A HOUSE RULEBOOK · SETTLED

Chess

The rules, written in our own words.

Chess belongs to nobody, so these rules are ours to write. They follow the laws used in tournaments, with a note where friendly tables often differ. Written by Nine Fathoms for Settled, 2026. Free to print for your own table.

The board and the pieces

Chess is played by two players on a board of sixty-four squares, eight by eight, in alternating light and dark. The board is turned so that each player has a light square in the corner at their right hand.

Each player has sixteen pieces: a king, a queen, two rooks, two bishops, two knights and eight pawns. One player has the light pieces and is called White; the other has the dark pieces and is called Black.

Setting up

The rooks go in the corners of the row nearest each player, the knights next to them, then the bishops. The queen goes on the remaining square of her own colour, so the white queen starts on a light square and the black queen on a dark one. The king takes the last square beside her. Each player's eight pawns fill the row in front of the other pieces.

Taking turns

White makes the first move, and then the players take turns, one move each. A player may not pass: on your turn you must make a move if you have one.

How the pieces move

The king moves one square in any direction. The queen moves any number of empty squares in a straight line, along a row, a column or a diagonal. The rook moves any number of empty squares along a row or a column. The bishop moves any number of empty squares along a diagonal, so it always stays on squares of one colour.

The knight moves two squares along a row or column and then one square at a right angle, in the shape of an L. The knight is the only piece that jumps over other pieces on its way. Every other piece stops before a piece in its path.

Pawns

A pawn moves straight forward one square onto an empty square. From its starting square a pawn may instead move two squares forward, if both squares are empty. A pawn captures differently from the way it moves: it takes an enemy piece one square diagonally forward. A pawn can never move or capture backward, and it cannot capture the piece straight in front of it.

Capturing

A piece captures by moving onto a square held by an enemy piece, which is taken off the board. You can never capture one of your own pieces, and the king is never captured: the game ends before that can happen.

Three special moves

Castling

Once in the game, each player may make a move with the king and a rook together, called castling. The king moves two squares toward one of its rooks, and that rook jumps to the square the king has just crossed.

Castling is allowed only when all of these are true:

- Neither the king nor that rook has moved at any time before in the game.
- Every square between the king and that rook is empty.
- Castling is not allowed while the king is in check.
- The king may not cross a square that is attacked by an enemy piece.
- The king may not end its move on a square where it would be in check.

The rook may pass over a square that is attacked; only the king's path matters. A king that has moved and come back to its starting square has still moved, and can no longer castle.

Taking en passant

When a pawn moves two squares forward from its starting square and lands beside an enemy pawn, that enemy pawn may capture it as if it had moved only one square. The capturing pawn moves diagonally to the square the other pawn passed over, and the passing pawn is removed. This capture must be made on the very next move or the chance is gone for good.

Promotion

A pawn that reaches the far side of the board is promoted at once. The player replaces it with a queen, a rook, a bishop or a knight of their own colour, whichever they choose. The choice does not depend on which pieces have been captured, so a player may have two queens or more. The new piece can act straight away, and can give check on the move it appears.

Check and checkmate

A king is in check when an enemy piece attacks the square it stands on. A player whose king is in check must get it out of check on their move, by moving the king to a safe square, by capturing the attacking piece, or by putting a piece between them.

No player may ever make a move that leaves their own king in check. Such a move is not legal and must be taken back.

When a king is in check and no legal move can get it out of check, it is checkmate. The game ends at once, and the player who delivered checkmate wins.

How a game is drawn

A stalemate is a draw, not a win. It happens when the player whose turn it is has no legal move and their king is not in check.

A game is also drawn when the players agree to a draw. It is drawn when neither player has enough pieces left to deliver checkmate by any series of legal moves, such as a king alone against a king, or a king and a single bishop against a king.

A player may claim a draw when the same position is about to appear for the third time with the same player to move. A player may also claim a draw when fifty moves by each player have been made without any pawn moving and without any capture.

Touching a piece

In tournament play, a player who deliberately touches one of their own pieces must move that piece if it has a legal move. A player who deliberately touches an enemy piece must capture it if they can. To straighten a piece on its square without moving it, say so before touching it.

> Many friendly tables do not play the touching rule. Agree before you begin whether your table does.