

International Chess School Core Course

The course is divided into two parts:

- Months 1-9 = positional understanding; without this, calculation brings nothing
- Month 10-13 = calculation and analysis; without which real progress is impossible.

<u>Month</u>	<u>Subject</u>
1	<i>Think Like a Strong Player</i>
2	<i>Watch the Two Centers</i>
3 - 4	<i>Master Piece Play</i>
5 - 6	<i>Master Pawn Play</i>
7 - 8	<i>Pawn Structures Explained</i>
9	<i>Advanced Fighting Strategies</i>
10 - 13	<i>The Art of a Master: Analysis</i>

Month 1 = “Think Like a Strong Player”

From the very first month, we present to you the correct way of thinking in chess. You will learn about the *TO DO* list, *consequences* of the moves, *recognizing real* threats, and what you have to do after your opponent’s moves.

The correct thinking method you learn here is of first importance in improving your chess. Then, throughout the entire 13-month course, we make use of this way of thinking when annotating games and giving explanations. Consequently you too will start to think like a strong player.

You will learn how to correctly evaluate a position when the material is the same and how to evaluate positions with material imbalances.

"Making decisions in chess" is a simple yet practical guide for choosing the best moves. This lesson will tell you what you should look for in every position → *the plan of play*.

Before starting our course, you can go through a test that is meant to measure players’ strength up to 2300 rating. The test is extremely hard and very few students are likely to find more than 50% of the solutions. This should not discourage students as they already know that their chess should be perfected. But the student will be able to compare this result with the tests given at the end of the course.

Tactics: The first lesson of tactics will stress its importance to the entire career of the player. The essential elements include board visualization and the forms of tactical interactions between pieces.

Month 2 = “The Two Centers”

In this month we study the two “centers” in chess: the real center of the board and the central figure in chess, the king.

You will learn to correctly evaluate the king’s safety, one of the most important criteria of general positional assessment. We present the pluses and minuses of all the possible pawn structures in front of the king so you’ll know where and how to attack or if the attack has any chance of success.

You will learn how to evaluate the role of pieces that attack and defend, correct placements, recognize defects that can be exploited, and find direct and tricky routes to bring pieces into attack or defend.

The central pawn structure is the most important element when deciding on the plan of play. We present the 5 types of center structures with the specific middlegame strategy for each and for both players. The large number of examples will help you spot the similarities and main strategies of positions characterized by the same kind of center.

Tactics: A good player must see the board, pieces and correct moves in his mind’s eye, so we start board visualization training.

Months 3 – 4 = “Master Piece Play”

You will learn specific strategies for each piece, where to place them, how to increase their qualitative value, and how to use them in attack or defense. An exhaustive set of concrete and practical instructions for each chess piece will show you how to fight for an advantage.

Here we will also study how to obtain and how to exploit a lead in development, local force superiority, better piece collaboration, and an opponent’s piece out of play.

You will learn another way to evaluate a position by making a comparison between the qualitative values of the pieces.

During Month 4, we offer a large set of problems chosen for each strategy studied during Month 3. Your individual work to find the correct answers together with our instructive solutions will consolidate the information and will improve your technique.

Tactics: Calculation is a tool that the chess player uses on almost every move to reach his goals in a given position. You will learn how to calculate variations in complicated positions and how to improve your calculation ability (Month 3).

Tactics: In Month 4 we investigate the sources of committing bad moves (mistakes), and we give instructions on how to eliminate them from your play.

Months 5 – 6 = “Master Pawn Play”

You will learn to create weak pawns and weak squares in an opponent’s camp and to avoid weaknesses in your own position.

You will learn the importance of the space advantage (the most important advantage in chess) – methods to obtain this advantage, how to exploit it, local space advantage, and methods to fight against enemy advanced pawns.

You will also learn to recognize an immobile pawn structure and to aim for a dynamic formation.

You will learn how to create and use the power of free pawns; we will analyze the pluses and the drawbacks of it.

The blockade and pawn majorities are also comprehensively studied.

Month 6 is dedicated to reinforcing the theoretical knowledge taught during Month 5 by means of many positional exercises. You find the solution to every problem and then compare it to our well-explained solutions.

Tactics: In Month 5, this section is dedicated to pawn combinations. You will learn a lot of tricks that will help you win or save full points in your games.

Tactics: In Month 6, you will learn how to defend inferior, even desperate, positions. We will present the techniques of “active defense”, “defense in the trenches”, “the creation of confusion”, and “the bluff”.

Months 7 – 8 = “Pawn Structures Explained”

Middlegame play is very much influenced by the pawn structure. During these two months we thoroughly study the most frequent pawn formations in chess: isolated pawns, hanging pawns, the isolated pawn couple, all pawn phalanxes, static centers, various blocked structures, and dynamic structures.

As a lot of positions can be framed in one of these typical pawn structures, you will learn how to play complex middlegames, from general ideas to great finesses.

Tactics: You will study the tactical collaboration between pieces which will help you to make decisions in complicated positions and will offer you a great advantage over many opponents.

Month 9 = “Advanced Fighting Strategies”

In the last month of the first part of the Core Course, you will learn more about the modern dynamics of play and very complex techniques of play such as the mobility of the pieces, piece dynamics, initiative, and cooperation between pieces and pawns.

An important positional technique is comprehensively explained: prophylaxis. You will learn how to be “bad” to your opponent, anticipating and thwarting his intentions, from his small threats to his key plans.

By this last month of theoretical study, you will already have all the information a strong chess master should have.

Months 10 – 13 = “The Art of a Master: Analysis”

The World Champion, Botvinnik said: “*What does the art of a master consist of? Essentially it is the capacity to analyze chess positions accurately*” and also “*whoever aims to become a remarkable player should perfect skills in the domain of analysis*”. If Botvinnik did not convince you, perhaps the words of one of the strongest players of all time, Kasparov, will have a greater impact: “*I think that (other things being equal) the analytical method of studying chess must give you a colossal advantage over chess pragmatism, and that there can be no certainty in chess without analysis*”.

After the first nine months, students should have already gained a good positional understanding. This constitutes the base for further work that they need to allot in the domain of analysis. Without a certain level of positional understanding, this work would be, at best, painful and, at worst, worthless.

So, the second part of our course is perhaps the most important stage of preparation for serious improvement. Here we focus on developing your analytical skills by having selected for you hundreds of positions for analysis.

By no means will it be easy to work on this second part. However, this work is or will become pleasant and, in the end, you will improve your game a lot, as the great World Champions have assured.

Every week for four months, you will have two sets of problems. Each of the 32 tests consists of:

a. 2 simple tactical exercises (total: 10 minutes)

These are just to warm up your brain for the rest of the work.

b. 1 position that requires concrete calculation of variations (total: 20 minutes)

This position requires a lot of calculation. You will have to find all candidate moves, calculate all the variations and get to a conclusion about the best move.

There is a big difference between these problems and the common “combinations” where there is a decisive continuation. Here, the player is supposed to find the best continuations but this is not necessarily “winning”... exactly like in practice.

c. 4 x positions for analysis (total: 90 minutes)

The core of this advanced part of the “Core Course” is the **128 positions for analysis**. They consist of complicated *positional* struggles. First of all you need to do a correct evaluation of the position, and then, of course, you should find the best continuation to your position. Some solutions can lead to a win, but more often the battle remains open, or sometimes you will need to find the most practical chance to save the game. This is “normal” chess and will prepare you for 95% of the chess game.

Of course, we will assist you with thoroughly annotated solutions that shed light on these positions. Moreover, every problem has a neat “hint” that can be used by less advanced players to point them in the right direction.

Technique of play

The technique of play may seem very easy for some players but the hardest part for others. For example, if you take a book of annotated games you will find long series of un-annotated moves even if the author tried to explain to you everything important. Those moves were very normal for the author of the book but, in fact, they are not at all clear for you. Therefore, we want to make up for this deficit and we will comment on games at the moment when others say “the rest is a matter of technique”. Four highly instructive lessons are given every month from Month 10 to 12.

We wish you Success!