

# How Chess Games are Ended

There are many ways that a game of chess may come to an end. Some of these allow white to win (1-0), or black to win (0-1), and some of them allow the opponents to "split" the point in a draw ( $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ ). There are three ways to win a game of chess:

- Your opponent resigns the game
- You checkmate your opponent
- Your opponent oversteps the time control

## Win by Resignation

Resignation is the most common way to win a game. When one's position is hopeless, and there are no more chances for counter-play, it's proper to resign.

There's a famous story in which Capablanca had outplayed his opponent in the first time control, and the game was adjourned to be continued the following day. In a day of formal wear, Capablanca showed up in tennis togs, as he was sure his opponent would realize his situation and soon resign, and he could get in a few sets. His opponent took offence at the clothing ensemble and played the game slowly out to checkmate, by which time it was dark outside. If you show your opponent respect, he will show you respect.

## Win by Checkmate

Checkmate is the ultimate goal of each game of chess. You never actually capture the king, but demonstrate that if the game were to continue, the opponent's king could not avoid capture.

## Win by Overstepping Time Control

If you overstep the time control, you forfeit the game. Before there were chess clocks it was said that it didn't take brains to play chess, it took buttocks! When players found themselves in a losing position, they would simply stop moving! Players would abuse the goodwill of their opponent. More than one game was decided when the player with the advantage resigned in disgust after waiting hours for each of his opponent's moves. It is apparent from reading the chess columns of the mid 1800's that a solution was needed.

When clocks were first introduced (1883), a player was subject to a monetary fine if they overstepped the time control. This allowed the more affluent players to take extra time in their games. There was also the problem of having to pay a fine just to lose the game anyway. This was resolved by making the penalty for overstepping the time control the loss of the game. Chess clocks were one of the

better innovations for the game, and are now used in all manner of two person board games.

When I have an opponent taking excessive time to move in a casual game, I gently invoke the Century Rule\*.

\*When asked, "What is the Century rule?", I explain he must make his move in this century.

There are four ways to end a game of chess in a draw:

- By agreement
- By repetition of position
- By the 50 Moves Rule
- By stalemate

## **Draw By Agreement**

The bulk of draws in chess are by agreement. The correct protocol for offering and accepting a draw is:

- on your turn, make your move on the board
- offer a verbal draw ("Would you like a draw?")
- then punch the clock.

Do not offer a draw without first making a move, as your opponent is not required to respond until it is his turn (and he can burn all of his remaining time while considering your offer, which cannot be withdrawn).

If your opponent offers you a draw you can accept at any time before you make your next move.

If you choose to reject the draw offer, the proper way is to say nothing, but simply make your next move.

Also, it is considered bad form to make a second draw offer without receiving and rejecting an offer from your opponent. That is to say, if you make a draw offer in a game, all future draw offers should be made by the player who last rejected an offer.

## **Draw by Threefold Repetition of Position**

The repetition of position rule says:

- if the same exact position occurs on the board three times
- and it is the same player's move in all three instances
- and all pieces have the same abilities (that is to say, if a player could castle in the first or second positions, but not in the second or third positions, these are not considered the same positions. Similarly, if a

pawn could be captured *en passant* in the first position, but not in the second or third positions, these are not considered to be the same positions).

- then either player may declare the game a draw.
- if your next move will repeat the position for the third time, you can claim the draw by indicating you will make the move. This prevents your opponent from making another move to change the position before you make your claim.
- Notably, the intermediate moves need not be the same, only the three positions must match.

There is a story about a game between Réti and Alekhine where the position was repeated twice and Alekhine called the tournament director over to claim a draw. Réti objected that the position had only been repeated twice, not three times, so the draw was denied. Alekhine then made his next move to repeat the position of the white pieces for a third time. Then it was Réti's turn. Because he had objected to the earlier claim, he decided not to repeat the entire position for the third time (but this was his only good move!) Réti made a different move and lost quickly to Alekhine.

This game, between Fischer and Spassky

<https://www.chessgames.com/perl/chessgame?gid=1044372>

was ruled a draw by threefold repetition on move 54. But while the position had occurred twice before (after white's 48th and 50th moves), it had been black's turn to move, while when the position occurred the third time, it was white's move. Technically, this game was drawn by agreement.

## Draw by the 50 Moves Rule

The 50 moves rule is there to prevent games where neither side is making progress from going on forever. The rule says:

- if 50 moves have occurred on the board
- without a pawn being moved
- and without a capture being made

Then either player may declare the game drawn. Thankfully, most of these games end with a draw by agreement, but there could be some instances where bishops of opposite colored squares roam around the board with no one making any progress. You can find instances of this kind of draw on the Internet, but they are uncommon. There are exceptions to this rule, particularly king and two knights v king and pawn. Having looked into this ending, I can confidently advise you to take the draw should it ever occur in one of your games.

Here's an actual game that the 50 moves rule was invoked in:

<https://www.chessgames.com/perl/chessgame?gid=1710666>

## Draw by Stalemate

The stalemate is the only draw that does not have to be claimed. When a stalemate occurs on the board, the game is immediately over and drawn. Unlike other draws, the rules of chess do not permit you to play on, even if both sides wanted to. The stalemate is unique, in that the players need not be aware that a stalemate is about to occur. Many games that were "all over but the shouting" ended in a draw when one player managed to stalemate himself by sacrificing material in a manner that left his opponent no option but to give stalemate. Here's a good example of saving the game with a stalemate:

<https://www.chessgames.com/perl/chessgame?gid=1252040>

## Other "Draws"

Some players think there is an "insufficient material" draw rule in chess (for instance king and bishop v king). But there is no such "rule". This game will have to end with one of the first three draws if one of the players wants to play on.

Similarly, some think there is a "perpetual check" draw rule in chess (where you can demonstrate that while you cannot deliver checkmate, your opponent cannot avoid being placed in check on each move). Once again, there is no such rule, and one of the first three draws listed will have to be used.

## Abandoned Games

Sometimes a game is not completed for an assortment of reasons (and is not expected to ever finish). When this happens, the result field is populated with an asterisk (instead of, say, 1-0). I was playing a correspondence game against Sammy Reshevsky in 1991 when he passed away. That game shows [Result "\*"].

## Adjourned Games

Of course a game may be adjourned for resumption at a later date (technically not ended). The position on the board is recorded, and the player on the move secretly writes down his next move and seals it in an envelope with the position. In this manner both players know the last move that they made, but not their opponent's next move. The envelope is trusted with a third party and only opened in the presence of both players when they are ready to resume the game.

## **Adjudications**

Games may be adjudicated (stopping play, but determining the outcome of the game with best, reasonable play by both sides). The adjudicator(s) analyzing the final position should be at least as good as the players of the game, but should not try to discover lines of play that neither of the players would be likely to find. The result here could be a win for either player, or a draw. Adjudications should only be used when it is impossible to complete the game at a later date and a result is needed.

Comments and suggestions are welcome.

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