

Chess Notation

Authored by
Temporary_Coffee

Chess notation is the language of chess. It is both a verbal and written way to describe events happening on the board. In fact, CoffeeChess uses notation to communicate with the reader! Knowing notation will not necessarily make you better at chess, but it is a crucial skill to be able to communicate with other chess players instead of just saying “rook over there.”

Nd5

h4

O-O-O!

Qa8??

Notation has four parts:

1. Which move of the game it is
2. Which piece is making the move
3. Which square the piece is moving to
4. Additional symbols to signal checkmate, good moves, or terrible moves.

Let's start with the first part.

Without knowing what move of the game it is, even perfect notation can be quite confusing. The move number of a game is indicated with:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- etc.

The second part of notation indicates which piece is moving. Piece names are abbreviated.

Knight = N

Bishop = B

Rook = R

Queen = Q

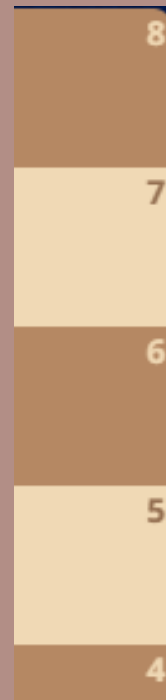
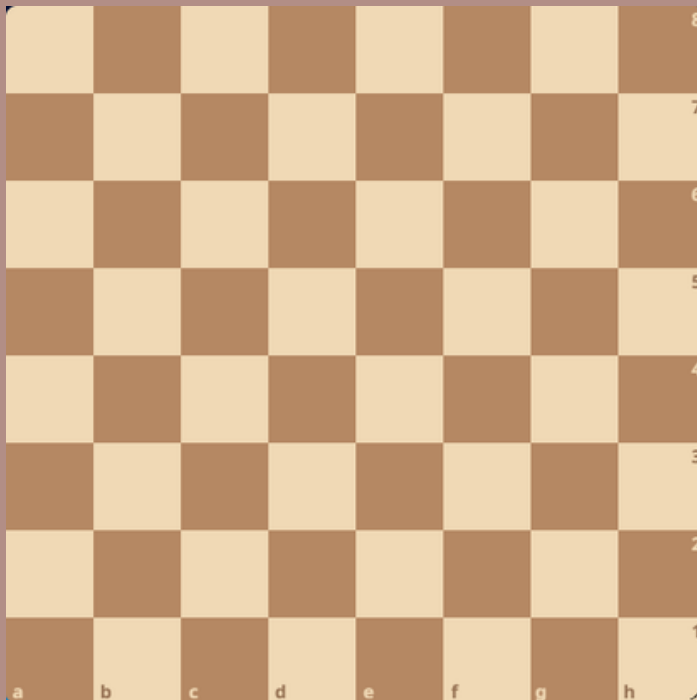
King = K

Pawn = nothing

Since both “knight” and “king” begin with the letter “K,” the notation for knight is an “N.”

Pawn notation is a bit different. If you want to say “knight to h5,” the notation would be Nh5. However, if you want to say “pawn to h5,” the notation would only be h5.

The third part of notation indicates to which square the piece is moving to. Notice that a chess board has coordinates, just like a game of “Battleship.”



Thus, if you want to say “queen to e3,” the notation would be Qe3. Notation might seem complicated at first, but the majority of it is fairly simple once grasped.

The fourth part of notation gives extra details about a move. Below is a list of symbols.

Check = +

Checkmate = #

Good move = !

Brilliant move = !!

Inaccuracy = ?!

Mistake = ?

Blunder = ??

Note that these symbols come after all the other steps of notation. ie 20. Qe3#. Note that it's possible to have multiple of these symbols after the notation. ie 20. Qe3#!!

Here are some practice problems. Try them out! Solutions are found after the problems. How would you express these moves in notation?

First problem



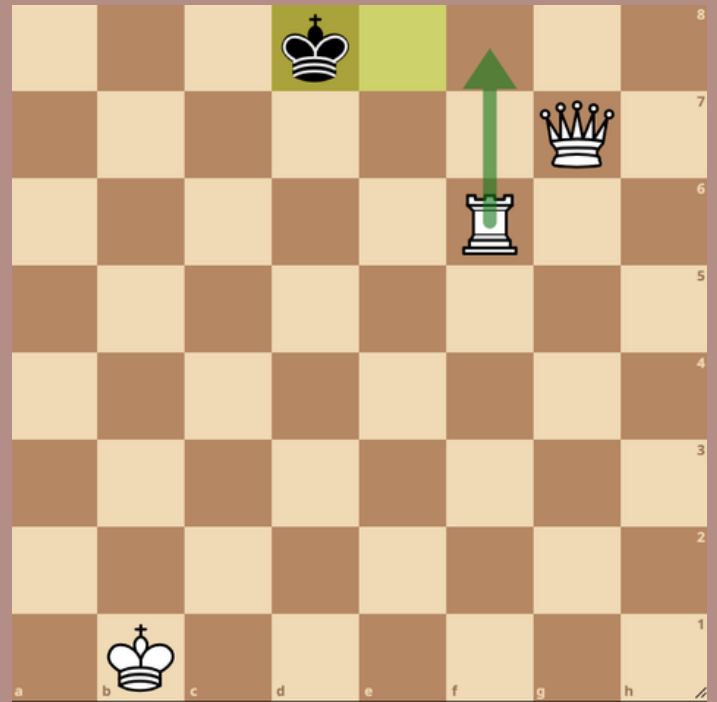
Second problem



Third problem



Fourth problem



Solutions:

1. Bc4
2. a6
3. Kf4
4. Rf8#

That's the essence of notation! However, it's time to address the exceptions. How do you express the capture of a piece? The castling of a king? The promotion of a pawn? Don't worry, it's quite simple.

Capturing a piece is merely expressed with an “x.” For example, if a knight moves to a5 and captures a piece, the notation would be Nxa5. Pawns, once again, are slightly different. When a pawn takes a piece, it is expressed as “the file number takes target square.” For example, axb5 tells us the a-pawn has captured a piece on b5.



axb5

Castling a king has interesting notation. A kingside castle (when the white king castles to the right or when the black king castles to the left) is expressed as O-O. A queenside castle (when the white king castles to the left or when the black king castles to the right) is expressed as O-O-O. Note that those are the letter O, not the number 0.

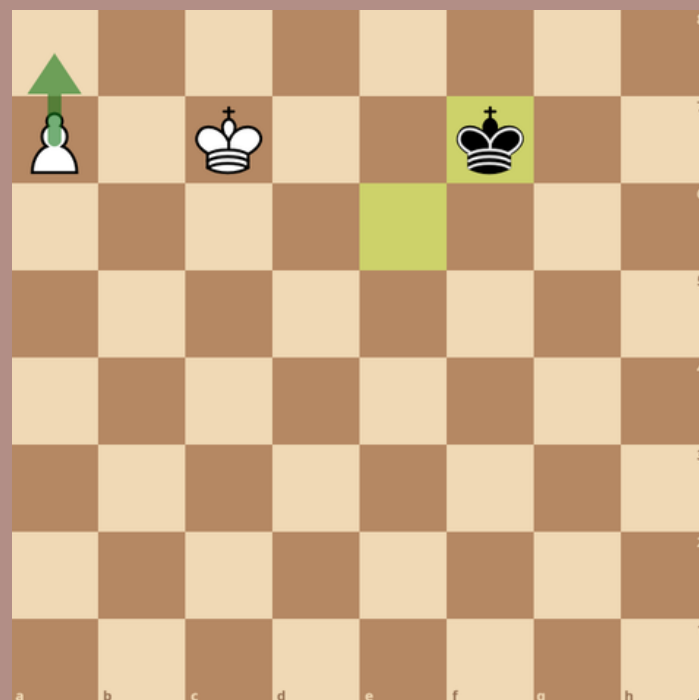


O-O



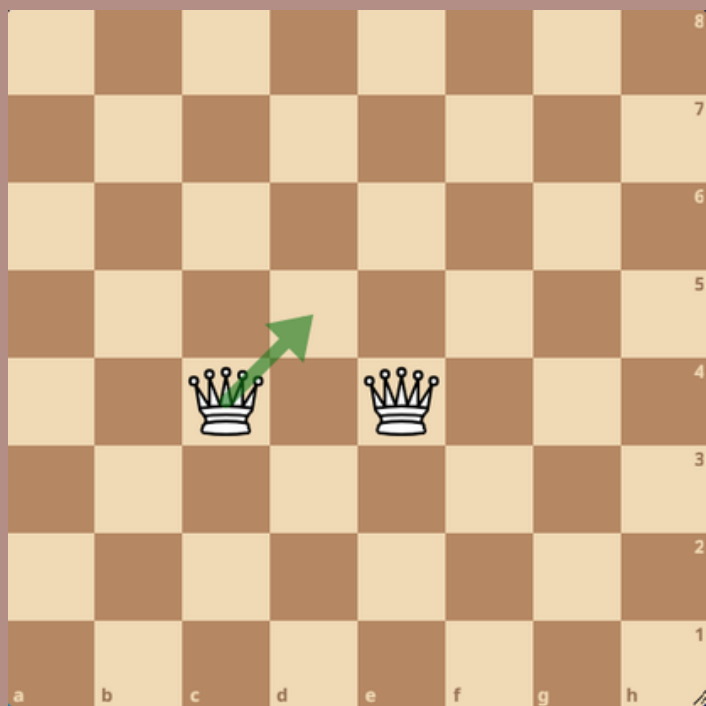
O-O-O

Promoting a pawn has relatively straightforward notation. It is “the square the pawn has just promoted to equals the piece it promoted to.” For example, if the a-pawn promoted to a queen, the notation would be a8=Q. If it promotes to a different piece, use the letter abbreviation introduced in part 2. ie a8=R

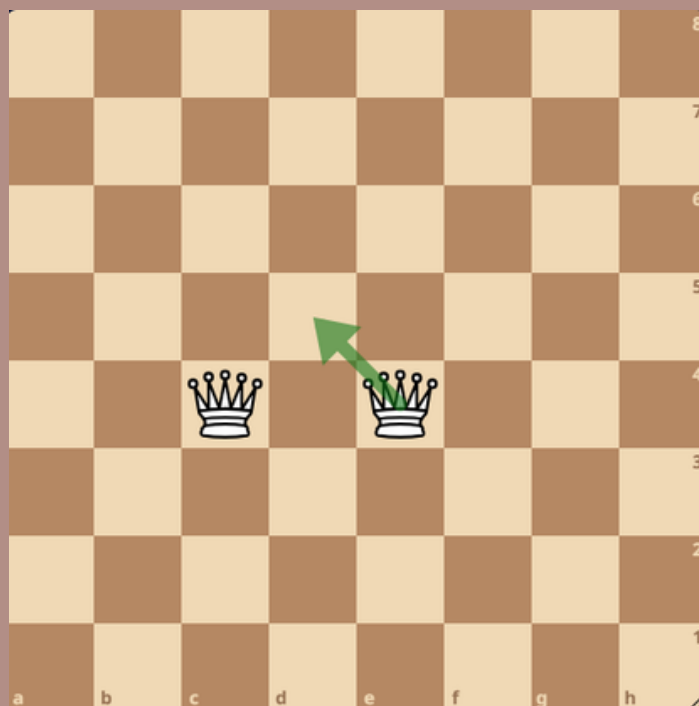


a8=Q

Finally, there's one more aspect of notation that must be addressed. What happens when two of the same kind of piece can move to the same square? An extra symbol is needed.



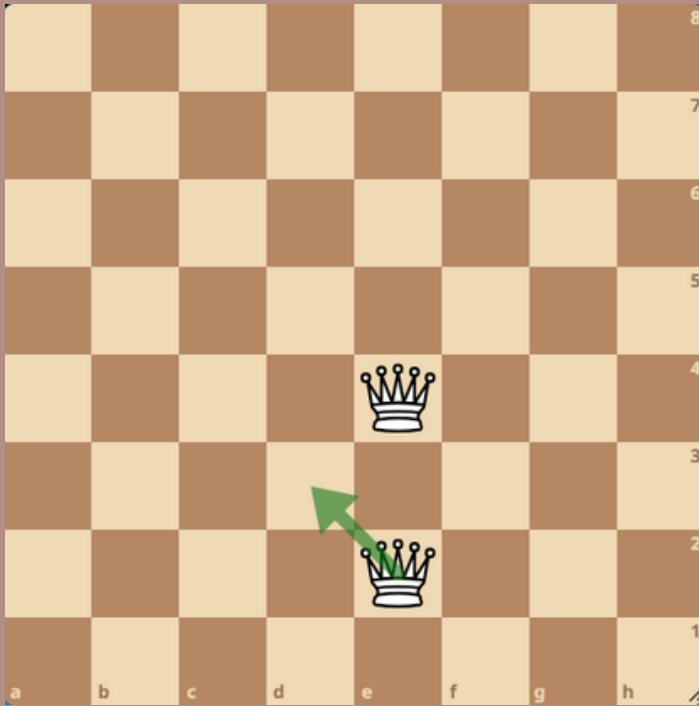
Qcd5



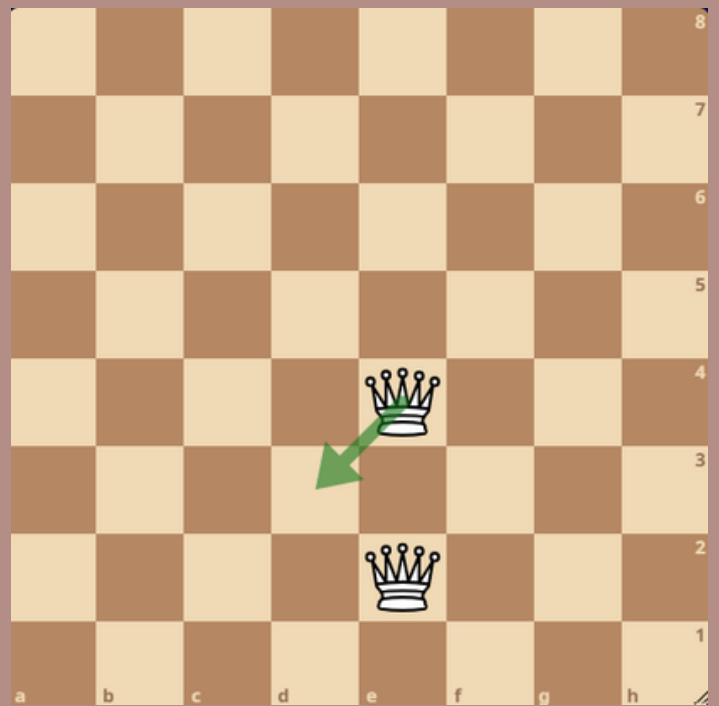
Qed5

The only difference is the addition of the name of the file the piece is on before it moved. In other words, the left example translates to “the queen on the c-files moves to d5.”

At this point, it might seem ridiculous to say there's more. However, there is. What if there are two of the same kind of piece that can move to the same square that are on the same file? If this is the case, leave out the file name and instead put the number of the rank the piece is on.



Q2d5

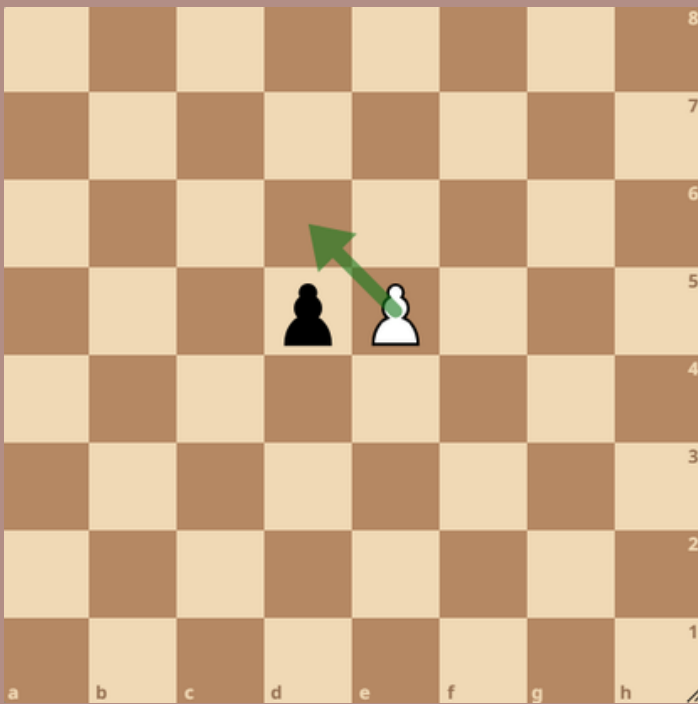


Q4d5

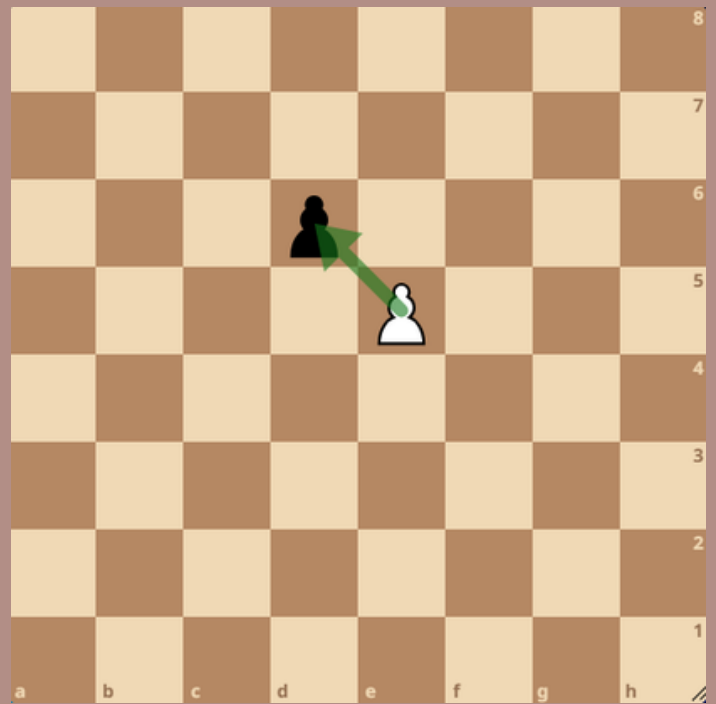
The left example translates to “the queen on the second rank moves to d3.”

In summary, if there are two of the same kind of piece on the same rank, use the file number. If they’re on the same file, use the rank. This isn’t something you have to remember - just think through it logically. If they’re on the same rank, listing the rank of the piece that moves doesn’t add any extra information.

There’s one more scenario that must be covered. En passant. Use the exact same notation as if the pawn had only moved one square instead of two.



exd6



exd6

And that's all there is to know about notation! The best way to improve your notation is simply to use it. Try describing an entire game in notation. Here are some more practice problems. How would you describe these moves in notation? Answers are found below.

1



2



3



4



5



6



Solutions:

1. Nge2

2. O-O

3. Bc4

4. R3f2

5. h4

6. dxc4