside pawns in order to destroy the black king's protections. This is possible because the black pawns are weak and White will be able to force exchanges on that side;

- 3) Bring the major pieces to their best positions, ready for the decisive transition on the kingside at the right moment... and the final attack.

When you have a good plan, the rest is "simple". The game continued without any counter-play for Black: 28. g3 Kg7 29. Kf1 Kg8 30. h4 h5 31. R1c2 Kh7 32. Ke1 Kg8 33. Kd1 Kh7 34. Kc1 Kg8 35. Kb1 - the first part is done. Now follows the final two parts: 35...Kh7 36. Qe2 Qb7 37. Rc1 Kg7 38. Qb5 Qa8 39. f4 Kh7 40. Qe2 Qb7 41. g4 hxg4 42. Qxg4 Qe7 43. h5 Qf6 44. Ka2 Kg7 45. hxg6 Qxg6 46. Qh4 Be7 47. Qf2 Kf8 48. Nd2 and Black resigned.

The "TO DO list" is another very important element that will help chess players think in an organized manner, make plans of play, and be consistent in their realization. We will insist on this "TO DO list" during our year 1 course and the annotations, questions and answers of the instructive games will be focused on how and when to create this list.

If you want to improve your chess, you need to start building and using this TO DO list technique in every game from now on. Starting from Month 2 of the course you will learn more and more strategy to help you create powerful "TO DO lists" according to the position. However, start now as an unorganized thinking process is the worst thing that can happen to a player. So, endeavor to organize your mind starting from this moment and you won't find yourself saying "I'm stuck and I don't know why I am not improving".

CONSEQUENCES and TO DO LIST

The Consequences of the moves and the "TO DO" list are very strongly connected. **You will see that identifying the consequences of your opponent's moves can extend your TO DO list with new elements.** For example, a newly weakened square may serve as a good outpost for one of your pieces.