

How to Play Chess960



Thanks to Bobby Fisher who in 1996, introduced the variant that is today known as Chess960, the most popular of chess variants today. Some call it Fisher Random Chess.

Learning how to play Chess960 is quite simple, because most of the rules are exactly the same as in standard chess! All the pieces move in the same ways, and you still win by checkmating the opponent's king. The only difference is in the initial setup: while the pawns are still on the second rank, the order of the first rank pieces is randomized.

To be accurate, the placement isn't entirely random, but follows a few simple rules:

- The king must be placed between the rooks.
- A player must have one bishop on the light squares, and one on the dark squares.
- Black's position is an exact mirror of White's.

These rules allow for 960 possible starting positions: thus the name Chess960. There are many ways to generate the starting position; one popular method uses a six-sided die to first place the bishops on one of the four light and dark squares (if you get an impossible number for a piece, you can just roll again), then placing the queen and knights on three of the remaining squares, then using the last three squares for the rooks and king (remember, the king will always be between the two rooks). There are also chess clocks which can randomly generate a position before the game begins.

There's one last rule change that can cause some confusion in Chess960. Castling is a little tricky, since the locations of the king and rooks can change from game to game. In order to keep the game as similar to standard chess as possible, castling in Chess960 always results in the king and rook ending up on the same squares as they would in standard chess. So, if you want to castle to the queenside, your king will end up on the c-file, and your rook on the d-file. As in standard chess, neither the king nor the appropriate rook can have moved yet if you want to castle, and the king cannot be in check, move into check, or move through a square that is under attack. In addition, there can be no piece on any square either the king or rook must travel over, just as in standard chess. Keep in mind that there are times when either the king or the rook won't have to move at all, and other times when one or both pieces may have to move further or differently than normal -- always check to be sure there's nothing in the way.

If you can understand those simple changes, you're ready to play Fisher Random Chess. This variant has become increasingly popular in the last few years, with high level Chess960 events becoming common. It provides a real test of tactical and strategic ability without requiring any theoretical opening knowledge to compete. You'll find that the middle game and endgame positions which result from Chess960 games are simultaneously new and unfamiliar, yet similar enough to standard chess so that it doesn't feel like a completely different game.

Enjoy your Chess960

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