

Mark Lowery's Exciting World of Chess

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Introduction to Chess

Open Games and Closed Games

by Mark Lowery

Introductory Overview

Games may be classified into four broad categories: **Open Games**, **Closed Games**, **Semi-Open Games**, and **Flank Games** (on the wings or Kingside or Queenside of the chessboard). This section deals with the basic principles, concepts, and goals for open games and closed games, while the other two categories are left for development in later tutorials.

[Note: Where quotations are included below, I have maintained the British spelling for words, such as "centre" (British) as opposed to "center" (American English). I also have retained the convention used for noting moves. Bracketed information [] represents editorial additions made by me, and in some cases are changes of the case for letters where appropriate.]

I. General Considerations, Principles, and Concepts.

Broadly viewed, open games and closed games are actually groupings of particular positional patterns relating to pawn structure, pawn center, the central squares, and the corresponding central diagonals and central files (d and e files). "The location of central pawns determines whether a position is CLOSED or OPEN." [The Complete Book of Chess Strategy, Grandmaster Techniques from A to Z, by IM Jeremy Silman at page 184 (full book reference provided in the Recommended Readings section at my chess website)]

Open Games

Open games are those in which the central squares of the chessboard are not blocked by pawns for a player's Bishops to have mobility and ability to attack, defend, and control squares along the central diagonal lines, and for Rooks to have mobility and ability to attack, defend, and control squares in the central files (d and e files). Open games are most often formed from the traditional e-pawn openings (or King's-pawn openings), e4-e5 and the variations on that thematic opening system.

Closed Games

Closed games are those in which the central squares of the board are blocked by pawns connected together. This restricts the mobility of Bishops and their ability to attack, defend, and control squares along the central diagonal lines. This also restricts the mobility of Rooks and their ability to attack, defend, and control squares through the central files (d and e files). More generally, this pawn structure restricts activity for most of the pieces, and provides for tough pawn defensive structures to break through to gain space on the board. Closed games often are formed from the traditional d-pawn openings (or Queen's-pawn openings)...White opens with d4 and the variations on that thematic opening system.

[The Complete Book of Chess Strategy, Grandmaster Techniques from A to Z at page 184; The Mammoth Book of Chess, by Graham Burgess at 110 (full book reference provided in the Recommended Readings section at my chess website)]

Open games usually provide much more active play, where the players' game plans are most likely to create significant tensions with many skirmishes and battles in a slug it out style of play.

Closed games tend to be grind-it-out style of play, where patience is often the key to victory; but when patience often is more sorely tested for both players. Closed games can be tedious and boring to a player seeking the thrill and exhilaration of frequent intellectual combat because closed games should be viewed as providing more reflective playing. Closed games rarely lend themselves adequate to active speed chess where management of the time clocks and time pressure are put at a premium. However, a player might choose a closed game in speed chess for precisely the reason of extending play to force the running down of the opposing player's time clock to zero.

Basic Elemental Principles For Playing Open Games

There are four basic elemental principles for playing open games. Applying these four principles, a player may develop a keen appreciation for a number of characteristic goals and additional important considerations to focus upon when playing open games.

1. The failure to castle, and castle quickly, is often disastrously fatal.
2. Focus playing toward the center of the chessboard. Control of the center is often a crucial determining point in open games.

3. Time is a premium; every tempo must be used wisely to develop and activate pieces quickly and nurtured with precision because falling behind in development is very dangerous.

4. Activity of pieces is usually very high, with most attacks oriented toward the use of pieces with pawns playing a secondary role.

[Adapted from The Complete Book of Chess Strategy, Grandmaster Techniques from A to Z, by IM Jeremy Silman at page 185]

Additional Characteristic Goals for Playing Open Games

The following characteristic goals are directed toward Kingside attacks and checkmate by White against Black. However, Black may apply similar characteristic goals against White. The focal points (critical important squares) are similar for Black against White, but in White's side of the chessboard (i.e., instead of the f7 square, it is the f2 square in White's side of the chessboard).

White	Black
1. attack on f7;	1. defend and protect the f7 square with dedicated tenacity and seek to prevent opening the f file (also the h7 square and seek not to open the h file);
2. control c4-f7 diagonal;	
3. control h5-f7 diagonal;	
4. control f file;	2. challenge for control of c4-f7 diagonal (focus a defense and protection on d6);
5. active Knights (Knight march) f3-g5-f7 triangle;	3. control White's Queen movements if gains h5 square, or seek to prevent her gaining the square;
6. attack e5 [gain control of e5 with a Knight, prevent centralization!];	
7. pawn advance to d4;	4. try to control White's King Rook movement from h1 to f1 (try to prevent castling with Black's King Bishop controlling the a6-f1 diagonal, or develop possibly Queen's Bishop
8. f pawn advance to f4;	
9. strong pawn center;	

10. open the e-file and f-file;
 11. obtain maximum control of d5 for launching attack against f7 with Queen and Bishop, and launching attack on c7 with Queen's Knight via c3 and d5;
 12. using subterfuge and/or material concessions, try and gain time to bring dormant Queenside pieces into attack on critical target squares (f7 and e5);
 13. do not be overly distracted from own goals by material gains by Black, where Black's Queen, Queen's Rook, Queen's Bishop, and Queen's Knight noticeably increase their radius of activity to be able to work on attacking vulnerable points in White's side of the chessboard.
- control of h3-f1 diagonal with possible attack from h3;
 5. limit movement of White's King Knight;
 6. judicious defense and protection of Black's pawn at d5;
 7. try and get Black pawn to d5;
 8. avoid with considerable tenacity and perseverance advancing Black's f pawn from f7;
 9. demolish White's pawn island and isolated pawn couple formed by the central King's pawn and Queen's pawn;
 10. prevent opening the e-file and f-file;
 11. fight for control of d5;
 12. avoid falling to temptation to take one White piece or pawn too many (but how can one take too many?...easy as a player often learns to his or her great dismay)...Stopping at one piece early in the game often is a good rule; don't get greedy, best to give up the spoils and gain the initiative first. This does not mean ignoring and forgetting material advantage and capturing opposing pieces when it is safe and logical to do so, only that a player must consider the overall ramifications. It might be best not to capture right

away, especially if not doing so actually yields a benefit or may yield a benefit later on in the game (e.g., a central strong pawn often is good to have in the opening and middlegame phases, but in an endgame it might become a liability);

13. observe carefully number of active Queenside pieces for White versus Black, never let the numerical difference get more than one as a good tactical and strategic principle...makes gains in time (tempi) and if not adequate consider sacrifices to gain this goal.

[Adapted from 200 Open Games, by David Bronstein at page xiv (full book reference provided in the Recommended Readings at my chess website)]

Additional Important Considerations for Playing Open Games

[Adapted from The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings, algebraic edition, by Rueben Fine at pages 6-7 (full book reference provided in the Recommended Readings at my chess website).

For Black, in open games the central primary key principle is to maintain symmetry and a strong pawn center. Defend and protect the pawn at e5 even at significant cost. Try not to abandon the e5 pawn, unless doing so is based on sound tactical and strategic purposes. White may attack e5 with follow-up pawn advance to d4, a very common tactic. Avoid doing pawn capture exd4, because this leaves Black with the unfavorable position of having a vulnerable central pawn at d6 in Doubled Pawns in the d-file, while White retains a strong central pawn at e4. Also, the importance of Black retaining a strong pawn center with a pawn at e5 provides a valuable blockade cramping activity by White's pieces and creates valuable centralization outposts at d5 and f5. The only logical primary defense for Black to retain a pawn at e5 is pawn advance to d6; however, this cramps Black's pieces somewhat. Therefore, the theoretical bases for open games yields two general defenses that Black may adopt in open games.

Strong point method: retain a pawn at e5 virtually at all costs; and

Counterattack: Black relinquishes Black's e5 pawn but compels White to give up White's e-pawn as well. This does not involve attacking the e-pawn on every move, but rather setting up position on the board to successfully attack the e-pawn.

In the e4-e5 system, critical consideration must also focus on center play with the pawns. Therefore, in these games follow-up pawn advances of either d5 or f5 are utilized. Pawn advance to f5 is less common, and must be undertaken after careful preparation to adequately defend and protect against the weakened King position resulting at f7.

If White does not follow the "theoretically" normal pattern, then against less regular lines Black should proceed to advance d5 if doing so can be safely done and secure a favorable strong pawn center for Black. A "good working rule [is] that *once Black succeeds in playing...d5 without any immediately harmful consequences he [or she] has equalized .*"

White on the other hand seeks to remove Black's pawn from e5, while seeking to avoid unnecessary exchanges of pieces. White's goal then is to attack Black's e5 pawn, e.g. with by developing the King's Knight to f3, a fairly common attack reply by White to Black advancing to e5. A strong central pawn in the opening and early middlegame phases should be used for attacking. White uses White's pawn at e4 sometimes but not necessarily always direct attacking...sometimes for creating attacking positions for other pieces. The above principles apply most in e4-e5 opening system and its variations.

However, in other e4 openings, where Black does not respond with e5, while Black's defenses "differ radically in some respects, they are very much alike in others." [The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings, algebraic notation at page 50] In this later grouping of open games, "Black's vulnerable f7 which played so predominant a role in 1. e4 e5 lines, is virtually non-existent here. For this reason the game is much more positional in character." [The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings at page 50]

Also, "Black's pawn structure is as a rule inferior in the opening. This should not be surprising, since he [or she] omits the natural...e5. It does not follow, however, that all these openings are poor [far from it!]; the only justifiable conclusion is that the struggle for equality (or counter-attack) becomes more far more complex and depends to a far larger extent on the pawn skeleton [pawn center and pawn structure]." [The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings at page 50] Reuben Fine goes on to explain:

In this later grouping of patterns for open games, the role of Black doing pawn advance to d5 (so difficult to force in the e4-e5 openings), is relatively simple in non e4-e5 open games except for the Sicilian yet does not yield immediate equality. Black's objective is to liquidate or neutralize the entire centre and when he [or she] does play...d5, he [or she] has only taken care of White's e-pawn. He [or she] must also hit at the White d-pawn, assuming, as is almost always the case, that that has been played to d4. Consequently, to secure complete freedom, ...d5 must be followed ...c5 or ...e5 (just as [in the e4-e5 system and variations] had to be followed by ...d5 or ...f5). Unlike the analogous case in 1 e4 e5, where...f5 has to be prepared carefully because it weakens the [K]ing position, here...c5 can and should be played whenever it is physically possible. Sometimes (as in the Sicilian), ...c5 comes first: in that even ... d5 must be the goal. In other words, Black must hit at the centre with his pawns to secure equality, and he [or she] can do it in these openings by ... d5 and ... c5 (usually) or ...d5 and ...e5 (less often) or ...c5 and ... d4 (exceptional).

[[The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings](#) at page 50]

III. Basic Elemental Principles For Playing Closed Games.

There are five basic elemental principles for playing closed games. As with closed games, a number of characteristic goals and additional important considerations come into play during closed games.

1. With pawns on central squares providing blockades as to the center diagonals, the d-file, and the e-file, good movement of pieces becomes more difficult.
2. When the center is closed, play should be directed toward the wings and development of pieces for flank attacks on the Kingside or Queenside of the chessboard.
3. Unlike open games where attacks most often are launched with pieces, in closed games attacks are more successfully launched with pawns. Pushing the wing pawns helps to gain space and helps to open files for the Rooks.
4. Concentrate play on the wing where the pawns point, because there is where most often space advantage lies and where a favorable destiny should be sought.

5. Early and quick development and castling, so critical in open games, may be delayed somewhat because the locked pawns in the center separates the fighting forces and make quick strikes uncommon.

[Adapted from The Complete Book of Chess Strategy, Grandmaster Techniques from A to Z at page 186]

Comparison Between Basic Elemental Principles for Closed Games v. Open Games

In a way, the "basic ideas in the d-pawn openings are, in a manner of speaking, a mirror of those in e-pawn openings. Here after d4 White's goal is to get his [or her] pawn to e4, just as it was d4, after 1. e4. Essentially, the idea is the same in both: to set up pawns at d4 and e4." [The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings at page 80] Unlike open games with emphasis on the traditional "analogues to the strong point and counter-attack defenses," there has developed more complex positional defenses based on "hypermodern theories." [The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings at page 80] Where a central theme in the e-pawn openings "was the proper development of the [King's Bishop]; in the d-pawn openings the [Queen's Bishop] is the eternal problem child for Black." [The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings at page 80]

Black's reply goal to White's d4 in d-pawn openings is to prevent White doing pawn advance to e5. The traditional reply is d5 taking control of e5, although others include f5 or with the King's Knight...Nf6 (either one also taking control of e5), or counterattacking White's pawn at d4 by c5 or Queen's Knight...Nc3.

While in open games, White's hope to derive an advantage lies in attacking Black's pawn at e5, the same principle applies in d-pawn openings. Most often, this consists of attacking with a piece..."developing with a move which attacks the Black centre (there 1 e4 e5 Nf3), here [the] best chance lies in a similar assault. But this time the Black d-pawn is defended, so [White] must hit at it with a pawn, rather than a piece. Thus we get to 2 c4, which is essential from a theoretical point of view." [The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings at page 80] There are variants, naturally, in the d4-d5 openings, for which a player needs to consider how to apply the principles to gain maximum benefit.

The d-pawn openings which do not follow the d4-d5 opening system "are undoubtedly by far the most difficult to understand. Even masters have been known to make serious positional errors in them. One reason is that the ideas are somewhat more complicated than in other debuts; another is that transpositions are almost always vital. Then too, subtle traps endow the order of moves with an importance that

is absent elsewhere. Nonetheless, these openings can be grasped and mastered by systematic application of the basic methods laid out. [The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings at page 122]

Additional Important Considerations for Playing Closed Game

In the traditional lines of play in d-pawn openings, two central themes abound for Black's play: (1) block White from advancing the e-pawn, or (2) attempt "to nullify the effect of such advance when it occurs." [The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings at page 122]

However, "[i]n many 'hypermodern' openings we find that Black permits often, encourages, White to advance his [or her] pawns in the centre and form what appears to be a powerful phalanx there. Then Black deftly attacks and White's structure collapses like a house of cards. This has led to the idea that several pawns in the centre are bound to be weak and that it is better to control the centre from the sides. Consequently, it has been said, Black's idea is to deliberately induce White to form a strong pawn centre." [The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings at page 122]

Yet, conventional and traditional theory does not simply evaporate into thin air in "hypermodern" openings. The basic principles, rules, and concepts still apply. "Other things being equal, a pawn in the centre is a decided advantage. It is a disadvantage only when it cannot be held there." [The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings at page 50]

This provides the key elemental questions Black faces in "hypermodern" openings: "Are other things equal? Or Black may ask: If I allow him [or her] to set up a powerful centre phalanx can I then shatter that structure or must I further submit passively?" [The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings at pages 122-123]

"Two paramount questions for Black and two for White" arise in these positional situations:

1. "Can a strong pawn centre be set up for White? (normally at c4, d4, e4)."
2. "If it can, can it be maintained?"

To simplify it into one essential fundamental question: "Can Black, once he [or she] has begun by not placing a pawn in the centre, manage to free himself [or herself] all the same?" [The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings at page 123]

"[O]nly one move stands out as of major theoretical value: 1 ... Nf6, and that because it does not merely develop a piece normally, but also prevents the march of the enemy e-pawn. There are two other replies which are regular and independent: 1 ... c5 (The Benoni Counter Gambit) and 1 ... f5 (The Dutch Defence). Besides, there are four moves which have some independent features, but will normally transpose into a more standard line: 1 ... e6, 1 ... c6, 1 ... d6 and 1 ... Nc6. Everything else is irregular because Black must make some effort to block White's immediate e4." [The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings at page 123]