

# Here are some samples from a few of the 534 pages in the book:

## Positional Tension

When pieces or pawns have captures available to them, there is tension until a capture or a move relieves the tension. This tension can be beneficial to one or both of the players. **Keeping the tension (or even increasing it) is usually better than releasing it**, unless analysis suggests a clearly better plan. **By releasing the tension, you lose some of your options.** A tension-releasing move draws an enemy piece closer into your position (which improves the opponent's position).

By keeping some tension into the late middlegame, you might be able to preserve some winning chances when the material is even. Otherwise, without a clear advantage, if the tension is released, the game is likely to simplify into a draw. In open and semi-open positions, it is important to generate some positional tension; otherwise, the game can get uninteresting and lifeless.

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## When to Attack

**Position:** If your opponent's position is fundamentally sound and he is well developed, you cannot force a successful attack against proper defense. In this situation, you need to try to improve your position while trying to negate your opponent's plans and wait for him to make a mistake. If you have the superior position, you must attack. If you have the worst of it, you must defend. If neither side has the advantage, both sides should maneuver and try to provoke weaknesses until one has the advantage.

**You have to do what the position dictates.** If it is the right time to attack, you attack. If it is not, you do not. **An attack without proper grounds must fail against accurate defense.**

If you love to attack, you can't go after the enemy king in any and all situations. Instead, you have to learn to read the board and obey its dictates. If the board wants you to attack the king, then attack it. If the board wants you to play in quiet positional vein, then you must follow that advice to the letter. (Jeremy Silman, *The Amateur's Mind* )

Yet when the time is right, and your position has improved to the maximum, the attack will pretty much play itself. Attack decisively, but at the right time. **“Once an attacking**

**position is obtained, any hesitation may prove fatal”** (Saviely Tartakower & J. Du Mont, *500 Master Games of Chess*).

**Advantage:** An attack cannot succeed unless the attacker has the advantage (at least in the area where he is attacking). Furthermore, if you have the advantage, you “should” attack. Steinitz said, “**The player with an advantage must attack, otherwise his advantage will evaporate!**” Many others have confirmed this principle over the years. Kotov & Keres even seemed more emphatic when they said, “The player who has the advantage must willy-nilly go over to the attack” (Alexander Kotov & Paul Keres, *The Art of the Middle Game*). You cannot force your will on the position, but if the advantage is there, you need to attack or you will lose the initiative or the advantage, or both. **Delays can cause problems. Once you determine that you have an advantage you need to decide where to attack and then attack.**

**The idea that you must attack if you have the advantage, according to Rubinstein, only applies to dynamic advantages. If your advantage is static, the general rule works in reverse: you have to prevent your adversary from getting counterplay.**

At least some of the factors of the position must be in your favor before you will have a reasonable chance of success with an attack. For example, you should have better development, a space advantage, more mobile pawns or better piece activity, or your opponent should have some weaknesses or an exposed king. **Aim the attack at the section of the board where your advantage is the greatest, where you are the strongest.** “Do not attack where you are weaker, or else it will rebound against you” (Luděk Pachman, *Complete Chess Strategy*). This can mean a part of the board away from the king as much as it can mean an attack on the king. Be sure to have enough coordinated material to successfully carry off the attack and aim it at one of your opponent’s weaknesses.

If your positional advantage is superior piece mobility, attack is usually the prescribed course. If you are behind in material, but the equilibrium is in your favor (you can be material down and still have the advantage), you should attack. Steinitz also said, “**Only the player with the initiative has the right to attack.**”

**Weaknesses:** An attack is only justified if your opponent has a weakness or at least a potential weakness. Moreover, focus the attack at the opponent’s vulnerable spots (where he is the weakest).

**Development:** **Do not attack until you have developed all of your pieces.** That means do not attack, as Blackburne said, “Until your queen’s rook is developed.” **It is rarely a good idea to attack early in the game.** Develop your pieces to good squares and try to create weaknesses in your opponent’s game. An attack without superior development and without the opponent having made a mistake will not succeed with correct play from your opponent. On the other hand, with a lead in development, the attacking possibilities will make themselves known to you.

A lead in development is like the power play in ice hockey (having an extra man on the ice while the opponent has a man in the penalty box). It is a temporary advantage. Like the power play, this is a great time to attack (in fact, little else makes sense). If your opponent has a piece cut off from play at the side of the board but you cannot win it, or the opponent’s

queen is cut off from the action on one part of the board, start an attack on the opposite side (since you are, in effect, ahead in material there).

**Center:** If you have to abandon the center, your opponent's attack will develop almost automatically. If your pieces are not positioned for attack, then a central pawn advance is usually not a good idea. You need to position your pieces to support and follow the attack before a central pawn push is recommended.

**King Safety:** Unless you have a forced mate, do not initiate a fight until your king is safe (especially if your opponent's king is safe). Do not think about attack before checking your defenses. An attack that is not justified will fail against correct play.

**After winning material, don't immediately attack your opponent.** Instead, quietly consolidate your position by developing all your forces and getting your king to safety. Only when everything is protected and your army is fully mobilized should you start marching up the board. (Yasser Seirawan, *Winning Chess Strategies* )

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## Playing in Time-Trouble

**Threat:** If you are short of time, you do not have time for elaborate analysis. You have to settle for responding to direct threats. If you do not see a direct threat with your opponent's move, then try to determine the purpose of the move. Then, move. If you have another time control, try to put off making major decisions until it passes.

**Quickly:** Obviously, in time-trouble, you must move quickly. You will almost certainly play weaker by moving quickly, but, if you do not move quickly enough, you will almost certainly lose. So, make a move. It is better to make a mistake on the side of overconfidence than to lose cautiously.

**Luft:** It is usually a good idea, in time-trouble, to create some luft. It gives you one less threat to be concerned about (back-rank mates) and it affords you some more flexibility.

**Intuition:** You must trust your intuition more during time-trouble. It saves a lot of time.

**Strategy:** Having a plan speeds your thinking-time up immensely, but do not make elaborate or far-reaching plans. If you are in time-trouble, it might be best to go for an endgame.

**Turn:** On your opponent's turn, think strategy. Do not waste precious time with concrete calculations. If you look at the clock, do it on your opponent's turn. **While your opponent is thinking, figure out a conditional reply to each move that he is likely to make.**

**Piece Value:** In time-trouble, knights are usually better than bishops. As the time-pressure increases, the value of knights and queens goes up. With times less than five minutes, a knight can be stronger than a rook.

**Protect:** In time-trouble, it is especially important to be sure your pieces are protected. Loose pieces drop off in regular chess, even more so when you are short of time. Unprotected pieces are the main source of tactical oversights during time-trouble.

**Calm:** Nervousness consumes energy. **Stay calm.** Write your moves down neatly. Control your nerves.

**Complications:** Avoid complications when you are in time-trouble. Simplify the position. You do not have time to work out tactical complications. **When you are in time-pressure, play it safe. Play uncomplicated, logical, natural moves. Play the move that looks right.** If you are losing anyway, that is another story... then a wild gamble might make sense.

**Sacrifices:** If your opponent is not in time-trouble, but you are, and he makes a reasonable-looking sacrifice, decline it. Do not take the time to analyze it. You have to assume that he has worked it out.

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## Isolated Queen Pawns

**The isolated queen pawn (IQP) structure** can come from many openings and is possibly the single most important structure in the game. Knowing how to play with and against it is essential. In most ways, the methods of playing with or against the isolated queen pawn is identical to that of playing with other isolated (non-queen) pawns.

**It is crucial (for both players) to try to control the square in front of the IQP.** Control of this square is often the key to the whole game. "Control of the square immediately in front of the Isolani is enough to decide a game" (Andrew Soltis, *Pawn Structure Chess*).

**Giving black an IQP is usually worth a tempo in the opening for white.** It is usually too difficult for black to give white an IQP because, if he does, he falls too far behind in development. If black, then, is behind in development, the IQP may prove to be a dynamic strength for white.

**Against IQP:** The square in front of the IQP is usually the most critical square in these kinds of structures. If your opponent has the IQP, the standard plan is to first keep the square in front of the pawn under observation with your pieces or **blockade it** (preferably with a knight). This is to keep it from advancing while you prepare to win it. Then, after gaining control over the square in front of the IQP, try to **exchange some pieces** to reduce the dynamic possibilities that are usually conferred upon the possessor. The more the reduction in material, the more the IQP becomes a static weakness. By the endgame, it can become a serious liability. Sometimes, you can convert it into the weakness of hanging pawns.

Try not to remove the blockade, as this might allow the IQP to advance. Build up pressure on the weak pawn. When the IQP is on an otherwise open file, **the major pieces should gang up on it**. The convergence of the power pieces should win it. The normal procedure against an IQP on d4 is to put a rook on d5 (after the minor pieces have been exchanged off). The major pieces are then lined up on the d-file, doubling or tripling on the pawn. At some point, the pawn will probably be pinned against an equal force on the other side, in which case a c5 or an e5 push can win the pinned pawn.

Occupying the square in front of the IQP is the older, traditional, way of proceeding against the IQP. It is a good method, but, it is a passive strategy and often it is difficult to make progress with it at some point. The more modern approach is to keep the advance of the pawn from becoming a good move while building an attack directly on the pawn (in other words, skipping the blockading step). **One other strategy against the opponent who has an IQP is to try to encourage an ill-advised or premature kingside attack.** The player with the IQP frequently will attack recklessly because they feel the need to attack (or lose the pawn). With this strategy, you can often exchange pieces (which increases your chances of winning the IQP).

Knights are usually valuable pieces for the possessor of IQP structures. Therefore, **the player playing against the IQP should usually exchange all of the knights.**

Generally, you should avoid playing Bd6 when playing against the IQP on d4. The reason is that it makes it harder for you to establish a blockade at d5 and it reduces your pressure on the IQP along the file.

If you can create any other pawn structure weakness for your opponent (such as doubled pawns, a second isolated pawn, or hanging pawns), then his battle would be pretty much doomed to failure. However, in the absence of a second weakness, it is difficult to convert the weakness of the isolani alone into a win.

The basic plan against an IQP is to:

- blockade or control d5
- exchanges pieces
- focus major pieces on IQP
- contest open files to exchange rooks

**With IQP:** There are a lot of great players who relish the idea of playing with the isolated queen pawn because, in the middlegame with the IQP, you will more than likely have the initiative (since you would be the one most expected to have active play). If you have a big lead in development, an IQP can be an advantage.

There is a dynamic potential associated with possessing the IQP. In fact, **because of the better dynamics, modern strategy generally supports the side with the IQP.** “When you find yourself with an isolani, think of it as playing a gambit, but without the material commitment!” (Lev Alburt, *Building Up Your Chess*).

**The IQP controls some important central squares. It can almost guarantee a central space advantage and piece activity around the pawn. The open squares around the pawn give the pieces a little more opportunity for movement and free the pieces for development. An IQP on Q4 is a support point for K5 and QB5 and there are open and semi-open c- and e-files.**

Your opponent will usually be a little tied up trying to restrain the pawn and defending against direct threats. He will try to exchange pieces and head towards the endgame. Accordingly, you **avoid exchanges** and keep him busy defending. “Those who live behind an isolani should not cast the first trade” (Lev Alburt & Al Lawrence, *Chess Rules of Thumb*).

The player with the IQP should **try to control the square in front of the pawn.** Try to prevent your opponent from blockading the pawn. Two reasons for controlling the square in front of the pawn are to deter the opponent from posting a piece there, and to help prepare for the advance of the pawn. If pushed, the pawn can lead an attack to break up the opponent’s position.

The IQP has good potential for supporting outposts for your pieces. When the player with the IQP gets an active game, he will usually have many tactical possibilities and it is difficult to neutralize his initiative. If you have an IQP and the initiative, you will often have the makings of a good attack. However, neither the kingside attack nor the threat to push the isolani is usually enough by itself. You need to develop both threats simultaneously to have the desired effect.

The advance of the pawn can open lines of attack. The pieces gain not only space, but also diagonals and targets resulting in a kingside attack. **It is important to keep the initiative, because if your opponent can get counterplay the pawn becomes a weakness.**

**Do not occupy the c- and e-files by rooks right away** because black can contest the files with his own rooks. The resulting exchange would favor black in the middlegame because it would reduce white’s dynamic possibilities of an attack.

You will usually want to **keep queens on the board for your attack**, but if the attack is neutralized or most of the minor pieces are exchanged, trading the queens can make it easier for you to help defend the pawn with your king (something that would be difficult with queens on the board). If you do need to start defending the pawn, trading the rooks can also reduce the chances of losing it.

There is the famous quote of Tarrasch's: **“He who fears an isolated queen's pawn should give up chess.”** Of course, what he meant by this was that IQPs are so common and important in chess that any serious player must learn how to play with and against them.

The basic plan when you have an IQP is to:

- attack
- avoid exchanges
- control Q5
- put outposts on K5 or QB5
- play on the open QB file
- build pressure on the semi-open K-file