

Sportsmanship and Etiquette



Sportsmanship is one of the life skills that can be enhanced through chess. Many parents tell us that chess has improved their child's self-esteem. Many others tell us that chess has taught their child sportsmanship, including how to deal gracefully with difficult situations and loss.

Our ["Guide to Scholastic Tournaments"](#) above addresses etiquette in the context of tournaments. We address the issue at more length in this section, which applies to both club and tournament play. Some of what follows are examples not only of poor sportsmanship, but of rule violations.

Be polite, and get off to a good start. Greet your opponent in a pleasant way with a handshake. You may say, "Hi, my name is..." or "It's a pleasure to meet you, my name is..." or something similar.

Don't boast, talk trash, or try to intimidate your opponent. Some players brag about their ratings, comment on their opponents' ratings, or play psychological games ("I played a guy last month with a rating like yours and blew him away.") **Don't.** Do not say anything that may offend your opponent. Also, avoid expressions, body language or gestures that may offend.

Don't argue with your opponent. If your opponent breaks a rule and does not correct the move when asked, or you disagree about the move, ask a tournament director or person in charge to make a ruling on the situation. Handling a conflict this way increases the chance that the dispute will be resolved peacefully without anyone wasting emotional energy.

Don't use outside materials. Use of any notes, printed material, recordings, an additional chessboard or a computer is prohibited. (Some tournament directors allow the use of a Monroi or similar device to record moves.) Violations may result in a time penalty or forfeiture of the game.

Don't give or ask for advice. You may not ask for advice on a move. Similarly, do not accept unsolicited advice; you may regret it. Those attempting to offer advice should be asked to stop and the tournament director notified.

Don't be annoying. It can be annoying and distracting to talk to your opponent during a game (see exceptions below). Other annoying behavior includes tapping a pencil or clicking your chess pieces against the table, kicking the table, humming, and muttering, singing or talking to yourself. If your opponent is doing any of these things and does not stop when you ask him, get an adult or a tournament director.

Stay at or near your game when it's in progress. You may of course leave to use the bathroom, and at most tournaments you are permitted to watch other nearby games while your opponent is making his or her move. However, be sure not to let your own clock run very long after your opponent has moved. Also, while you're watching the other game, don't crowd the players or touch the table. Long absences from a game in progress are otherwise not allowed unless you have permission from a tournament director. If you wish to leave because you are resigning, make that clear to your opponent.

Do not discuss your game in progress with anyone. Even after it's over, discussing or analyzing your game is distracting to other players, so is normally not allowed near games in progress. Find a quiet place outside the playing room. .

Don't talk with anyone in the playing room except to say check (optional) or checkmate, to make a draw offer, to point out an illegal move, or to talk with a tournament director to request a ruling.

Don't try to trick your opponent by pretending to have made a bad move (gasping or faking dismay) or falsely announcing check, checkmate, or stalemate.

Do not rush your opponent by saying "hurry up!," "go!," "move!" or anything similar.

After your game, be a good winner or loser. Either way, thank your opponent for a good game with a handshake. If you win, do not celebrate in front of your opponent, nor belittle your opponent. If you lose, consider your loss a learning opportunity and think about what you might have done differently. Win or lose, immediately after the game, analyze your written moves with your coach. This is more productive than getting upset. You learn more from a loss than a win, and when you learn you really win.

Be as polite, as clear, and as calm as possible when talking to a tournament director. This will make you more effective in making your point. Keep in mind that tournament directors, although specially trained, are human beings trying their best to enforce the rules and make discretionary rulings. Many of them serve on a volunteer basis to make the tournament a good experience for you. If you disagree with a ruling by an assistant tournament director, you will usually be permitted to speak to your coach or parent and can ask to appeal the ruling to the chief tournament director.

Spectators are usually not allowed in the game room, but some tournament directors allow them. When they are allowed inside, they are **observers only**. They have no special rights or privileges, and are not allowed to talk out loud, signal, or interfere in any way in games being played. Only the players can enforce rules during their games and get help from a tournament director when needed. It's best to have spectators at some distance from games, and behind any players with whom they are associated, to avoid any appearance of communication.

Saying "check" is not required, but is considered polite, especially if you are playing with an inexperienced player. If you or your opponent announces checkmate, make sure both of you agree before resetting the board and going to the scorer's table.

Asking to borrow your opponent's scoresheet, if you think you may have made an error, is permitted as long as the request is done while your clock is running.

If you wish to offer a draw, first make your move, then simply say "I offer a draw" and hit your clock. Do not extend your hand unless your opponent extends his/hers and accepts the draw. Do not pressure your opponent to accept a draw offer. If the offer is rejected, additional draw offers before the position has changed significantly may be reported to the tournament director as an annoyance.

Black normally has the choice of equipment, unless White's equipment is more standard. A digital clock with appropriate time delay is the most standard clock. A standard tournament set has Staunton-style pieces with a 3-3/4 inch tall King. A standard board has 2-1/4 inch squares and algebraic characters on the sides to assist in notation.

If you're late, your opponent may begin the game and start the clock at the beginning of the round. If Black is late, White has choice of equipment.

Skittles games are played in a more relaxed setting. Some people relax the rules and/or tolerate more distractions. Others prefer to stick to the rules and seek to minimize distractions. Either way, you may wish to clarify these issues with your opponent.