

Algebraic Chess Notation

Chess notation is a way of recording your games and is useful for several reasons. It allows you to study your games after you play so you can learn from your mistakes... and your good moves, too! During a game a tournament director can use your notation to resolve a problem between players or as evidence for rulings. Knowing how to read chess notation allows you to study games published in magazines and chess books, including games played by the greatest players of all time! Good luck in learning this language of chess!

PIECES: Algebraic chess notation is the most current and commonly used chess notation system. It uses abbreviations and symbols to make recording your games quick and efficient. For instance, instead of writing out the name of each piece, you simply use a capital letter. Let's look at the letters and which pieces they belong to.

K: King



Q: Queen



B: Bishop



N: Knight



R: Rook



P: Pawn



For pawn moves, you do not need to write a letter down.

BOARD: Every square on a chessboard has a name which includes a letter and a number. The letter indicates the horizontal row, or **rank**, the square is located on. The number indicates the vertical column, or **file**, the square is on.

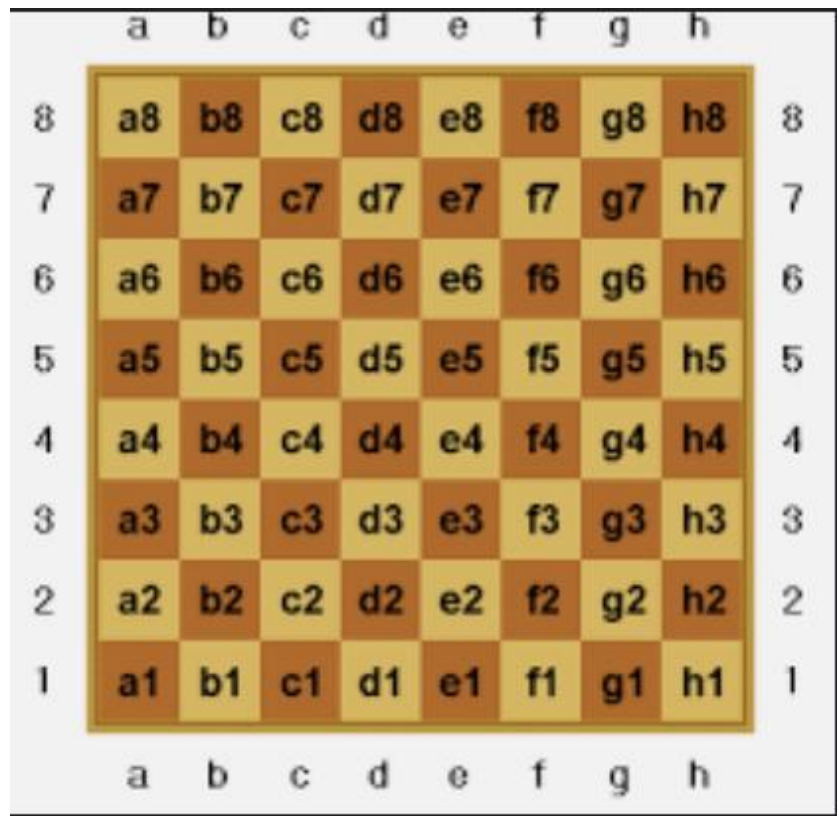
See diagram to the right to see the names of the ranks, files, and all the squares.

The white pieces always start on ranks 1 and 2 and the black pieces always start on ranks 7 and 8.

MOVES: When you write down chess moves, you must indicate the numbers of the moves, which pieces have moved, and which spaces they have moved to.

Take a look at this example:

1. e4 e5
2. Nf3 Nc6



White always goes first, so we see that for the first move of the game, white moved a pawn to e4. Black responded with a pawn to e5. For their second moves, white moved a Knight to f3 and black moved a Knight to c6.

CAPTURES: The small letter x is always used to indicate a capture. It is read as "takes." For example, 12. Nxf6 says the white Knight captures the piece on square f6 on move 12, or in shorter form, Knight takes f6.

CHECK: Attacking the King is called a check and is indicated by a + symbol. For example, Qh5+ is read as “Queen to h5 check.”

CHECKMATE: Checkmate always ends the game. If you put the king in check and there is no legal move to protect the king from attack, that is checkmate. The symbol used for checkmate is #. For example, Ra3# would be read as “Rook to a3 checkmate.”

CASTLING: Castling is a special move that allows you to move your king and rook at the same time. You can castle **short** toward your Kingside or **long** toward your Queenside. Castling Kingside is recorded as o-o. Castling Queenside is recorded as o-o-o.

EN PASSANT: En Passant is another special move that means “in passing” in French. It allows your pawn to capture an opposing pawn on the same rank in certain circumstances. Indicate an en passant capture by appending e.p. to your move.

PROMOTION: If your pawn reaches your opponents back rank, you can exchange it for another piece of your choice. This is called promotion. Indicate this by writing the square name the pawn has moved to and the letter of the piece you have chosen to promote to. For instance, f1Q means black has promoted a pawn of the f file to Queen. For example, b8R would mean white has promoted a pawn on the b file to Rook.

AVOIDING AMBIGUITY: There are cases where multiple pieces of the same type can move to the same square, which could lead to ambiguous notation. In these cases, note the origin file of the piece before writing the destination. For example, Nge5 is read as “Knight on g to e5.” If both pieces started on the same file, then use the rank number. For example, R2xa7. This is read as “Rook on 2 takes a7.”

SYMBOL LEGEND

x	Captures or “takes”
+	Check
o-o	Kingside castle or short castle
o-o-o	Queenside castle or long castle
#	Checkmate
!	Good move
?	Poor move
e.p.	En Passant (This is a very special move and means “in passing” in French). E.g., exd6 e.p.
1-0	If White wins, then it is notated as 1-0. If Black wins, it is notated as 0-1, while a draw is notated as 1/2-1/2.

CONCLUSION: Hopefully this brief introduction to algebraic chess notation gives you a solid start to recording your games accurately and consistently. Doing so will allow you to analyze your games and share them with friends and coaches. Practice recording your games each time you play chess and both your notation skills and your chess play will quickly improve!

GOOD LUCK!!