THE COMPLETE TRAINING PROGRAM

21 DAYS TO SUPERCHARGE YOUR CHESS

By YURY MARKUBHIN

CD Included
21 Days to Supercharge Your Chess

by Yury Markushin
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Preface

There are 1000s of chess books available nowadays, covering many different aspects of chess: thousands of opening lines for every possible variation (from A00 to E99), complete endgame bibles with tons of different ‘theoretical’ endgames, memoirs of the famous grandmasters with a detailed explanation of how they conquered (or didn’t) the World Titles. No doubt, these are all good reads. With such a tremendous amount of information, for an ordinary chess player, it may be difficult to focus on something specific.

Many players who wish to improve their game buy 10 or 20 different 300 – 400 page chess books and start reading them. They may spend weeks analyzing variations of the openings that Capablanca played against Botvinnik in 1925. Then they may switch to a different opening system, next to something else and so on and so forth. Players get lost in the ocean of information. They forget the main reason why they even bought these books. Most books don’t even get a chance to be read; some are just briefly skimmed through.

Then, after half a year of such training, you ask that player a simple question: **how much did your rating increase?** In 95% of times the answer is either ‘not at all’ or by some minuscule amount.

What’s going on here? What happens to that 95% of chess players? Why they simply cannot progress at chess? It seems like they invest everything: time, money and patience, but do not get the results they need?

The problem is that they spend a lot of time and effort to absorb this information, or if you may call it knowledge. Most of that however, is outdated or irrelevant for today’s generation of chess players. The ‘passive’ knowledge will not lead to more won games and higher rating, nor will it lead to a better understanding of basic chess principles.

Now we are talking about fundamentals that many players are lacking and which severely stagnates their chess improvement. You see, the chess knowledge does not necessarily translate into chess ability. There are many players out there who read countless number of books, but still cannot checkmate with two bishops or convert a winning rook ending. Sounds familiar?

That’s where our system ‘21 Days to Supercharge Your Chess’ comes into play. It will show you in a step-by-step, easy-to-follow format what you need to do **day-after-day** to actually improve your ability to play chess.
DAY 1: Write Down Your Goals

Welcome to the first day of our unique training. Today you will set a goal for the 21 day chess training program and stick to it during the entire training process.

In order to improve at chess you need to fully trust this system and to believe that you can be a much better chess player than you are right now. Most chess players never realize their full potential simply because they do not believe in themselves.

Let me give you just one example how powerful your brain is. The fastest computer has about 3 billion transistors. That sounds like a lot. In fact, your brain has over 100 billion brain cells – neurons. Each neuron has from 10 to 100,000 connections with other neurons in your brain. That’s over 100 trillion neuron connections altogether. That is more connections than in 30 thousand fastest computers combined! Your brain is capable of solving problems that a supercomputer cannot even dream of approaching.

“As you think, so shall you become.” – Bruce Lee

The most important part of any training process is to setup up a goal. In order to stay fully dedicated to the training process for these 21 days you need to take a piece of paper and to write down your one sentence goal. That can be anything you want to achieve using this program. Whether you want to improve your positional understanding of positions, improve your endgame play or gain 100 or 300 ELO points is up to you. After you have written your goal down, put it on the wall or on your desk. The best location is somewhere, where you can see it at least twice a day: when you wake up and when you go to bed. That will stimulate your thinking process and will keep you brain focused on chess training during the entire program duration.

"The difference between a goal and a dream is a deadline." — Steve Smith
DAY 2: Daily Routine for the Next 21 Days

Welcome to the second day of our training program, this is a very important chapter in which I will provide you with an easy to follow and extremely effective chess training program outline that will guide you for the next 20 days.

If you want to improve your chess and start beating these opponents you play on a day-to-day basis first we need to work on the right training habits. It was scientifically shown that if a person sticks to a certain routine for at least 21 days, it eventually becomes a habit. Our program's duration is exactly 21 days and that’s not a coincidence. That’s definitely enough to make initial, most important adjustments in your brain to develop the new, correct chess training habits.

Most chess players do not have any training program at all. They grab pieces of information here and there, possibly solve some tactics, and play a few games from time to time. That is the main reason why such players don’t progress at all or progress by baby steps. This type of chess players doesn't have a clear plan to follow for becoming stronger at chess and wonder why they lose most of the time. That's why 95% of chess player never make it to the expert level!

But, you have a huge advantage! Since you have purchased this book, and invest your time going over it, you are dedicated enough to start progressing fast.

In this chapter I will give you a step-by-step plan that you need to follow to finally see that chess progress you’ve been waiting for.

Each of the 21 training days will be divided into two parts:

- **Theoretical section** - you will study the appropriate chapters of this book corresponding to each day
- **Practical section** – you will be assigned a homework that you will need to solve for each training day

**The training program has the following structure:**

1. Tactics

Every training day you will be assigned certain tactics problems that you need to solve, or at least attempt to solve. These simple exercises are specifically selected to train your tactical vision for combinations that occur in real life games.

By the time you complete this 21 day program you will solve more than 120 problems, which will significantly increase you over-the-board awareness.
You will be able to find multi-move combinations, pins, forks, and checkmates much faster and easier than ever before. That will lead to decrease in blunders and increase in won games by tactical means.

2. Studying master's game/Attacking Chess

Studying masters’ games is a very important element of chess that gets overlooked by many players. By analyzing masters’ games not only will you get exposed to the best attacking/defensive techniques, typical maneuvers and formations but most importantly, you will get a feel for a more subtle, positional elements of the game. In this program you will study 21 Grandmasters’ games with detailed move analysis and ideas explanation.

Knowing how and when to attack is a fundamental component of chess. Any high level player must know how to use his pieces together to win material or to checkmate his opponent. You will study the art of attacking chess by going through the specifically selected positions with detailed explanations of the ideas behind each move.

3. Endgame Lab

The pawns are the soul of the game as was precisely stated by one of the greatest chess players of 18th century François-André Danican Philidor. The endgame is primarily based on pawns, which become tremendously important at the final stage of the game. During the course of 21 days you will only study the endgames that occur most often in practical chess.

**General recommendation for the training process:**

1. You don’t need to do everything at once, since it’s not only difficult and time consuming, but also counter-productive. It was shown by the researchers from Harvard Medical School that a human brain retains the information better if it’s fed by small pieces rather than by one gigantic chunk. It means that if you spread the chess tasks equally throughout the day you can actually benefit from this program much more. Remember, that the goal of this 21 day program is not just to make you learn the chess ideas that will help you win more games, and boost your rating, but also to develop a correct training routine that can be used month-by-month to progress even further.
2. The best approach to solving tactics, working on attacking technique/studying master's games and understanding the endgames is to spread these tasks throughout a training session. Let’s assume you have 60 minutes per day to work on your chess. You can allocate your valuable training time the following way:

- Reading the theory → 10 minutes
- Studying masters’ games/ Working on the attacking chess → 20 minutes
- Solving tactics → 20 minutes
- Endgame clinic → 10 minutes

This is the most optimal time schedule that will allow you to absorb the information presented in this program easier and to get the maximum results for your chess.

*Today you need to do both Day 1 and Day 2 practice sections!*
Day 3: Evaluating Chess Positions

After reading this chapter you will be given an easy-to-follow, discrete, and well tested analysis plan that can be applied to any type of chess position.

It is extremely important to be able to quickly and accurately evaluate chess positions to understand what's going on. The main difference between novice and master level chess players is the ability to evaluate chess positions. Master level player has a precise, step-by-step algorithm in his head which he applied to many different positions precisely determining what’s happening on the board.

The main reason why computers play chess so well is because it can very accurately evaluate one or another position. In other words, the more precise your position evaluation ability, the higher your chess strength is.

Here is an outline for analyzing chess positions that you can memorize and apply when a deep evaluation is required. First, you need to refer to this outline during the analysis, but after some time you will have it in your head, and the evaluation will become habitual, and automatic.

Analysis Plan:

1. Material on the board

This step is very straightforward. We compare the number of pieces and pawn to the opponent's. For ease of evaluation it is common to use a point (pawn) value system and add the number of points to get the total score for each side.

2. Presence of Threats

If you have an extra rook, but you lose a queen the very next move, it is quite incorrect to assume that you have any sort of advantage. Therefore, it is very important to check for threats and possible combinations that your opponent may have before continuing with a full analysis.

3. Position of the Kings

Position of the kings and their safety is an important aspect of position analysis, since if you’re getting checkmated 3 moves from now; it’s meaningless to talk about any positional advantages or better pawn structures you may have. You should do a relative comparison of positions of the kings and take into account the presence of any sorts of threats for their safety. You need to make a conclusion about whose king is safer and how much.

4. Presence of open files and diagonals

You should evaluate the number of open files and diagonals as well as what side takes greater advantage of them (rooks on open files, bishops on long diagonals, etc.)
5. Pawn structure, weak and strong squares

You should evaluate the pawn structure, pawn weaknesses, presence of passed pawns, etc. Also it makes sense to evaluate the presence of weak and strong squares on the board. Strong squares are the squares that can be occupied by your pieces that cannot be removed (i.e. chased away) by your opponent’s pawns and vice versa.

6. Center and space

You need to evaluate the type of center we are dealing with in the current position. The center is considered not just the central squares (e4, d4, e5, d5) but also the pawns and pieces that control these squares. You need to pay specific attention to the type of center. The two most common structures are: dynamic and static. The dynamic center is the center that can change its form, for example by movement of pawns or pieces. The static center is the center that cannot change its form so easily. Also we need to distinguish between closed center and open center positions, based on the pawn structure.

Space – defined as availability and control of squares by one of the players. The more squares your pawns and pieces control the more special advantage you possess. Space is important, because the side with the greater amount of space has the luxury to more effectively organizing the pieces and maneuvering them for an attack/defense.

It is important to decide the type of the center you have and the amount of space you control since the overall game strategy is often dictated by the positional factors like this.

7. Development and Pieces Activity

You need to consider the activity of the pieces and their development, meaning how well are the pieces positioned, how many open diagonals, ranks, files they control. The easiest way to compare the pieces’ activity is by doing a relative comparison. For example, you take one of your pieces, and compare it to the opponent’s counterpart. Then you take another piece and so on. At the end you need to make a conclusion about whose pieces are more active.

Finally, after doing the position evaluation you need to come up with a conclusion what’s sides position is better and to come up with a plan for the game based on your evaluation. For example, if your position is better you must attack in order not to lose your advantage.

If your opponent’s position is superior, you need to find a defensive plan, at the same time, looking for counter play and counter attack.
**Today's extra task:**

After looking going over today’s master’s position and understanding the position evaluation basics take one of your own games and try to evaluate 2-3 most important positions in that game. Check how positions and evaluation changes, as well as how that affects the outcome of the game.

Note: It is important to only evaluate positions fully when you need to make an important decision about the game direction, attack, change of plan, etc. It does not make sense to evaluate the position deeply after each move since then you’re in danger of running into time trouble.
Day 4: Keeping a Training Journal

In this chapter you will learn about the importance of keeping a training journal, where you can log your training process from start to finish. The journal will keep your training in a more systematic way, as well as it will illustrate your progress and act as a motivator for the next lesson.

This is one of those things that most amateur chess players don’t do. However, many professional chess players log their progress in some or another way, with many benefits. It was shown many times via scientific research that people dedicate themselves a lot more to a training or routine if they keep track of their progress.

The goal of Supercharge Your Chess program is to make you used to spending a little bit of time every day on improving your chess. In order to stay on top of this task you really need to track what you did, how much time you spend and what you’ve achieved. That’s what’s called systematic approach.

It’s a lot more useful to study chess for one hour per day every day, than to study for 8 hours in one day and then don’t do anything for the rest of the week. By studying chess on the regular basis, your brain adapts and keeps thinking about chess problems you have solved, games you have analyzed, endgames you have learned throughout the day even if you’re not aware of that. It happens automatically. Similar processes happen during sleep time as well, forming chess-related neuron connections in your brain.

What do you need to log in your chess journal?

You need briefly comment on each of the components of the chess training program and indicate time you spend per day:

1. Theoretical part - write most important conclusions you made from each chapter.

2. Indicate how many tactics problems you have attempted and how many you have solved correctly. You may also comment on which problems you have found the most difficult.

3. Summarize what you have learned about attack in chess in one sentence. Add more comments if necessary. Comment on the most important lessons you have learned from studying a particular master’s game.

4. Write down the most important conclusion from the endgame you have studied.
What are the benefits of keeping the training journal?

You may print out and use the following journal page to log your progress *(you can access your downloads in the quick start-up guide of membership area).*
DAY 5: Systematic Approach to Avoiding Blunders

In this chapter I will introduce to you an easy-to-use, yet very effective way to avoid blunders in your games. You will be able to quickly form correct chess thinking habits, which will dramatically reduce your blunder rate, saving plenty of games and rating points.

How many times have you heard “Oh no, that was such a stupid move” before somebody resigns? If you play chess regularly, I bet that happened a lot. How many times have you made a bad move which instantly cost you a game? Just imagine you play great chess for three hours straight and then on move 70 just blunder it away in one second. It sounds devastating, isn’t it?

We come to the main point of this chapter, what can you do to stop the blunders from happening?

As Savielly Tartakower pointed out, the mistakes are there waiting to be made. But, you don’t have to be the one who will make them. I recommend using one simple, yet extremely effective method to eliminate 90% of all blunders you were about to make. Here is the 3-step approach:

1. Think about the move you’re about to make.
2. Write your move down before making it.
3. Think about that move again for 10 - 15 seconds before playing it.

By following this simple 3-step method you will save yourself from trouble of making as much as 90% of all your blunders. That means 9 blunders out of 10 will be eliminated, meaning you won’t lose these 9 games you were about to lose!

I myself struggled a lot from blunders, when playing competitive chess. It seems after a long chess battle I start losing focus and concentration over the board. At some point that caused me to blunder and lose the game.

One strong FIDE Master suggested to try writing the moves down before physically moving the pieces. At first I was a little skeptical about it, but when I tried writing the move down and then rethinking it for a few seconds I was shocked. I was able to immediately cure my blunders problem and save myself a handful of points. I’m sure if you follow this simple yet effective rule you will too beat the blunders!

In order to form a correct habit of avoiding blunders at chess I recommend the following exercise.
Today's extra task:

Play a 2-3 competitive games with a clock running. Don't pick too short time control; at least 20-30 minutes per side should be sufficient. Employ the blunder-avoiding approach as outlined above. If you start running out of time, reduce the timing in step 3 from 10-15 seconds, to about 5 seconds. After you practice for a few games, you will automatically employ this method after each move, dramatically reducing blunder rate.
DAY 6: Setup Your Own Chess Database

In this chapter I will tell you how to set up your own chess games database for FREE and how to use it to improve your game.

Why do you need a database?

You must be wondering what all professional chess players do that amateurs don’t? Among other things, professional players have their own chess databases set up. Why is it important to have a database? Strong players can use them to organize their opening preparation, search for novelties, prepare for the next round opponents, carefully evaluate and comment their own games, etc.

If you’re serious about getting better at chess and moving to the next level (and I’m sure you are since you are reading this book) you need to set up your own chess database. Do you need to invest hundreds of dollars to buy commercial chess products to be productive? You can, but I will provide you with the free resources that will get the job done.

In order to make fast progress at chess you need to start treating chess more professionally. What does that mean? First of all, regardless of the outcome of the game you need to ask yourself why that happened.

After each competitive game/tournament you should take some time for the book-keeping. Enter the games in your database; specify the name of your opponents, event and write a few lines about the game. If you play competitively over the board you might have a pile of old score sheets laying around that you could enter in your database. If you play online, most chess servers store your games and you can download them and import into your database. You don’t need to worry about the quick time control games, just focus on long time control ones, since these are more suitable for analysis.

It is a good practice to take a couple of minutes right after the game is finished, to write down a few words, such as what went well and what didn’t. You can also comment on most important moments of the game, and where you think the mistake was made. It is a much easier task when the game is fresh in your memory.

What software to use?

There are many different chess software packages available that allow maintaining a database of your own games. The most famous commercial package is called ChessBase and the free alternative is SCID. ChessBase has some convenience and productivity advantages compared to SCID, but the free competitor has enough functionality to maintain, annotate and analyze your own games.
If you are not willing to spend a couple hundred dollars on the commercial package here is what you need to do:

2. Select your operating system, download and install the SCID package
3. You should see something like the window below when you run the program.
4. First your need to create a new database. To do that go to **File → New → type your database name and hit Save**

5. Then, you need to open your newly created database, go to **File → Open → select your database name and hit Open**

6. Finally you want to import your games to that database, go to **Tools → Import File(s) of PGN Games → select your pgn files and hit Open**. The games will be imported and you will see them in the database window, similar to the picture below.
Note: You can also add games move-by-move from your score-sheet and save in the database. Similarly games can be exported into the ChessBase.

**Today’s extra task:** following the instructions above install SCID (or use ChessBase or any other chess database software you have) and upload your games into the database. You need to develop a habit of uploading your games and annotating them shortly after it’s finished. That will help you to more critically look at your chess, spot weaknesses and improve quicker and easier.
Day 7: Physical Preparation

After this lesson you will understand the importance of physical fitness in chess.

Many chess professionals agree that physical fitness is a very important element for playing chess at your highest ability. A chess game, played with a classical time control can last up to 5-6 hours and thus is a very demanding activity. If you lose concentration after 2-3 hours, you will lose the game.

As Bobby Fischer puts it: “Your body has to be in top condition. Your chess deteriorates as your body does.”

Many top players work on their physical fitness as a part of their training routine. Some of grandmasters participate in active sports like tennis and swimming (Kramnik), some run and play soccer (Carlsen), some prefer hitting the gym 2-3 times per week. Anand states that the right nutrition intake, good sleep and a physical fitness are the key components to playing productively.

Staying healthy is important for chess players of all levels, since otherwise they cannot train and play at their best, will make unforced mistakes and lose games.

It does not matter what kind of physical activity you prefer to make your heart pumping from playing basketball to running on the treadmill. Even though chess is a ‘mental sport’ it does not mean that you don’t need to keep your body in good shape. Fitness routine of 2-3 times per week should be sufficient to keep your body in shape.

Today's extra task: pick some physical activity you enjoy the most and participate in it today. That may be anything: soccer, tennis, gym, running, etc. Make it a habit, exercise at least twice per week.

Do not forget about playing chess however, play a few casual games with a brief post-game analysis session.
Day 8: Psychological Preparation

After reading the today’s lesson you will understand the importance of psychology in competitive chess. You will be given an advice of how to use it for your advantage to maximize your results.

Many chess players believe, quiet mistakenly, that psychology has nothing to do with the game of chess. Majority think that one, higher rated player will win the game regardless of all other factors. That is totally incorrect. Indeed, a higher rated chess player has more chances winning the game if we keep all other factors constant. The game of chess is played between two individuals over the board, not between two rating numbers. Therefore, like in any other sport, psychology of competition plays a major role of chess.

Psychology in professional chess:

Let me give you a few examples. Anand, was one of the highest rated chess player for decades and was rarely able to successfully play against Kasparov. Kasparov won many of the games they played. You can tell me, it’s Kasparov, who can compare with him? In the Match Kasparov – Kramnik in London 2000, Kasparov loses his title without winning a single game. Psychology played a big role in that defeat.

Then, in the 2008 World Championship Match between Kramnik and Anand, Indian grandmaster totally changes his opening repertoire and completely surprises Kramik during the second game of the Match, when he played “1.d4” instead of the usual “1.e4”. Besides the time wasted by Kramnik and his team for preparing the responses against “1.e4” during the past six months prior to the Match, the gigantic psychological pressure on Kramnik could not be underestimated and played it’s decisive role. Kramnik has been taken out from the comfort zone of his home preparation and thrown into the darkness. As a result, Kramnik lost the Match “4½-6½” giving up his title.

Nakamura, a number 1 American grandmaster, one of the highest rated players in the world played many games against the Norwegian superstar Magnus Carlsen, without winning a single game. Nakamura had an objectively winning position many times but was not able to convert his advantage.

What’s going on here? As Dr.Emanuel Lasker, who held the World Championship title for 27 years writes “It’s the players who fight over the board, not the wooden pieces.”

How can it help you?

Things like self-confidence, ability to overcome loses and ability to learn from your own mistakes are very important for a successful chess player. Self-confidence over the board cannot appear by itself, it needs to be developed by studying chess, solving tactics and winning games.

If you play somebody you have played before you pretty much know what to expect. During a chess game both players are trying to trick each other, obtain an advantage and ultimately to win the game. In many occasions however, keeping other factors the same, the more self-confident, calm player will win the game.
Sports physiologist and a chess master N. Krogious, believes that there are many “right” moves for one or another position during a chess game, but sometimes, even a weaker move plays a decisive role in the game and wins because of psychological factors.

Even if the opponent is completely unknown and his strengths and weaknesses are hidden, psychological aspect of the game plays a crucial role in the competition. As GM Webb puts it, you should take a look at the age of an opponent. Older players usually play more positional chess, they’re often very familiar with a modern opening theory, but tend to run into time trouble and make mistakes in the later stage of the game because of low stamina.

On the other hand, very young players usually play aggressive and tactical lines, but suffer in the endgame and simple positions.

The conclusion is clear: **for young players it is better to play tactical lines against the older players; for older players it is best to direct a game towards the endgame and simple positions, where no tactics is involved whatsoever.**

Without taking into an account psychology, it is impossible to judge what kind of positions it is better to play and what type of strategy to use against each group of players, based on their age.

At a novice’s level chess psychology plays even greater role than at a master’s level. It was observed many times that if the stronger opponent blunders a piece or a pawn, the weaker side just will not accept it because of the thought that there is a trap, they do not see, leading to immediate lose.

How many new upsets to the stronger side could there be, if the weaker opponents could just eliminate this fear of higher ranked players?

Tigran Petrosian once wrote: **“The chess battle should be decided over the board, not in the head before the game”.** A player should not come to the game pre-programmed to lose just because his opponent is thought to be a stronger player, instead he should consider opponent’s strengths and weaknesses and use this knowledge to his advantage.
Day 9: Evaluate and Annotate Your Own Game

After reading the today’s chapter you will understand the importance of annotating your own games and learn how it should be done with an easy to follow guide and examples.

In order to understand the strong and the weak sides of your chess, most coaches recommend picking two games you’ve recently played and analyzing them thoroughly. You should choose one won and one lost game for such analysis, to get a more complete picture.

When analyzing the game it is very important to be fully objective. That means you need to admit your own mistakes and give credit for the good moves of your opponent. Realizing that you have made a mistake is the first, very important step towards the success at chess.

Regardless of the result and feelings, it is necessary to act like a professional chess player when approaching analysis to get the maximum results.

You need to write down some quick notes about the game as soon as possible after the game’s done, when it’s still fresh in your memory. Especially, concentrate on the moves when you had to make a hard choice and the moves when the game dramatically changes its state (positional to tactical, etc.)

It is a good practice to separate the game into 3 distinct parts: opening, middle game and the endgame. These 3 stages of the game require individual analysis and must be treated separately.

Here is an outline for a full chess game analysis as used by many strong players around the globe:

1. Opening

Any chess game, regardless of your rating, starts with an opening. Therefore, it make sense to start your analysis with the opening evaluation first.

You should focus on the following questions when analyzing the opening:

- Was it a home preparation line or you had to diverge from it?
- What other variations of that opening line you have previously played?
- Did the opening lead to the type of position you want to achieve?
- Did you obtain any positional/material advantage out of that opening?
- Overall, whose position was better after the opening?

By answering these questions you will be able to judge how well you’ve played the opening.
Also, you can note the problems you may have faced in the opening, such as

- Development of piece
- Space
- King safety
- Pawn structure

Based on this evaluation, you can fairly accurately find problems in your opening preparation and fix them accordingly before the next game.

You may also feel a little disappointed that you did not take a full advantage of your opponent's inaccurate opening play. That is normal. Regardless, of the game's outcome you have gained priceless experience. In fact, we learn much more from the games we lose.

2. Middle Game

Middle game comes right after the opening. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish where exactly the opening ends and the middle game begins. That's not very important for our analysis. For the sake of argument, we assume that the middle game begins when most of the pieces are developed, and the King is put to safety. Of course, there are maybe exceptions to these rules, since in some games King never gets a chance to castle, and not all the pieces play active role in the game.

What should you focus primarily when analyzing the middle game?

The main difference between the opening and the middle game is the goal. The goal of the opening is to develop the pieces. The goal of the middle game is to use these pieces to realize a plan.

Therefore, when analyzing the middle game you should first of all comment on what is your plan.

Here is an example. Your opening may be a Queen's Gambit Declined. The goal of this opening is to develop the pieces favorably for the middle game plan: minority attack on the Queen's side or taking control of the center of the board, and preparing attack on the castled black's king.

After it is clear what's your middle game plan you should pay attention to the tactical and positional possibilities in the position. These are the means of achieving the plan on the board. Comment next to the most important decisions in the game, offer some ways to improve for both sides.

Deep analysis of the middle game positions is very important for those who wish to improve their chess. That is the only effective method to find flaws in your game and to patch them quickly.
3. Endgame

Endgame is a final stage of the game where every little advantage counts. Analysis of the endgame is somewhat similar to the middle game. First, you need to comment on the endgame plan that you have. For example, you may want to promote your isolated passed pawn on the King side. Then you need to show how to do that. For example, you may use your king to support such a promotion.

During the analysis you may find additional ideas and possibilities that you missed during the game. Write them down as separate variations, and comment if they are better than the moves played in the game.

As a final stage of your analysis you may want to use the engine to your games for missed tactics, and other ways to improve for both sides. Computer lines can be added to your analysis as well, for completeness.

Today's extra task:

In order to become familiar with evaluation and annotation of your own games you should pick 1-2 games (lost and won) that you have recently played and add your comments and thoughts after the moves. You do not need to comment each move, just pick the most important ones and write a few words on both sides plans, tactics and so on. Try to see what went well and what did not and find something to be improved in future.

Note: Take a look at some of the [annotation example](#) that I did for one of my own games.
Day 10: Playing Practice Games

After this lesson you will learn what you need to keep in mind when playing practice games in order to improve your chess. You will also learn what kind of games you need to play in order to improve faster.

Playing practice games is an extremely important element of chess training. It is impossible to learn to play chess without actually practicing playing games. However, you should play smart, and treat these as a part of the training process. You need to follow a few important yet simple rules to get a maximum gain from playing training games.

Rule 1. Play at least 30 minutes (per side) time control games. Over the board play is by far superior and useful than online chess. The reason is that most players take over the board chess more serious and are able to concentrate better and push yourself harder than when playing online. However, if it is impossible to play over the board, online chess can be an adequate substitute (don’t forget about a longer time control I mentioned in the beginning of the paragraph!).

Rule 2. Treat each of these training games as an important, tournament game. Do not rush your moves and do not make dubious decisions. Calculate and double check all variation in your play, avoid blunders by using previously discussed approach. Do not guess moves and hope for luck. Employ the deep position analysis outline as well as the quick position evaluation 3-step guide as discussed previously. The point of these games is to use what you’ve learned in this training program so far to make it a habitual skill.

Rule 3. Write down your moves for the post game analysis. You should analyze all of your serious training games and draw conclusions such as what went wrong and what can be fixed in future. You should also upload the most important training games to you database with brief annotations.

Note: keep in mind that in order to improve, you should look for a stronger competition. Does that mean you need to play against 2600 rated players to improve? No, in fact, it is best to play against somebody about **200 point higher rated** for best learning experience. Playing against a much stronger opponent is not as useful, since you will lose most of the games without understanding what and why actually happened. Same goes to a much weaker opponent.
You won’t learn much by winning all games straight. Pick somebody about 200 points higher rated and try to beat him. When your own level increases, pick somebody even stronger again.

**Today's extra task:** you should play 1-2 training games following the 3 rules as stated above. Notice where you succeed and failed, what worked and what did not. Draw conclusions.
Day 11: Improving Your Endgame Play

After studying this lesson you will learn which fundamental endgames you need to study to cover most of the occurring endings in practical chess. You will also be supplied with easy-to-follow tutorials to study these endings.

Endgame is one of the most important and hard stages of the game to master. Many chess coaches agree that a good understanding of endgame positions is a key for becoming a strong chess player. That is why we have a practical section called ‘Endgame Lab’ you have been studying all this time.

Endgames can be divided in two categories:

1. **Theoretical Endgames** – are those, where the outcome of the game is commonly known, with a correct play, of course. These are well studied positions and the solution is entirely technical.

2. **Practical Endgames** – positions which appear in real games. These usually have more pawns and pieces than theoretical ones, and can only be solved by applying basic endgame knowledge. The goal is to transpose these, into the first type – theoretical.

You don’t need to be a genius to figure out that to win Practical (actual) endgames you need to memorize more theoretical endings. In fact, it is not very hard and time consuming to learn 15-20 theoretical positions. You should only study positions, which are very common and have high probability of occurrence at practical chess.

Check out the following tutorials that explain most fundamental endgames of chess:

**King and Pawn Endings**

- **King and Pawn vs. King** (pawn promotion race, single passed pawn, pawn majority, corner draw)
- **King vs. King Opposition**
- **Triangulation**

**Rook Endings**

It is very important to know how to play the Rook endgames, since these are, by far, the most common and complex of all endgames. The most important rook endgames are:

- **Rook and Pawn vs. Rook** (building the bridge, pawn on 6th rank, pawn on 7th rank, some special cases or rook endings)
- **Rook vs. Bishop**
- **Rook vs. Knight**
Advanced Techniques

- Two Bishop Checkmate
- Knight and Bishop
- Queen vs. Rook

Note: It’s a lot of endgames to comprehend at once. Don’t worry; you don’t need to do it in one day. Take your time, and make sure to follow these tutorials to understand the endings, since they are very important for practical chess. An outcome of many of your games depends on how well you understand these positions.
DAY 12: Bulletproofing Your Opening Repertoire

After reading this lesson you will learn a number one mistake 95% of chess players make while studying opening that leads to stagnation. You will also learn an efficient, 4-step opening preparation method that will allow you to save a lot of time, learning an opening of interest.

Many chess players, especially those of club level, overestimate the importance of the opening preparation. They learn, memorize and study the opening theory day after day, week after week and month after month without seeing much improvement in their chess.

They spend hundreds of hours studying those lines with different variations, its subtleties, buying many books covering all possible lines of Queen’s gambit, Catalan or Sicilian Defense. Sounds familiar? That is 95% of club level chess players I’m describing here. Only if they knew this… I will tell you now something that may shock you.

You ready?

*If they just spend 25% of their “opening preparation” time to solve tactics and to study endgames, their playing ability would just skyrocket after a couple of weeks.*

That is why in this training program you won’t see much information on openings (except in this chapter). Many chess coaches agree that for chess players rated under 1800 – 2000 spending a lot of times on openings is unnecessary, or in other words waste of time. What’s good of having a +0.3 advantage after the opening and then blundering a piece or missing a mate-in-3?

Once this becomes clear we’re now ready to move on to the second part of this lesson:

**How to study the openings?**

**Step 1.** Find a few grandmaster games (5-10) dedicated to an opening of interest, preferably annotated.

**Step 2.** Go through some of the games and try to understand the basic ideas, plans, piece positioning and a typical pawn structure of the opening you’re studying.
Step 3. Once you familiarized yourself with an opening, you need to get some practice by using it. Play some practice games using this opening with a sole idea to evaluate different positions that arise after the openings and your ability to play them.

If you get stuck at some point of the opening during the game, make sure to go back later on to check (using an opening tree or a grandmaster’s games database) how should you have played that. This is an extremely efficient, hands-on opening preparation approach. After a few iterations you will be proficient in that opening.

You only need to know how to play no more than 2 main openings for white and the same number for black color.

Step 4. Stop here, no more chess opening preparation is necessary. Spend your valuable time improving areas of chess (tactics, master’s games, attacking skills, endgames) that will really make difference in your chess.
Day 13: Finding the Right Move in a Complex Position

In today’s lesson you will learn how to find a move in a complex position by using a simple, 3-step algorithm.

With complex positions arising on the chess board all the time, it is often hard to find the strongest continuation. How should you approach such positions with lots of possibilities, tactics and things going on the board?

When you need to calculate variations in complex positions always first evaluate the most forcing continuations:

1. Checks

These should be evaluated in the first place since they are the most forcing moves of all. A check paralyzes your ability to react to threats or carry on with your plan. It also significantly limits the number of possibilities you have on the board, since you must get out of check by all means. You need to evaluate all possible checking treats and estimate what dangers they possess.

2. Captures

Next, you need to evaluate all reasonable moves involving captures of the pieces and pawns. The ‘capture’ moves should be considered because they are also forcing moves, meaning that if you don’t respond appropriately you will lose material and the game.

3. Threats

Threat is a possibility for your opponent to win material, check or checkmate your king. There are also another types of threats exist, which are more subtle but nevertheless very unpleasant and should be considered as well. For example pawn pushes, improving piece positions, changing pawn structure types, promotion are also considered as threats and should be accounted in you analysis.

Most of the times, analysis of these 3 most forcing continuations is sufficient enough to find the best move in any even most complicated position. In order to be able to calculate long variations in chess it is extremely important to know exactly what lines to calculate.

The World Championship and the highest rated chess player ever Magnus Carlsen, was once asked how can he calculate such long variations over the board? He smiled, shrugged his shoulders and said that the trick is to know what to calculate and also to be able to visualize the position at the end of the calculation.
Our simple, 3-step algorithm does exactly that. It reduces the number of moves that you need to take into account and allows you to focus just on important stuff. Instead of calculating 3-5 different lines 3-5 moves ahead, you only need to focus on 1-2 important continuations. Not only that will save you a lot of time, but also will prevent unnecessary mistakes caused by miscalculations.
Day 14: Using an Isolated Pawn

In today’s lesson you will learn how to play for and against the isolated pawn to maximize your winning chances. By using these simple rules you will have a clear and an easy to follow plan applicable to most positions of this kind.

Isolated pawn is a very common element, which occurs in many openings including Queen’s Gambit, Caro-Kann Defense, French Defense, Nimzo-Indian Defense, etc. Therefore, it is important to understand how to play with and against an isolated pawn.

The single most important thing you need to keep in mind when playing for either side, that an isolated pawn is an asset in the middle-game but a liability in the endgame. It controls important central squares in the middle of the board providing space, while also creating great outposts (often used by knights).

**When you have an isolated pawn you should:**

- Play actively in the center
- Find the right time to move the isolated pawn
- Attack the opponent’s King

Therefore, if you have an isolated (king or queen) pawn you should avoid exchanging pieces, since that will lead to an endgame where you do not want to have an isolated pawn. What you should do is to use the spatial advantage an isolated pawn gives you at the center to create an active play (an attack) against the opponent’s king.

You will be able to position your knights at the center and they will be well supported by the pawn. If your opponent will try to drive your knights away with its own pawns, that will create weakness in his own pawn structure. In the case of exchange, you can retake with the isolated pawn fixing your pawn structure. Also, an isolated pawn can be pushed at the right time, if not blockaded by an opponent’s piece, to create a breakthrough.

At the same time an isolated pawn will create difficult time for your opponent to coordinate his pieces due to the lack of space and control of the center.

**When you play against an isolated pawn, you should:**

- Blockade an isolated pawn by placing a Knight (ideally) in-front
- Create pressure on an isolated pawn by using your pawns and pieces
- Exchange pieces, since an isolated pawn is a big weakness in the endgame

If you play against an isolated pawn, you have two main plans to follow. One of the plans is to simplify the position and to exchange out to the endgame. It is much harder to protect an isolated pawn in an absence of pieces; it becomes a serious weakness, waiting to be captured.

Another plan is to actually try to attack and to win that pawn right from the middle game. It is usually done by blockading the isolated pawn by a minor piece (usually a knight) to prevent it from moving and creating complication. After the pawn is blockaded, the other pieces are used
to put pressure on the pawn. It is usually much easier, both psychologically and chess-wise, to attack the pawn than to defend it. After you build serious pressure on the pawn, and tie your opponent’s defensive resources, you can switch your attention to some other targets (i.e. opponent’s king).

Games involving an isolated pawn always have rich, attacking possibilities for both sides, but at the same time you have a clear plan to follow regardless of what side you’re playing on. By having a clear plan you will have an advantage against someone who may not.
Day 15: Evaluating Your Chess

After reading this chapter you will be able to assess your chess and to get a rough picture at where you currently are. This is really important for future improvement process and effective training throughout our 21 day program.

Today I will introduce you to the systematic chess diagnostics method used by many strong players to evaluate their chess and detect strong and weak sides. You will learn your strengths and weaknesses through opening and middle game classification and analyses.

1. Opening classification and analyses of results

When I tell chess players to analyze their chess they say well, I have already analyzed my games. They miss a bigger picture. What they don't understand is that not only they need to analyze a particular game, but also they need to evaluate their chess in general. What do I mean by that? Imagine a player who has played 15 tournament games in his chess career. The opening of these games and the results are distributed as following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPENING</th>
<th>WON</th>
<th>LOST</th>
<th>DRAWN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Queen's Gambit Declined</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruy Lopez</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petroff Variation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sicilian Defense</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King's Indian Defense</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this little statistics it is possible to draw some conclusions about our player:

- Queen's Gambit Declined and King's Indian Defense are the most successful openings resulting in least amount of loses and highest amount of wins

- Sicilian defense and Ruy Lopez don't work well for this player and need to be switched to some other opening

- There aren't many conclusions can be made from Petroff’s statistics yet

The point I'm trying to make is simple, in order to understand what kinds of positions you understand the best you should look at the openings you played in your games and see the results you have achieved. If you start seeing patterns, for example good results in the one opening and bad results in the other one, you should swap the bad opening with something
else, while keeping track of statistics. Finally, when you find the right opening choice your results will improve.

2. Middle Game classification and analyzes of results

Some people may disagree with the point I made in previous bullet and say that our imaginary player may have lost 3 games in Sicilian defense due to some other reason rather than the opening. In order to have a more precise "portrait" of a chess player we need to also analyze his middle game/endgame results. We can create analogous table to one above for our player:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Middle Game</th>
<th>WON</th>
<th>LOST</th>
<th>DRAWN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Open</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chess Themes</th>
<th>WON</th>
<th>LOST</th>
<th>DRAWN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharp Lines</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolated Pawn</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center Attack</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Attack</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above statistics we see that the imaginary player needs to work on his tactics more, aim for open/semi-open position and avoid closed games, especially the isolated pawn ones.

When you create a middle game/chess theme profile for your own play you will learn a lot of useful information about the types of position you play the best and the type of things to work on. The chess theme list can be extended depending on your needs with things like rook endings, pawn endings, opposite side castle, passed pawns, etc.

By combining the opening classification and middle game classification statistics it should be possible to make conclusions about the types of openings and position that suit you the best.
3. Game Analyzes: Pattern Recognition

You should use serious chess games you have played as a learning tool. By serious games I mean the actual tournament games played in the long time control, when you were fully concentrated and focused on the game and played at the max of your chess ability.

The most crucial part of the analysis is to draw the right conclusions about strengths and weaknesses of your chess. The ultimate goal is to eliminate your weaknesses and build up strengths.

Today's extra task:

Evaluate your chess by using the outline presented in this chapter. Based on the drawn conclusions determine what openings, types of middle games and chess themes you play the best or the worst. You can expand the following analysis by adding the most typical endgames (king and pawn, rook, minor pieces) to the equation to get a more complete picture.

Note: you can print and fill out the self-evaluation tables presented on the next page.
Self-Evaluation Tables:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPENING</th>
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<th>DRAWN</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Open</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closed</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chess Endgames</th>
<th>WON</th>
<th>LOST</th>
<th>DRAWN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>King and Pawn</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rook</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Opposite Bishops</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Minor Pieces</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Day 16: Finding Grandmaster with the same style as your own

In this lesson you will determine what playing style is the closest to your own and will find a grandmaster with a similar style as yours.

In order to improve your chess and to get more ideas to use in your own games you need to find a grandmaster with a playing style similar to your own. The first step of this process is to actually figure out what playing style do you have. You have done many exercises that involve analyzing your own games as well as annotating them, finding the right plan, etc.

There are 3 main types of playing styles that you need to consider:

1. **Attacking**

   This is a very common chess style among grandmasters and club players alike, which is characterized mainly by the attacking nature of the games. The attacking players plan the attack quickly and implement it at the first possible moment. The games played by the attacking players often involve material sacrifices, many different tactical motifs, risky decisions and a lot of intuitive play. These games are usually the most spectacular of all, since the players balance on the razor blade edge between winning and losing. The games are rarely end in a draw.

   In order to be a successful attacking player one needs to have a certain characteristics necessary for this type of play. These are mainly the good calculation skills, ability to play under huge pressure for long periods of time without making mistakes, wiliness to take risks and, of course, the nerves of steel!

   Some of the most famous chess players with a clearly defined attacking style are Kasparov, Carlsen, Tal, Topalov, Shirov, Polgar.

2. **Positional**

   This is another playing style, which is a complete opposite of the attacking style. The games played in this style are characterized by maneuvering of pieces, in order to get a more favorable position, long-term plans with a possibility to improve the pawn's structure, prophylactic moves, well planned and supported pawn pushes, etc.

   For a positional player a raw tactical calculation is not as important as a clear understanding of the position with all its subtleties and nuances. Even though, things don't happen here at the lightning speed, and games don't end in 25 moves like in the case of attacking style, a good positional player can paralyze the play of his opponent. By constantly improving his own position, a tiny bit, by a tiny bit, a positional player can squeeze his opponent's position like the boa constrictor squeezes a helpless rabbit.

   Some of the most famous positional chess players are Karpov, Kramnik, Smyslov, Petrosian, Nimzovich,
3. Positional-Attacking

This is a hybrid chess style and probably the most universal style of all. Players possessing this style do not have a clearly predominant attacking or positional characteristics. Depending on a position, they can play aggressively, but also they can play a solid positional chess if necessary. These universal players need to have the best of both worlds: a great calculating ability as well as a superior positional understanding.

The most famous positional-attacking chess players are Botvinnik, Fischer, Spassky, Anand.

**Today's extra task:** based on the outline above you need to figure out what type of chess player you are and find a grandmaster or 2 with a playing style similar to your own. Then you should review couple of his games, and build a habit to review games of the stronger players with the same playing style.

That will give your chess a boost as well as some personal inspiration and motivation to play and improve.
Day 17: Dominating Opposite Color Bishops

After studying today’s lesson you will learn the fundamentals of playing opposite color bishop endgames. This is a very important theme that occurs in many games. We introduce a couple of very important rules to keep in mind while playing these endings.

Most of the opposite color bishops endings are drawn. Sometimes, even when your opponent is one, two or even three pawns up, you can still manage to draw an opposite color bishop endgame.

If you are playing for a win there is one very important rule to always keep in mind that will enable you to win an opposite color bishop endings. The trick is to create two passed pawns on opposite sides of the board.

It is much a more difficult task to stop two passed pawns on the opposite sides of the board. If your opponent will try to stop one pawn with a king, you will protect it with a bishop and will go ahead and try to promote another pawn supported by your king. Your opponent will be forced to give up his bishop for that pawn at the promotion square. Then, you can just relocate your king to the other side of the board, chase the opponent's king away and to promote the pawn. In today's Master's game you will learn this technique. Make sure you understand it; it’s a very important technique to use in your own games.

Another thing to keep in mind when playing opposite bishop endgame is that the side with the most active bishop has a tremendous advantage. It is almost like playing a piece up. For example, in the queen + bishop ending, the attacking side is better off since it is very hard to use the opposite color bishop effectively for defense in this kind of endings.

In order to play for a draw, one must blockade the pawns with the bishop and the king, so that it is hard to support their movement for the opposite side. A more detailed explanation of how it's done is available here.
Note: if you are playing for a draw and a pawn or two down, it’s make sense to exchange down to the opposite color bishop endgame (if possible), preventing your opponent from having passed pawns on opposite side of the board.

Next, you’ll need to blockade the pawns with your king and bishop and claim the draw.

Extra task for today:

Check out the following article explaining how to play the opposite color bishop endgames.
Day 18: Beating Stronger Opponents

After studying the today’s lesson you will learn how to maximize your winning chances when playing against a much stronger opponent. I will share 3 general strategies you should always keep in mind when playing against stronger players.

We are all good at beating opponents that are lower rated than us. What happens, however, when we face a stronger opposition? I bet you know the answer. We start getting nervous; all of a sudden we start playing strange moves, start making unforced mistakes and ultimately lose the game.

If your opponent is 400 points higher rated than yourself, according to chess statistics, he will win 95% of the games. What happens in the other 5% through? Exactly, the stronger player draws or even loses the game. How do these 5% manage to beat stronger players? I will give you a handy strategic guide that will maximize your chances against stronger opponents.

You won’t win all the games, of course, but it will definitely help out your score!

Here are some fundamental suggestions for when you play against a much stronger opponent:

- First thing you need to do is to calm down and don’t be nervous. Do not be afraid of your opponent; even if he is 2200 rated and you are only 1200. Remember, you still have a chance winning the game.

  If you watch very strong players play chess, they are always calm and concentrated during the game. While nervous, chess player cannot make best moves possible. Only full concentration and "turning off" from the outside world into the world of chess allows you to play best possible moves.

  You should not worry about the outcome on the game when you in the process of playing. Take it as a challenge; focus on the problems you face during the game disregarding the intimidating opponent. You may get surprised at the end.

- Do not automatically exchange pieces. A lot of weaker chess players think that if they exchange more pieces they will be able to make a draw in the endgame.

  This is a big misunderstanding!

  Of course, if you trade all your pieces and pawns, the game will be drawn. But a stronger player would never allow that to happen.

  In that case, if weaker side would try to exchange pieces he would most likely be trading his active pieces for much less active pieces of the stronger side.

  Advantage of a strong side will increase and he would be almost guaranteed winning that game. Even if you exchange most of the pieces, stronger players usually play a very solid endgame, which will most likely guarantee them a game point.
Just remember, keep your pieces on the board. The main idea when playing against a much stronger player is to complicate the position and to confuse your opponent, which is impossible in a theoretical endgame which he probably executes better.

- **Play the game actively!**

  Do not just sit there and wait for a miracle to happen while playing some passive, defensive moves. If you do, a stronger player will just activate all his pieces and launch a deadly, unstoppable attack.

  Remember, the best defense is an offense or a counter attack. If your opponent launches the attack on your queen side, strike his king side (assuming he castled king side) with you pawn chain supported by pieces.

  Make it as difficult as possible for him to gain any advantage. **Fight for every tiny advantage!**

  Do not ever step back and let him control the game. If you like playing open positions make sure you open up more files and place heavy pieces (rooks, queen) on the open/semi open files. If you, in fact, feel more comfortable in positional play or in closed positions, you should try to avoid pawn exchanges. Make him play your game! Do not play his.

- **Remember, playing just for a draw is a very bad strategy.** If you do, you most likely will lose the game.

  To get a draw against a stronger opponent you need to play as actively as possible (see the recommendation above). It does not mean, however, that you should start a premature attack from move one, sacrifice all your pieces and resign.

  This happens a lot in chess, even on master’s level. So, if you see the possibility of a strong attack even if you have to give up some material for that, go for it!

  But, before you sacrifice it makes sense to think about the position and see if it actually going to work. **Calculate 3 times before you sac a piece!** There was one game I played on a tournament, where I sacrificed two pieces and resign 3 moves after. Miscalculation in that kind of positions cost me the game and the tournament.

  Deep calculations are very important when playing tactically.

  Lasker once said, "It's much better to lose a game your way than your opponent's…"
Day 19: Beating Weaker Opponents

In this lesson you will learn how to dominate the weaker opponents, win most of the games you play against them without taking unnecessary risks. I will share the most effective strategy you can employ against this kind of players.

In the previous lesson we have learned how to play against a much stronger chess players in order to maximize your winning chances. The strategy was simple: to keep your pieces on the board and to complicate the position.

Why do we need to worry about how to play against the weaker players? Shouldn’t they be easy to beat? I want to stress that in this lesson by the weaker players, we’re referring to players who are 100-200 point lower rated than you.

- Oddly enough, when we face this type of opponents, we think that they will lose automatically, relax, and often get in trouble, sometimes even losing the game. If you don’t want to lose your rating points, tournament standings and get your mood spoiled by unnecessary upsets here is the strategy you need to employ against the weaker opponents.

  When playing against a weaker opponent you need to keep everything under control. **Keep position quiet and positional.** You don’t need to play the razor sharp lines against this kind of opponents.

  The less risk you take the higher probability of success you should expect. This is exactly opposite to what you should do when playing a much stronger opponent.

- If you have a clear win in the endgame, don’t be afraid to exchange down and to realize your advantage. It does not matter how effective your win looks, in chess the results matters.

- Avoid sacrifices and unclear combinations; this is how you can get in trouble even against a weaker opponent. Minimize risks and capitalize on your better understanding of positions.

- Treat the entire game of your opponent as a weakness. Eventually, he will make a mistake first, if you keep the position under control, and you do not need to take any significant risks.
Even if you have a serious significant material advantage you should not relax and assume that the game will be won by itself. Remember, when a player obtains a winning position he gets excited for a moment and then relaxes. This is the most dangerous state of playing chess.

This is where the most mistakes occur. At the same time the opponent who is losing, activates his chess abilities and sometimes returns into the game winning some material back or obtaining an initiative.

Follow the old saying “the hardest game to win is a won game”, concentrate and get that well deserved win!
Day 20: Stable vs. Unstable Positions

After reading today’s lesson you will understand the fundamental difference between the two most important types of positions in chess: stable and unstable. You will learn how to correctly evaluate both types of positions to maximize your chances.

What are the two most important types of positions at chess?

Stable Positions

In the stable type of positions it is relatively easy to see the positional factors. When approaching this type of positions, you should analyze the position and to come up with a plan. After evaluating the positional factors, setting the priorities and developing the plan you should try to realize it.

The most important conclusion that we need to make after an evaluation of a position is what side has an upper hand or an ‘advantage’ in the given position. If you’re a side with an advantage (superior position), you MUST start an attack. Otherwise, your opponent will have time to strengthen his position and will start attacking you. At that point you will lose your positional advantage.

If you clearly see that your opponent’s position is superior to your own, you should defend and strengthen your position. But you must remember that the final goal of each defense is an attack. Therefore, a defensive phase of the game is a preparation phase for the counter-attack. Always keep that in mind; otherwise you will lose focus of the game.

Active defense is always a much better alternative to a passive defense. Of course, in order to play attacking chess, your position needs to be ready, otherwise that may not end up well. All your moves should be based on the precise positional analyzes, not on a current emotional state of the mind. You should evaluate the position and check the following factors:

- Your pieces are positioned correctly (actively) and ready for the attack
- Your king is relatively safe and you won’t get checkmated during the attack
- You are able to neutralize the defensive forces of your opponent

If these factors are true, you’re ready for an attack and should proceed.

Unstable positions

The main difference between approaching stable and unstable positions is that the former ones should not be evaluated from the point of view of an advantage. It is totally incorrect. You need to look at unstable position and see what’s happening on the board.

Deep positional analyzes is useless in unstable positions, since you may have a better pawn structure or even some material advantage but it is irrelevant if you’re getting checkmated in 3 moves. In these types of positions you need to first of all calculate the exact lines and variations.
At the same time you need to think about attacking possibilities, play actively, deflect opponent’s threats and create your own.

The goal in any unstable position is to get some material or positional advantage and to convert the position into the stable type in order to safely realize your advantage and to win the game.
Day 21: Continuing Your Progress: beyond 21 Days

Congratulations, you have successfully completed this program and not only improved your chess, but also developed correct training habits that will stay with you forever! The program is almost over, but your training has just begun. During these 21 days together, I’m sure you learned a lot about what your need to do and how to do it in order to improve your game.

What should you do after day 21?

I suggest taking a few days off and then start your training routine as follows:

1. Study Master's Games

Studying 3-5 games per week and understanding its ideas should be sufficient enough to keep you progressing. If you have more spare time you can toss a few recently played GM games to this recipe.

I recommend starting with a book like *My Best Games of Chess*, by Alexander Alekhine (14$ on Amazon). This book presents 220 of Alekhine’s best games with fully analysis and annotations. It should be enough material for the whole year of studying.

2. Solving Tactics

This is a very important part of your chess training and it never should be forgotten. Try to spend about 30 minutes 3-5 times per week to solve tactics. That way you will have your tactical skills sharp and never rusty. I recommend using a chess tactics training software CT-ART ($19 on Amazon) which has 4,000+ tactics problems from basic to the most advanced.

3. Endgames

Endgames are crucial part of chess and should always be worked on. For this purpose I suggest two books: one easier to understand and another one which is a little bit more advanced.

You should start with the easier one *Chess Endings: Essential Knowledge* by Yuri Averbah ($13 on Amazon).

Then you should move on to the more advanced book *Endgame Strategy* by Mikhail Shereshevsky ($18 on Amazon).

I won’t specify the exact number of endgames or amount of material you need to study. Just keep studying these works and your endgame understanding will skyrocket quickly.
4. Additional Resources

If you have not yet, you should study the fundamental positional work by Aron Nimzowitsch *My System* ($22 on Amazon). Many of the strong and super-strong chess players have studied this work and it was an important stepping-stone for a better positional understanding.

Good luck with your chess and don’t forget to comment on your experience using our program!

*Note: these are Amazon affiliate links, meaning that I will get a small commission if you order the suggested items.*

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