

The Art of **CHESS** **TRAINING**

A Grandmaster Guide



GM NOËL STUDER

The Art of Chess Training

The average chess player is lost in a sea of possible courses, books and articles. They play some games, solve some tactics and go through the latest opening courses, without a clear goal or plan in mind.

This can go well for quite some time. Just through exposure to chess they might pick up some ideas here and there and improve their game. The problem is: this doesn't go well forever.

Inevitably, sooner or later, they hit a plateau. "It worked before, why am I stuck now?" many ask themselves. Not knowing how real chess study works, they continue the same way but can't make any progress anymore. At this point they have a choice to make.

Either continuing the same approach, which often leads to frustration and a long stagnation period. Or change their approach and try to break through the plateau with a simple and consistent chess training routine.

But the problem is: how does that routine look like? This eBook will explain you how effective chess study should look like.

Stagnation, frustration and chaotic chess training? It doesn't have to be like that!

You, my dear reader, are capable of so much more than just a little improvement here and there. You don't need to feel lost, fall for the marketing of the latest opening courses and play mindless blitz marathons.

By working with many amateur chess players, just like you, I realized that some simple tweaks to your chess routine can take you from an overwhelmed, disappointed chess lover to a motivated, ever growing chess player.

The reality is: chess improvement might be hard, but it doesn't have to be complicated! If you know some of the tested improvement concepts, such as the pareto principle, and manage to create a suitable plan for yourself, chess improvement can become simple.

Nobody can put in the time and energy for you. But what I can do is to help you understand what really matters in chess training and thus outline the path for you. This is exactly what this eBook is meant to do.

After reading it, you will know the ins and outs of chess training and what you have to do to improve your chess consistently.

You will know what intentional chess training looks like and be able to apply the same systems to become a better chess player every single day.

Not only will you know what you should do, but you will also learn how to improve your focus and get the most out of every minute you study chess.

Who This Book Is For

This book is for every chess player wanting to take their improvement in their own hands.

Are you fed up of feeling overwhelmed by the sheer amount of training possibilities? Fed up of not knowing what you should do to get better?

Instead you want to have a structured way to break through your plateau and beat your friends and competitors?

Then this book is perfect for you. By the end of it, you will be armed with all the concepts, strategies and resources you need to improve your chess consistently.

And the good news is: you don't need to invest several hours every day in chess training to reach that. I'm not going to tell you chess improvement is going to be easy. That would be a lie. But if you manage to spend 30 Minutes every day studying and improving your chess, you will see notable differences in your games soon enough.

As long as you train the right things with good focus and the right way, you will improve.

About Me

You may be wondering why a former professional player and Grandmaster should be able to help you improve your chess with limited time. Let me give you some background.

Back in my teenage days nobody considered me a big talent. The national Youth Coach of Switzerland once even told me “You can’t even calculate three moves ahead, how will you ever become a Master?”

The answer is: by training smart & hard. Not only did I become a Master, but I managed to beat the record for the youngest ever Swiss Grandmaster.

As I couldn’t rely on my natural talent, I had to come up with systems that helped me train smarter and better than everyone else.

This got even more important when I had an accident and had a traumatic brain injury in 2017.

The injury meant I could not focus well for a prolonged period of time, making it even harder to improve my game. By expanding my knowledge and skills about structured chess training, I managed to overcome this injury and reach an all time high rating after that sad incident.

Having only limited time, just like my students and readers, meant that I had to get the most out of every single minute I was able to focus on chess training. All the things I learned helped me become a better Coach and author, as I can fully relate to the situation of an amateur chess improver.

In a way, my hardships, lacking talent and a brain injury, have become my teaching superpowers! As I had to work hard & smart all my life to win championships and become a Grandmaster, I developed strategies that not only helped me, but also thousands of students and readers.

This book is for you guys.

It is about and for all the chess improvers wanting to break through their barriers and reach their chess dreams.

Before we dive right into the strategies that allow you to improve your chess on a consistent basis, I want to show you what is truly possible if you follow the advice of this book.

2. Everyone Can Improve Their Chess

Let me make something very clear right now: I'm absolutely certain you are able to improve your chess results. I have not seen, nor digitally interacted with one single human being who reached their maximum potential in Chess.

Even the greatest Chess player of all time, Magnus Carlsen, felt that he could reach a seemingly unattainable rating of 2900 if he refined his skills just a little more. Luckily for us mortals, it is actually way easier to improve than for someone as strong as Magnus.

I'm writing this for two main reasons.

1. To motivate you and
2. To help you get rid of all the excuses.

"I'm too old", "I don't have enough time" or "I don't have much money" are all frequent excuses.

I know this might sound harsh. I'm sure you don't intend to use them as excuses. It feels like this is really what is holding you back. The problem is: we are lazy, and improvement takes energy. So, our mind comes up with 'explanations' as to why putting in this effort doesn't make sense.

You've already started reading this eBook, which means you are ready to take action. Use this motivation to keep reading. It will be worth it!

You will realize that when you focus on what really matters, understand the simplicity of improving anything, and are ready to put time & effort into your chess, nothing will be able to stop you from getting better.

In other words: we are our own biggest obstacles.

Am I saying everyone can be a Grandmaster? Hell no! Reaching the Top 0.1% in any field is extremely hard and not for everyone.

What I'm saying is that everyone can improve their chess results with a modest time investment (already 30 Minutes a day done well can be enough!) and the right training plan.

At the end of the day, what matters isn't achieving a certain rating or title, but becoming a better chess player every single day.

And that's what you will learn right here.

What's even better is that you can use the proven methods you will learn in this eBook in any other area of your life. No matter if I want to improve my tennis game, learn a new language or be a profitable poker player: I use the exact same methods I used to improve my chess.

Sounds amazing? It truly is.

You know what's also great? The story of my 70-year old student who improved his chess tremendously in only one year.

The 70-year old Chess Prodigy

Some years ago, I got an email from a 70-year-old Gentleman named Albert. Albert played chess as a child and stopped playing when he started law school. For 40 years, he did not play a single game. Then, after retiring in his late sixties, he picked chess up again. He fell in love a second time with the game and started to play some games.

As you might expect, the results weren't that great after a 40-year break.

Albert only had a couple of 40-year-old books and didn't really know how to study chess the right way. Nevertheless, he enjoyed playing so much that he was elected president of the Chess Club of Bern soon after. This is when he heard my name for the first time (My parents were barely born when he played chess the first time around) and contacted me.

Albert was convinced his best days were gone. How could it be otherwise? His mind wasn't as fresh as it was 40+ years ago. So, he asked me to train him so "he would not lose more rating".

This is the best-case scenario for some lazy coaches. Someone with enough finances, no previous experience working with a Coach, and no expectations is contacting you.

Not for me though. I have always been very protective of my own time, so I wasn't looking for this kind of Coaching.

My ambition is that anyone that works with me will improve their chess performance.

For this to happen, I need to be motivated myself and convinced that my student actually does what I tell them.

Just when I wanted to decline his offer, I realized this was a great opportunity. I thought "If I can help Albert improve, it will be an extremely inspirational story. And the end of the so often used excuse "I'm too old".

So, I pushed back and answered:

"I will Coach you only if we both firmly believe that you will get better within a year."

Albert was a little confused by my conviction but said that he would do his best to follow my advice and see where things go.

Challenge accepted!

We decided on one 1.5h session every month. This is relatively little training, but it was the only way to fit the training into my very tight tournament & training schedule. And it also offered Albert the time to absorb my lessons and do some work on his own.

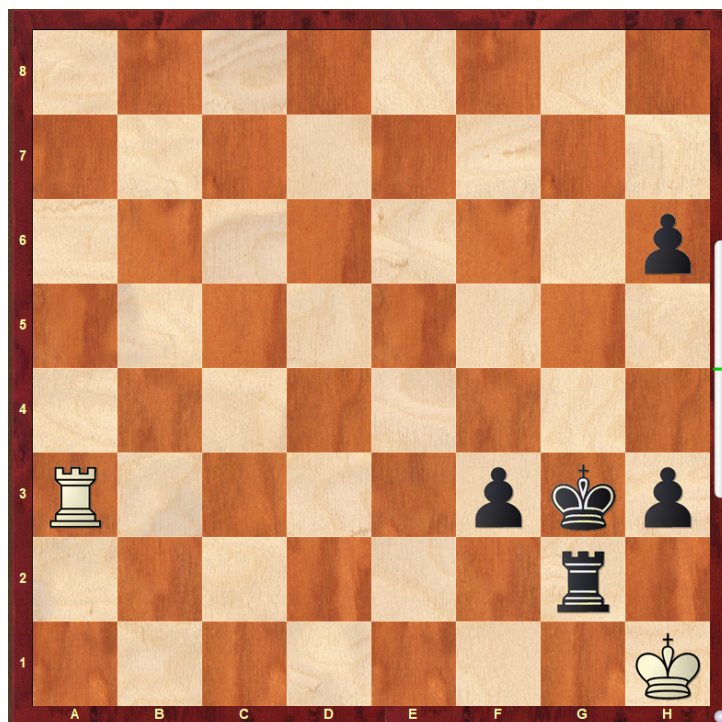
So how did it go?

One year later Albert scored 5/9 against exclusively higher rated players in his first FIDE-rated tournament. This resulted in a performance of 1830, 195 points higher than his Swiss rating of 1635 when we started working together.

Main Tournament (ATO) 2019				Biel	SUI	2019-07-22		
Rc	Ro	w	n	chg	Rp	K	K*chg	
1810	0	5.00	9	0.00	1830		0.00	
<input type="checkbox"/> Udipi, Kala Kishan	1732	SUI	0.50	1	0.00		0.00	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Garcia Garcia, Juan Gabriel	1725	ESP	1.00	1	0.00		0.00	
<input type="checkbox"/> Svensson, Lars-Ake	1834	SWE	0.50	1	0.00		0.00	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manukonda, Arun	1899	IND	0.50	1	0.00		0.00	
<input type="checkbox"/> Ehle, Eric	1800	SUI	1.00	1	0.00		0.00	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lada, Ireneusz	1914	POL	0.00	1	0.00		0.00	
<input type="checkbox"/> Jorns, Benedikt	1747	SUI	0.50	1	0.00		0.00	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fondain, Georges	1839	FRA	0.50	1	0.00		0.00	
<input type="checkbox"/> Hofer, Friedrich	1797	SUI	0.50	1	0.00		0.00	

He also managed to raise his Swiss rating by 110 points in the same one-year period. This is what happens if you focus on what really matters. My favorite game was when he tricked one of the biggest talents in Swiss Chess, an 8-year-old boy, into a stalemate after 6 hours of play. You read that right: the 70-year-old Albert defended a lost rook endgame so well that he tricked his 8-year-old opponent after 5 hours of play into a stalemate. A total role reversal.

White to play and draw:



65.Rxf3+! After Kxf3 black stalemates White and if the King moves back, White can continue to take pawns by 66.Rxh3 and achieve a simple drawing Rook endgame.

Since then, I'm absolutely convinced chess improvement is for everyone. And the even better news is: Albert might be an outlier when you look at all the chess players. But he is a normality when you look at the players who work with great focus on a simple training plan for a prolonged period of time.

If you are ready, as Albert was, to take my guidance and put in the time, you will see improvements not only in your knowledge & skills but also in your results.

To get the right results, you need to do things the right way. When you want the outstanding results Albert and many of my other students got, you need to do something different than the rest.

You need to do the things the right way. The benefits, as you will soon learn, are far greater than just rating gains.

3. The Benefit of Doing Things Right

I get it. Analyzing your losses is hard. Training chess after a tough day at work is hard. Solving a tough position and writing down your solution is hard.

Let's face it—structured training can feel like work. There's no denying that it can be more challenging to push through a challenging tactical sequence than to sit back and watch your favorite streamer. It requires discipline, determination, and the willingness to step outside of your comfort zone.

But let me tell you something: The rewards of doing things right are monumental. Yes, structured training might mean saying 'no' to that new, shiny course. It might mean turning off the entertaining stream to focus on your chosen training plan. However, the benefits that you will reap from this commitment are both immense and wide-ranging.

Day by day you will build up new skills in an effective and thought-through way.

Darren Hardy, in his book '[The Compound Effect](#)', explained this brilliantly:

"It's not the big things that add up in the end; it's the hundreds, thousands, or millions of little things that separate the ordinary from the extraordinary." - Darren Hardy

In other words, to become better at chess you don't have to be a genius. You don't have to know 27 moves of theory in every single opening sideline.

To become better at chess, you need to do the basic things that work over and over again.

Is this the most enticing marketing pitch ever: to do the basic things over and over again? Hell no. But it's the truth. And it works.

When you consistently work on what matters, your rating will inevitably improve. This isn't a promise. It is just the natural way

things go. I can't tell you when and how much, but you will improve your rating if you follow a structured plan filled with things that matter.

The fun thing is, training in a structured way is not only working, but it also provides you a sense of freedom.

Yes, you read that right. Structure, consistency, and discipline lead to freedom. Or in the words of the former Navy Seal Jocko Willink:

“Discipline equals freedom applies to every aspect of life: if you want more freedom, get more discipline.”

Knowing what you will do, when exactly, and why provides you with peace of mind.

The Only Way to Escape Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

A clear plan and the ensuing discipline are also the only way to get rid of the fear of missing out. Many chess improvers wander around without any clear plan. They immediately give their attention to the ones that scream the loudest and promise the most. “Buy this opening course and you will immediately improve your chess” some might scream.

Without clear guidance, this sounds awesome! So, they buy this course, go through the many hours of content, and try to memorize everything. The problem is: openings don't win games if your opponents are decent. The lack of tactical training, experience, and endgame knowledge will soon be felt. So once more, they wander around without a plan and are easily persuaded by the next shiny thing.

You might have been there already. After all, you probably wouldn't read these pages if you had a perfectly working training plan.

One of my favorite ‘Quotes’, misattributed to Albert Einstein (we don't know who said it first in reality) is:

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results”

-- Not Albert Einstein

So, if you want long-term improvement, a feeling of pride for your training and visible rating gains, it is time to change your approach.

This is your chance. You are responsible for your own improvement. It is not only possible to improve, but also pretty simple.

What you desperately need is a simple training routine you can stick to over a prolonged period of time.

Once you have that, you will understand that another of my favorite quotes also applies to chess. Derek Sivers, an amazing author, former musician, and entrepreneur said:

“The standard pace is for chumps. The system is designed so anyone can keep up. If you’re more driven than ‘just anyone’—you can do so much more than anyone expects. And this applies to ALL of life—not just school!”

The thing is: this lasting improvement only works if you are ready to do the work. Forget about quick and easy. What really works is slow and hard. Compounding over time, you will at some point look back and think “Holy shit, how did I get so good at chess?”.

The answer is: by following a simple plan over a prolonged period of time.

Improve Your Chess, Improve Your Life

I could write a whole book about the benefits chess improvement had on my life. The thing is: improving chess isn’t much different from improving your health, learning a new language or improving your business skills to earn more money.

The same principles apply everywhere. You got to do the things that matter on a consistent basis with high intensity. Proving yourself you can do it in chess will give you the confidence to tackle other areas of your life as well.

I had a very easy time in high school thanks to my chess background. Then I learned to speak five languages fluently (I work & write in English but it is only my third language), became a winning poker player in a few

months and improved my tennis skills rapidly. Every time I take on something new, it seems to become simpler to do. The mindset is right, I'm ready to do the hard stuff and I don't have to learn all the principles anymore.

Start small, Pareto principle, the power of discipline, all these things apply anywhere in life.

That means, the benefits of doing this right are much bigger than just some rating points. This eBook literally has the potential to change your life. So strap in and read on, because it will be worth your time, I promise.

4. The Reality of Chess Improvement

I hope you feel the motivation coming up. Improving your chess without FOMO is truly great. You won't feel lost anymore and can enjoy every game even more.

But as I've told you throughout this eBook, improving on a consistent basis isn't going to be easy.

Let's talk about the reality of chess improvement. And why it differs from our hope or imagination.

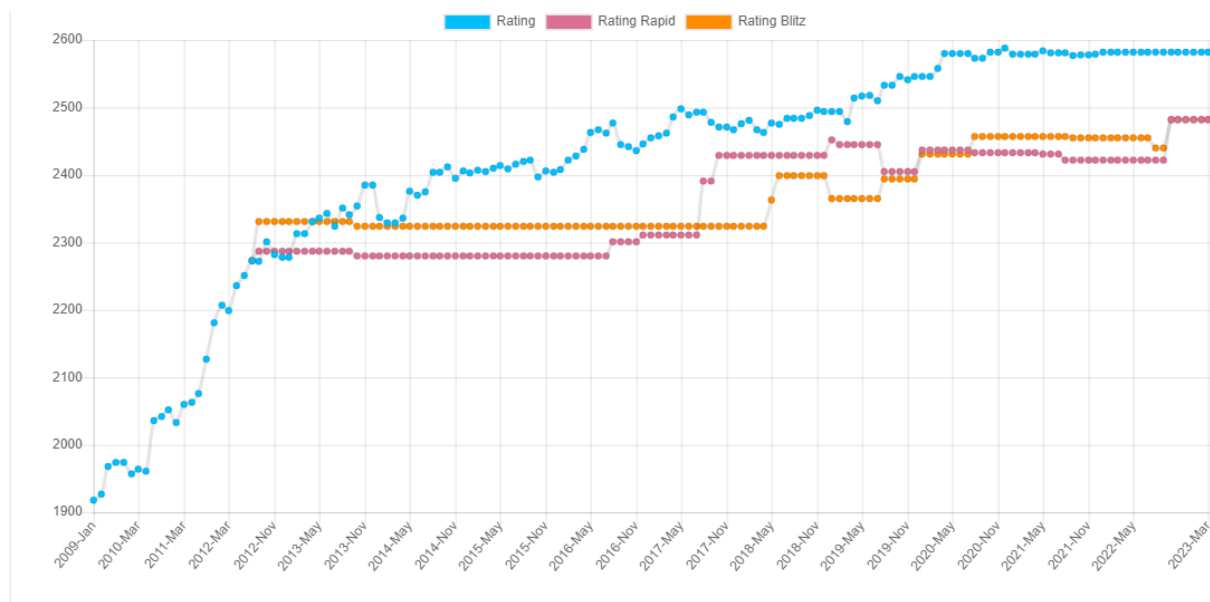
What we hope for is usually linear improvements. That means every time you study, you get a little better and you win a couple of rating points.

Sadly, the reality couldn't be more different! Instead of a straight line, a normal rating graph usually resembles a roller coaster. And that's also what might be explaining the emotions of most chess aficionados well. Enthusiasm and motivation are followed by despair and a feeling of not being made for chess improvement.

While there is nothing much to do about the inconsistent nature of your rating graph, you can keep the positive emotions and avoid the most negative ones. You are already doing a step in this direction by reading this eBook.

The second step is to internalize that progress doesn't come linear. I know I repeat myself, but it is so important that it is hopefully worth it.

Now let's look at my FIDE rating graph over my career.



The tendency is up, but there were a lot of bad moments with periods of stagnation over several months or even more than a year.

Let's zoom in a little on a difficult period in my career. From November 2013 to October 2015, I won a staggering 12 rating points. This while working hard on my game and even becoming a professional player in the Summer of 2015.

It would have been easy to believe I hit my rating ceiling and to give up. But I kept working and believing. Every day, I tried to learn more and improve my skills. Then suddenly, in less than a year I scored a GM Norm, became Swiss Champion for the first time, and won 80 rating points (which is a lot on IM Level).

These difficult moments are where the smart & hard-working players will outperform everyone else. Thanks to a reasonable plan, those players are able to focus on the process, even when the results aren't that great. They know that at some point their hard work pays off. They just need to keep going and earn their improvements even more.

What then happens is that suddenly something clicks, and everything looks simple. The lessons were absorbed so well that the quality of the moves increases. In periods of big rating gains, I rarely felt like I played masterfully.

Because I absorbed the learned things so well and worked on my skills, the good chess I played felt logical.

This is the fun period where we can reap the fruits of our hard & smart work. This is where everyone wants to be, but only a few get to experience it.

And let me tell you, quick growth and success are the next test of your character. It is very easy to rest and enjoy the moment of good results without putting in additional effort. Soon enough, life will slap you in the face with a period of bad results and stagnation.

The key to improving chess, but actually to improve anything in life, is to put constant effort in, no matter if things go badly or well. The biggest tests for anyone are periods of stagnation or periods of accelerated growth. If you are able to get back to your training schedule and put in the work, no matter how your results are at the moment, you will outperform everyone else.

And you will be surprised by how much the difference actually is. I truly hope you will get to experience this firsthand.

In essence, the reality of chess improvement is a constant struggle with ups and downs. If you want to be successful at it, and even outperform many of your peers, you need to accept the fact that good periods will be followed by phases where you feel bad about your chess, and this reflects in your results.

You need to be able to push through the hard periods and keep yourself working in the good periods. This is best done by focusing on the process and having a clearly structured plan for chess improvement.

5. Setting Realistic Expectations

My Sport Psychologist had a lasting impact on my mindset. Not only within chess, but also on my values in everyday life.

One day I visited him after a tournament that went decently well on paper. But I was furious. And to be honest, I didn't really understand why. I just won 5 rating points (pretty good on IM level!), got some prize money and played good chess. What's not to like?

Robert was quick to point out the problem: my hidden expectations. I had a deep belief that I was underrated (basically throughout my whole career, just like many other chess improvers). Thus, I wanted to proof myself and expected my "breakout event" to come anytime soon.

Before going to a tournament, deep down my expectation was that it would be amazing. Not decent, not good, but amazing. That was a big problem, because it meant I was disappointed in 95% of the tournaments I played. The solution he proposed was both simple and powerful: **write my expectations down.**

The main problem was until this day I wasn't consciously aware of my sky-high expectations. And you can't really change something you aren't really aware of. As I got more aware of hidden expectations I realized that I and many others have hundreds of hidden expectations deep inside.

Why am I getting a little upset if I do someone a favor and they don't say anything? Because it is my expectation that they will say "thank you" upon receiving a favor. This is just one of hundreds of examples I encountered over the years.

What does this have to do with your chess improvement? I'm almost certain that you have some expectations when it comes to your chess. Even more so, you probably had some expectations when you started reading this eBook.

This chapter isn't about judging your expectations. It is meant to help you bring your expectations on paper. And then to adjust them if they don't fit the reality of chess improvement outlined above.

So, get out your pen & paper. This is about you, your goals and your expectations. I can't tell you what they are. I can just help you bring them out.

But before we do that, let me tell you which mindset will allow you to thrive and improve without constant pressure on results.

The Mindset to Thrive and Be Happy

I'm not the guy to promise a lot. But when you read this headline, you might get the impression I'm exaggerating.

Well, I can only tell you how this mindset has changed my own life. And it certainly helped me reach higher goals and feel happier about myself.

Instead of extreme pressure during games and a lot of pain after losses, this mindset helped me to control my inputs, give my best at all times and have high goals but without hitting rock bottom after a painful loss.

You will still lose games you should never lose and this will still hurt. But with the right mindset, you will be able to aim high, without suffering as much when the things aren't going your way.

The mindset is:

Ambition without expectations.

This means that I am aiming very high. I'm not happy living an ordinary life. I have broken records in chess and made it to the very top. In my mind, this is only the beginning. I want to push myself to become a better person every single day. My ambition is to help thousands, maybe even millions of chess improvers. Sometimes my ambitions are so high that people call me a "dreamer". They believe what I set out to do is simply impossible.

Just when I started writing articles a big chess company contacted me and inquired me to make a course for them. I wasn't really interested in creating just another opening course, so I asked if they would be interested in a "how to study chess" course. They only replied that it would be hard to sell something like that and the conversation fiddled out.

So I just changed my mind and did something else?

Hell no!

A little over a year later I self-published my course, [Next Level Training](#). In the first 10 days after publishing in December 2022 I made over \$25,000 dollars. At the time of writing, over 300 students have improved their chess tremendously by following the step by step suggestions of the course.

Sometimes, you just need to have a vision and aim high. Remember what my former national Coach told me? That it would be hard to become a Master for me!

7 years after this comment I became the youngest Swiss Grandmaster in chess history. Playing small just isn't for me. But having high goals also means you will fail to achieve some of them from time to time. **Robert says you should fail to achieve 30% of your goals or you aren't playing big enough.**

So how can I keep my enthusiasm and motivation even when I fail to achieve a specific goal?

By letting go of my expectations.

If I would expect to achieve everything I aim to do, I'd be depressed right now. Remember how I was furious after a good tournament just because it didn't reach my super high expectations? That's the recipe for depression right there.

My ambition was to become European Champion, my best result was 16th place. My ambition was to have a 2700 rating, my all-time high was 2588. Before launching my [Blog](#) and the [Next Level Training course](#), I created a chess tactics card set nobody wanted and held a chess mastermind for a mere 6 attendees.

Yet I don't feel like a failure at all. Because I don't expect to achieve everything I try to do. At least not the first time around!

Big ambitions help me to push myself towards a goal and to do the hard work nobody else is ready to do. As I don't expect to reach the goal, I don't have many hard feelings if I don't achieve this specific goal.

As long as I did my best, I'm happy with the process. And as you will learn for your own chess study, you learn most by stretching your brain and trying things out. Nobody enters this earth as a finished product!

Now this sounds amazing on paper, but was a long hard process for me. And I have by no means 'made it' and never expect an outcome anymore.

If I'm doing things on auto-pilot I usually have expectations. When I enter a Poker tournament I have an expectation to get into the paid ranks (and maybe even win it), when I write an article I have the expectation that thousands read the article and find it great. And so on and so forth.

The change happens when I become aware of my underlying expectations and rationally think about the situation. I'm not in control to fulfill most of those expectations, so it is best to try to let them go.

I do this by the often used "fake it until you make it" method. I try to remind myself that I don't have any expectations. Or, even more drastical, I expect the worst possible outcome. For example, when I register for a poker tournament, I ask myself: "How can I make this fun even by expecting to exit the tournament early on?"

You can use the same idea when playing chess. To avoid having high expectations, ask yourself: "How can I make this fun even if I end up losing the game?".

This way you win in any case. It doesn't mean that you can simply switch off your brain and play mindless moves. You expect to give your best at all times (remember: high ambitions!). But you don't expect any outcome anymore.

Enough talking, now it is time for you to bring out your expectations and to set a realistic, motivating goal.

How To Set Realistic Goals

Smart goal setting is much harder and more sophisticated than many people think. I could just write “Aim as high as possible” and continue with the next Chapter. But that doesn’t do the job.

I sadly see many people taking inspirational advice the wrong way. I hear stories of people in their 40s starting chess and soon after wanting to quit their work to “follow their passion and become a Grandmaster”. This isn’t inspiring, this is delusional.

Don’t get me wrong. You can do whatever you want with your life. And if you have the financial means to stop working right now, this sounds like a cool challenge.

But don’t risk your livelihood and your safety just because you want to follow a ‘dream’ that is very unlikely to happen. The biggest problem is even if you manage to become a Grandmaster, you will realize that probably it wasn’t worth giving up everything you had for it. Mind you, this comes from someone who was both a professional Chess player and achieved the Grandmaster title.

From my experience, Chess is the most fun when it is a great hobby with big ambitions. You don’t have any financial pressure and can keep a healthy balance in your life with other activities and time for friends and family. This will also help you to focus less on results, because deep down you will realize that 100 points more or less won’t change you as a person, nor your life.

Find Your Chess Goal

I encourage you to take some time now and write out the answers to the questions below on a sheet of paper or in a Word document. Having things written out clarifies any doubts and is much more long-lasting than just shortly thinking about the answer.

Remember: even if you feel like you don’t have any expectations, this probably isn’t true. Try to think back to your last tournament or games. Have you felt disappointed afterwards? If yes, this is the proof that you actually have expectations.

Frustration happens if the reality doesn't match your expectations.

So, let's bring those expectations down on paper once and for all. Again, I can guide you through the process, but you have to do the work yourself.

When you answer those questions, don't think about what would be optimal, or what you would do if you had 5 million in your bank account. Answer the questions as honest as possible according to your current situation. You can always come back to these questions and adapt your answers once your life situation changes.

1. What importance does Chess have in your life? List the main pillars of your current life situation in order of importance. Common pillars are:
 - Work
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Health & Exercise
 - Romantic Relationship
 - Chess
 - Other Hobbies
2. How Much Time and Energy Are you ready/able to invest into Chess? Deduce the time you spend for more important things and come up with a realistic number.
3. What is an ambitious yet realistic long-term goal with the amount of time you can spend on chess?

This goal should sound a little scary. If you are absolutely sure you will achieve it, you probably are playing too safe. The goal won't push you to really do the hard work on bad days. If nobody else has ever done it before, even with more time than you, you probably have unrealistic hopes. It is hard to give clear guidelines, but take those rules of thumb into consideration:

- If you just started out, any FIDE title is only possible with a semi-professional approach, many hours of training, finances for tournaments, and the ability to play 50 classical games a year.
- Winning a total number of points is the easiest for beginners and hardest for GMs. A GM that wins 50 points a year is crushing it. On the other hand, with smart & hard training, winning 500-1000 points for players rated 500 online in a year is not impossible.
- The more time and energy you are able & willing to invest, the more improvement is possible.
- When we set goals, we usually forget about the bad periods. We think about what is possible when everything goes well. It won't. That should reflect in your goal.

Emotions, Not Numbers

Now you probably have a number written down. That's the easiest way of coming up with a chess goal. But to make your goal really effective, we take things one step further. Ask yourself, "what would it mean to me to achieve that goal?". Or in other words: "Which emotions would I feel when I reach this goal".

Vividly imagine yourself achieving the goal. Would you be proud because you were showing the 'Ambition without expectations' approach to your kids? Or would it be a self-confidence boost to go after your dreams more often, also in other parts of your life?

Whenever I do this goal-setting process, I nearly tear up. Achieving such a high ambition should elicit a lot of positive feelings. But as I told you above, it usually isn't the rating or the title that makes you happier.

My level of happiness did not change at all once I became a Grandmaster. If anything, I was sadder because I didn't have this big goal to work towards.

If instead, you manage to focus on the emotions, what this means for you and your loved ones and how you will feel about yourself as a person, then you have a high probability that:

1. The goal keeps you going even on bad days.
2. You will actually feel the process was worth it after reaching the goal.
3. Not achieving the goal isn't a tragedy, because you still enjoy the benefits of pushing yourself to become a better person by trying to achieve a high goal.

Find Your Why

There is one last thing that helps me tremendously. Include loved ones in your goals. Or even people you don't know! This might be the difference of getting stuck in your own head and feeling you push yourself to be the best version for the greater good.

In school, I was heavily bullied. Playing chess wasn't cool and being the only kid with epilepsy wasn't fancy either. For 4 years I was hating every day of school life. I knew it would suck, but I didn't know what the 'cool kids' came up with on this specific day to make my day horrible. I only knew they were very good at it.

This only stopped when I went to high school in a different city. I'm 26 now, but sometimes I still have chills when I walk around the city I grew up. Seeing one of my bullies makes me feel like a helpless 10-year-old kid again.

Why do I tell you this? Because thanks to Robert, I managed to use this personal story to make my goals more meaningful to me. My main motivation was to be able to show that even if you get bullied, you can achieve your dreams in life. There is a possibility and chance that after all this darkness, there is a period of light again.

I also became an ambassador for a non-profit organization helping people with epilepsy to live a normal life. Whenever I had a bad day and didn't want to train, I just had to tell myself: do it for the bullied kids, do it for the people suffering from epilepsy.

This was enough to light the fire inside of me once more and keep me going.

I remember a very specific instance when I had a horrible tournament and was extremely upset about my play and results. I took the results way too seriously and was no fun to be around. After many tries to calm me down, my girlfriend remembered the code phrase we discussed before the tournament. She just said: “just imagine the bullied kids would see you like this. Is this inspirational?”

My mood was turning 180 degrees instantly. The tournament still sucked, but I tried to handle it as well as possible. I just had to imagine that the bullied kids were seeing my every move. Not only on, but also off the chess board.

Was I really the role model I wanted to be? Would I inspire them to keep believing by being a snappy, depressed a-hole?

Nope! I got my shit together and acted like a role model instead.

So, my question to you is: what is your main driver to be a better version of yourself every day? Who could you be an example for?

Write this down together with your goal and you will be able to push yourself like you never did before.

But always remember:

Ambition without expectation

Yes, you have a goal now that is really worth training for. But nobody can guarantee you success. Both in short term, by winning some games or in the long run, by hitting your goal. Use these emotions to become a better version of yourself every single day. That's what you can control.

What exactly comes out of this nobody knows. Let go of your expectations and you can enjoy the process of improving your chess game without constant pressure on your day to day results.

Ahhh, such a relief! Now, you're ready to learn how chess improvement actually works. I will teach you the simple equation you need to follow in order to improve your rating consistently over time.

6. How Chess Improvement Really Works

As I specified in the introduction, the chess improvement I talk about is linked to better performance during games. Fancy lines on your computer don't help if you can't put them into practice. And the knowledge about some tactical motifs is also not enough if you can't spot those tactics under pressure in a real game.

Ultimately what you want to do is to improve the quality of your decisions during a game. Even more so, you should mainly improve the most critical decisions during each game. I don't really mind if you make the fifth engine choice when the evaluation goes from +0.5 to +0.1.

What really counts is that you find the right moves when the first move is winning, the second draws and the third-best move already loses the game.

That leads to everyone's goal in chess improvement being:

Improving the quality of my most frequent critical decisions during a chess game.

I added the most frequent because we want to do effective work. From time to time, you might have a critical decision in some endgame that happens in 1:1000 games. You don't have to think about that decision too much. You need to worry about the skills you need in every single game or at least in most of them. You will be able to improve the quality of your most frequent critical decisions during a chess game if you:

1. Work Consistently on your chess.
2. Are able to focus well both during a game and during training.
3. Study the parts that really matter (and happen frequently!).

For the math fans reading this, we can make a little equation:

Consistency * Quality * Study Material = Improvement

You might realize the problem with such an equation: if any of the three factors is close to 0 or 0, you don't improve your chess at all!

Well, let me change that a little bit. We all know someone who plays only bullet, watches just some YouTube videos or never analyzes their games and still improves.

It isn't impossible to improve without a structured training plan. But, you'll leave it up to chance. Especially if you hit a plateau, anything else than a structured way of training is just hoping to magically get better.

The vast majority sadly won't be as lucky and will get stuck.

If you want to take control over your chess improvement and not leave anything up to chance, you should follow the Consistency * Quality * Study Material equation.

Only this way you can be sure that you will get better at chess and thus your results will improve over the long run.

7. Maintaining consistent chess training over a long period of time.

I know you are busy. You probably work a full-time job and might have other hobbies and a family. Frequently you might come home from work depleted. You want to do something chess related, but in this physical state, you prefer watching videos or playing blitz without really thinking through your decisions.

But in the long run, this doesn't get you where you want to be. You want to improve, show yourself that you are a good chess player, and beat your friends, club mates or even win a local tournament. To do so, you need to find tricks to get yourself to do the hard work which might not be what you want in the moment but is what you will be happy you did.

Going from a non-existent routine to a training plan including hard things might be daunting. I've been there. Thousands of my students and readers have been there. The reality is, if you are ready to change some little details, you will have a structured, well-planned chess training soon enough. You just need to apply three key concepts:

- Start Small
- Plan your chess training sessions
- Track your progress

Start Small

Funnily enough, that's where most people lose me. I'm talking about doing the hard things and now suddenly I tell you to start small.

Please keep reading, because this makes sense soon enough.

Remember that chess training is a marathon, not a sprint? Ok, good. Now I have a question for you: what is the most frequent reason someone doesn't finish a marathon?

You are right, giving up! No matter if you want to run a marathon or to improve your chess, you need to avoid giving up at all costs. Per definition, if we don't give up, we keep going and thus work consistently on our chess.

And to avoid giving up we want to start small.

We can always increase our training. But it is extremely hard to get back to a decent routine if you gave up your training altogether.

Remember the number of hours you wanted to train chess every single week from chapter 5? Divide it by 3.

This will be the number you aim to do in your first week. Then slowly and steadily, you can increase the amount you work on chess without the risk of quitting.

By keeping your initial training small you will be able to stick to your plan initially and build up a training habit. Right now, I bet training consistently is the exception, and chaotic training is the rule. Once you flip this around and consistent training becomes the norm, you can play around and increase the hours you train.

But until then keep it small. Small and steady wins the race.

Plan Your Training

I might be an expert when it comes to chess training. Over the years I developed great habits, a working system, and a determination that led me to where I am right now.

But I'm a novice at other things. For example, consistent health routines. Even though I can use the same principles, I had a hard time consistently going to the gym for a long time. What went wrong?

I always put going to the gym last.

I said that I was going twice a week, but never fixed a clear appointment. In the mornings I wanted to get going and focus on work and then in the evenings, I felt too tired. I told myself I will go on the weekend but then meeting friends was more enticing than lifting weights in the gym. It was only a year ago when I understood the missing piece: a clear time & day when I go to the gym.

I added going to the gym to my calendar. And I decided to always go in the mornings. So now, every Monday and Thursday I go to the gym. If,

for any reason, I can't go on these mornings, I need to find a replacement before missing the session.

Going to the gym has suddenly become a priority, not the last thing to fit into the week. Most mornings I don't feel like I want to go to the gym. But my things are already prepared (I do that the night before) and without thinking I take my stuff and go out the door. Once I'm in the gym, it would be ridiculous to go home without a good workout, so I do everything on my plan as well as I can.

I never ended a gym session and thought "That wasn't worth it". The key was to trick myself into getting myself in the gym, even if I didn't feel like working out.

So how does my gym routine matter for your chess improvement? Well, in a way your chess training is my going to the gym. It isn't what pays the bills, nor what takes up most time of your day. But it is something you want to do and get satisfaction and health benefits out of. Yet, you might struggle to do it because you push it around depending on everything else in your life.

And that's exactly what needs to change.

Now that you have a small amount of time you want to spend on your chess training in the first week, ask yourself: when exactly will I train chess?

Fix a clear day and time, preferably one that you can stick to every single week.

"Monday 30 Minutes training" is not enough. Just like me, you will probably first do everything else and then figure you are too tired to do the training.

Come up with different slots throughout the week where you can study Chess with good focus.

A very simple plan could be:

Monday-Saturday 07 AM - 07.30 AM Chess Training.

If you have the possibility to take time for chess in the morning, I highly recommend trying to do so.

You will be full of energy and ready to do some hard stuff. It will also give you a great feeling to have done the chess training early. Just like I get a boost when I finish the gym because I know I already did something hard but beneficial.

You might ask yourself: but why only Monday-Saturday?

Taking days off is super important. Not only for muscle training or work, but also for chess. Your days off will provide you with fresh energy & motivation to train even better in the upcoming week. More to the amazing benefits of taking breaks in the section on improving your focus down below.

If you really want to take your chess to the next level take your time and come up with a manageable schedule for the next 7 days. Aim for 5-6 days with chess training and at least one day off. Define the time and day for each session.

If you want to go one step further, you can print your plan and hang it all around your apartment. This way you get visually reminded all the time that you really want to do your chess training.

And everyone living with you knows that they won't enjoy your company during this time.

To make things easier for you, I created a Chess Training Planner which helps you to schedule your chess training for every upcoming week. It is very simple and actionable. I will explain and link to it at the end of the book, alongside other material and links you need to jumpstart your chess training.

No matter if with or without my Chess Training Planner, remember:

If you don't plan it, you won't do it!

Track Your Progress

The last part that will help you maintain the consistency of your training is to keep track of your progress.

I LOVE to tick off things I did that will help me grow as a person in the future. Be it my chess training (when I was still competing), work tasks, gym sessions, or doing the laundry, I keep track of most things that aren't easy but beneficial.

When I tick off these things, my brain gets flooded with endorphins (hormones that make you happy according to my rudimentary biology knowledge). And this makes it more likely that I repeat this task.

Tracking your progress does not only mean ticking off tasks and releasing happiness hormones. It also gives you the possibility to improve the quality of said task through simple questions.

Just like you can't really improve your game if you don't analyze it, you can't really improve your training if you don't shortly think about things that went well and some things you could improve the next time.

For years I have filled diaries or Word Pages with my own thoughts on the training I just finished. This ranged from hundreds of pages of written-down solutions for puzzles to small remarks like "phone in my pocket is a huge distraction" (more to the most common distraction later on) to chess insights I never wanted to forget again.

Everyone has a different preference for a note-taking system. The key is once more that you do it and that it is simple.

After years of trying, I opted for pen & paper. There is something special about writing down your own thoughts not digitally, but truly old style. Because that's to my liking and many of my readers do enjoy it as well, I included a daily & weekly review section in the already mentioned Chess Training Planner.

The pre-set questions will make the review process simple and quick. Instead of sitting there with no idea what you should write down, you simply need to answer these easy questions and you are done.

The process also works if you take the insights from the planner and come up with your own note-taking system. Be it an Excel sheet, a Word document, or just a pen and piece of paper: everything works as long as you do it consistently.

If you do things correctly, you will soon look at filled out training plans, daily & weekly reviews, just like thousands of my readers already do.

Weekly Review	Weekly Planning
<p>Weekly Wins Be proud of yourself for every minor or huge win this week. Write all of them down.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Weekly Planning</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Week of _____</p> <p>Next Week's training sessions: Plan your upcoming training sessions with Day, Time & Resource</p> <p>1. _____ <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>2. _____ <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>3. _____ <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>4. _____ <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>5. _____ <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>6. _____ <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Your Weekly Goal: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>The One Thing to make this week's training more effective: _____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>What have you learned this week? Write down the things you have learned from this week's training sessions.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	
<p>Improvements for future training sessions What could you improve in future training sessions? Write down everything that comes to mind.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	
<p>Additional Notes Space to write down beautiful motives, things to remember or anything you feel like writing down!</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	
19	20

8. Improve Your Focus

The best training plan doesn't help if you aren't able to focus.

I'm sure you have those days when your brain feels foggy and doesn't really get going. Coming up with some clear calculation is difficult and you might even forget from time to time what you calculated just minutes before. It is no joy to do any brain activity in such moments.

I sadly know this all too well. Since my brain injury, I have had those moments every single day. I remember a particular tournament where I couldn't even sit for a prolonged time because I got dizziness and nearly fell off of my chair. I had to lie on a sofa right outside the playing hall while my opponent was thinking.

To remain competitive, I got obsessed with improving my focus. On one side I had to come up with strategies to keep playing decent moves when my brain didn't function properly and on the other, I wanted to improve my focus so I could get more out of the little focus hours I have every single day.

The most important thing I learned is that focus is a skill that you can improve, not some inherent thing you either have or don't have.

Even as a brain injury patient, I have a certain amount of control over my focus. Sure, sometimes I'm helpless against sudden nausea, dizziness, headaches, and concentration loss.

But most of the time, I can influence my ability to focus with some key factors:

- Learn to keep your attention on one thing.
- Avoid Distractions.
- Take breaks

I'm no expert or doctor, nor do I want to pretend to be one. If you are really serious about improving your focus then speak to professionals, read books, and listen to podcasts. In the coming pages, I will simply

explain what helped me personally to improve my focus whenever my brain lets me concentrate.

While working on these key factors is great, there are even more basic things you might do wrong. Getting at least 7 hours of good quality sleep and nourishing your body with healthy food is absolutely mandatory to good focus.

This eBook isn't the place to help you improve your sleep or nutrition. I can only stress that these 2 can literally change your life. Getting good sleep & proper food will make you feel like a totally different person if you don't do that yet.

If you want to dive deeper into these subjects, here are some resources:

For sleep, follow Dr. Mathew Walker.

- His book, Why We Sleep
- His podcast Episodes with Tim Ferriss

For more simplified advice, read Sleep smarter by Shawn Stevenson.

Learning about nutrition, you can read my own article on good nutrition in chess on my blog. If you want to learn from a true expert, read the fantastic books by Michael Pollan about food:

- The Omnivor's Dilemma (very in depth version)
- In Defense of Food (decently long version. I read this one and liked it a lot)
- Food rules (for everyone just wanting crisp concise action points)

Focus on One Thing at A Time

Buddhist Monk Dandapani put it very nicely when he defined focus (also called concentration):

"As the ability to keep one's awareness on one thing for a prolonged period of time."

In an ever more quickly paced world, most people strive to do several things at the same time. We all only have 24 hours in a day, and it might feel like doing things simultaneously is beneficial for us.

But that's not true. Research shows that multi-tasking is one of the biggest myths nowadays. In fact, multi-tasking is strictly speaking impossible.

What researchers found is that when you 'multi-Task' you actually just switch tasks extremely quickly. You can't simultaneously think of an elephant in pink shorts and keep reading this text.

It might feel like you manage to do so, but in fact you just switch quickly between reading this text and imagining this stylish elephant.

What's the issue with that you might ask yourself?

Twofold:

- 1) You overload your system.
- 2) Re-gaining focus takes time.

Other research shows that a small interruption of a task of barely 30 seconds can lead to a period with lesser focus for 30 minutes!

Read that again: getting interrupted 30 seconds can lead to a bad focus for the next 30 minutes. Sometimes you dive deep into something, and your brain is in the so-called flow state. Your thoughts align and things seem simple.

Even just a small question such as "hey, what will you eat for lunch today" can disrupt this whole flow state. In some cases, it might then take you up to 30 minutes to get back to it.

I could go on and on about this and fill a whole book. But for our purposes I feel this is enough. I hope we agree that:

- 1) Multi-tasking is impossible.
- 2) Attempting to do so will seriously impact the quality of your training.

Now the question is: what can you do to improve your focus? I've tried many things. Some worked, others not. I shortly want to talk about the activity that helped me improve my focus the most.

Meditation

If you think meditation is just some woo-woo thing only hippies do, then you think just like me some years ago. But since meditation became rather mainstream, I gave it a chance. And I have to say: if done over a prolonged period of time, meditation not only improves my focus, but also makes me feel calmer, avoid overwhelm and helps me feel happier overall.

Now that's a good sales pitch (hopefully 😊). Meditation is nothing else than practicing keeping your awareness on one thing at a time for a prolonged period of time. Often people think they shouldn't think at all during a meditation session. As I understand it, that's wrong.

The aim of meditation is to be aware when thoughts pop-up and to let them go. I like a metaphor from my favorite meditation app called *Headspace*.

"Meditation is sitting next to a highway of thoughts and resisting the urge to jump in one of the cars (thoughts). You simply observe what's happening on the highway."

If you are anything like me, meditation will suck initially. You will feel you are very bad at it because your monkey brain jumps all over the place. Who thought sitting still could be so hard!

As with most hard things, the key is to keep doing it until they become rather easy. As I mentioned above, I use the meditation app *Headspace* (no affiliation, just a happy client) to assist me with the meditation process.

I try to make meditating a daily habit by doing it first thing in the morning. As you know by now, starting with two 2-hour sessions a day will most likely lead to you giving up. So whenever I try to re-start my meditation habit I just do 5 Minutes a day. Those are very short, guided meditations

that pass quickly. Once I'm able to stick to that routine, I slowly prolong the sessions.

Again, some honesty is needed. I do 'know' that meditating is very beneficial for my focus and well-being. I'm not aiming to become a monk, but I would like to do 2 sessions à 20 Minutes every single day.

Sadly, I haven't gotten there yet. My longest streak was 90 days of 15 Minute meditations. It is no coincidence that my sleep and happiness were at an all time high in the third month of this streak.

Avoid Distractions

Last but not least, we not only have to enter into great focus (also called flow state) but we need to work on keeping it as long as possible. The biggest risk for flow state are distractions. As mentioned before, a short 30 second conversation can lead to a break of great focus for up to 30 Minutes.

So next time before you shortly ask your colleagues or spouse 'just a short question' while they do a task, just be aware this little conversation might cost them 30 Minutes of focused work.

In my own chess training, I had three main things that distracted me during a good session Digital devices, Interactions with humans & Nutrition/Hydration.

Again, there are whole books filled with advice to avoid distractions and thus improve your focus. I won't bore you with that.

What I want to do is to make you write down your own biggest distractions during chess training. Note at least 3 frequent distractions. If you haven't yet started training chess seriously, you can simply use distractions you face at work or when studying something else.

Then take a moment to think how you can avoid these distractions.

Prophylaxis is the key word here! Think ahead and prevent distractions from happening beforehand. This way, you can use 100% of your focus on your chess training. The results will be tremendous

Take Breaks

Now that you manage to focus on one thing for a prolonged period of time and avoid distractions, you can just study the whole day like a machine, right?

Well, not really... No matter how trained you are, your focus span at high intensity won't be much longer than an hour. For most of us, the sweet spot is between 30 and 60 minutes. This time allows you to enter in a flow state and keep a high concentration. In longer sessions, your ability to focus slowly decreases. That's why we need breaks.

The most famous and successful athletes I know are extremely good at taking breaks. They know that in order to perform at 110% when it really matters, they need to be able to relax fully. In sports with more physical components this is pretty straight forward. You can't lift heavy weights every single day or you will have serious injuries.

Because chess lacks this part, I had to learn it the hard way to really listen to my body and take breaks. In 2017 I had a meeting with some of the most promising Swiss sport talents. We were all supported by the same foundation and striving to be the best at our relative sports. As a chess player, I always felt self-conscious at such meetings and felt I needed to prove that I belong to such elite sportsmen & ladies.

So, when it was my turn to present myself, I proudly talked of my 40+ hour chess training week. It seemed to spark interest of everyone else and I felt relieved after my short presentation. Later in the evening Marco, then 5x World Junior Champion in Skiing told me: "Impressive schedule, but when do you ever relax?".

This short remark hit me hard. Marco didn't seem to be impressed by the many hours I worked and simply thought that I wasn't putting proper focus on relaxing well. Ever since I tried to implement more breaks into my hourly, daily & weekly training schedule.

PS: through hard work & smart relaxing, Marco since won an Olympic Gold medal, the World Championships, 2x Overall World Cups at the age of 25. He still looks both very ambitious but also relaxed at the same time. He embodies the "Work Hard, Rest Hard" philosophy that helps so

many athletes around the world to excel at what they do without burning out.

I hope you won't need a serious head injury and raised eyebrows from famous sportsmen to understand that taking breaks is essential for chess improvement. Taking breaks is also not weak or something for the lazy people.

So your question might be, when should you take breaks and how should they look like? Here you are:

Breaks Between Training Sessions

If you train more than 60 Minutes per day, you should have a break in between the different sessions. There is no one fits all, but you should find your own rhythm that works for you. I've experimented with several formats, such as:

30 Minutes training, 5 Minute Break

45 Minutes training, 15 Minutes Break

60 Minutes training, 5 Minutes Break

And many more. What worked best for me was 45 Minutes Training and 10 Minutes break. Much more important than the exact timing was what I ended up doing in a break.

My reflex was reaching for my phone or surfing the internet for 10 Minutes. But that does not relax my brain at all! What really helps is getting fresh air, filling up your bottle of water and walking some steps.

The goal is that your brain recharges. So, in a break, you should not put more things into your brain! Let it relax. You can also do some stretching or have a light conversation with someone. Digital devices should be banned from breaks. Period.

Weekly Breaks

In my Chess Training Planner, you will find only 6 days to schedule your training for every week. This is my way to try to force you into taking one day off chess training every single week.

As we know from Marco, taking breaks isn't for the weak, but in fact is just a normality for the ultra-high performers among us.

On this chess free day your mind can recharge, and you can gain more motivation for the training that is ahead of you.

This is probably the point my students struggle the most with. For driven individuals, taking a full day off seems like a total waste of time. But in the long run, this is what differentiates between burning out and having high quality training for a prolonged period of time.

When I write chess free day, I really mean it. Some of my students try to be smart and "only review" what they did during the week or "just read a book for fun". Both of these activities are ways to still try to squeeze some improvement out of the rest day. That might seem smart at the beginning but is irrelevant and dangerous in the long run.

Once I incorporated the rest day into every week, I began to enjoy it. During a hard training session, I would tell myself to keep pushing so I really deserve this rest day. I usually couldn't wait for the first training session after a rest day. So having a rest day helped me to regain focus, keep motivated before & after each rest day.

9. Areas That Really Matter

Every week I get several emails from readers who are stuck in their chess improvement journey. Some of them are desperate to know what they are doing wrong. Many stress that they put in a lot of hours but can't see any improvements.

I specifically remember an email from a reader, let's call him John. John let me know that he spent more than 20 hours every single week on chess but can't see any improvements. 20 hours weekly for a prolonged period is extremely impressive. So the consistency couldn't be the issue here.

From afar, it is extremely hard to rate the focus from someone during a chess training session. But I took John's word that he managed to concentrate well on what he did. So there was only one possible explanation for the lack of improvement: John didn't spend time on things that really mattered.

As I always do, I asked John how exactly he spends these 20 hours. He sent me the following 'training plan'.

- 5 hours watching his favorite streamer on Twitch.
- 5 hours playing Blitz/Bullet without analyzing the games.
- 5 hours watching Chess related YouTube Videos
- 5 hours of Puzzle Rush

This was a big aha moment for me. My definition of chess training is vastly different from the definition of John.

According to my definition, John doesn't train chess at all. He spends a lot of time on chess but doesn't do any training.

"Now he really went totally nuts" you might think, reading these lines. Just stick with me for a moment. I hope it will all make sense soon enough.

As stated at the beginning of this eBook, chess improvement has the goal of seeing better results over time. That means any chess training

should have the same goal. To keep things as simple as possible, I divide time spent on chess in two brackets:

- Chess enjoyment
- Chess Training

As said above, according to my definition, John only spends time on chess enjoyment rather than chess training. So, what is this definition? Again, I aim to keep it very simple:

Chess enjoyment is any chess activity that has the main motivation to enjoy chess.

Chess Training is any chess activity that has the main motivation to get better at chess.

There are obvious crossovers. Chess training can certainly also be fun. And chess enjoyment can have small positive effects on your chess results. But to keep things simple, I like to have the two brackets defined by the main driver.

I'm by no means saying that you should not spend time enjoying chess. **My main point is that one should not expect to get better when spending time on chess enjoyment.**

While you might slowly increase your potential and chess knowledge, time spent mostly enjoying chess might never show in your real games. In most cases, a healthy balance between chess enjoyment and chess training is optimal.

But as chess enjoyment is easier, arguably more fun in the moment and basically always free, you need methods to get yourself to train some chess. If not, you risk being in the same situation as John. You spend a lot of time on chess, your expectations grow but your results will remain the same.

To make things more clear, let's shortly look over the 4 different things John spends time on and determine why these should go into the chess enjoyment bracket.

Watching your favorite Twitch streamer

It is seldom that we really focus and think along when we consume chess content that way. That means the main driver is enjoyment. You might find yourself chilling on your sofa, sipping your favorite drink, and watching your favorite streamer.

Don't get me wrong, this sounds like a lot of fun! So I'm not telling anyone to stop doing so (also my fiancée is a Streamer, so I don't want to destroy her livelihood...). What I'm saying is that this activity should not make you feel like you train chess. Thus, there also shouldn't be an expectation to get better when you watch your favorite streamer.

Blitz/Bullet Without Analyzing Games

Bullet games are pure fun. Period. You won't improve much of your chess skills and maybe even internalize big mistakes. With blitz and Rapid games, there is a very important distinction from Training to enjoyment. Can you guess it?

It is the analyzing part. Playing without analyzing is for enjoyment. Playing and analyzing is training. It is as simple as that. If you don't go through your games trying to find your mistakes, you most likely just like the adrenaline of competing. I get it. Now that I retired, I only play games without really analyzing them.

"Hypocrite" you might say. Nope. You know why? Because I do not expect any improvements. As my priorities shifted, I really only play chess for pleasure (sometimes also to procrastinate, but this is another topic...). I'm well aware my skills aren't improving and I also don't get frustrated when my blitz rating sinks even lower.

So, if you just want to play and enjoy, without expecting any improvements, do so. But don't play chess games without analyzing them and think "I spend so much time on chess, why am I not getting better?".

Chess-related YouTube Videos

Yes, there are some amazing instructional YouTube videos. But the vast majority of the videos is for fun and entertainment. More often than not, you can also get sucked into entertainment videos even if you start out with the intention of training.

I'm ready to admit that 1-5% of chess improvers have the iron discipline to really only watch YouTube videos that are of high quality. And they never get distracted by other videos which seem more fun. But for the vast majority, watching YouTube videos should be a fun activity you do on your sofa, not something you expect to get better with.

Puzzle Rush

As you will read soon, learning & solving tactics is extremely important for chess improvement. But just like playing games, there is a slight distinction here. The problem is that the "Rush" is again mostly focused on adrenaline and enjoyment. For those who don't know how this works:

You get a pre-fixed amount of time (mostly 3 minutes) and need to solve as many puzzles as possible. If you get 3 wrong or the time is out, you are finished. There are daily, monthly, and yearly leaderboards and you can even compete against someone else doing the same puzzles in the same amount of time.

When I was still active, this was the easiest way to procrastinate while feeling that I did some training. I started with one puzzle Rush and ended 3 hours later on full tilt and without reviewing any single mistake I did.

Again, you might belong to the 1-5% with the iron discipline where this never ever happens. Congratulations, I'm deeply impressed. For anyone else, can you really look in the mirror and say: "I do puzzle rush only for improvement's sake, analyze every single mistake, and think through all my decisions even though the time is ticking down"? I know I would be lying to myself.

Thus, Puzzle Rush goes as well into the enjoyment bracket. If you simply solve puzzles or do puzzle survival (trying to keep a streak alive,

but no time pressure forcing you to make quick and hasty decisions) you can obviously put that in the training bracket.

Chess Enjoyment or Chess Training

I hope the difference between chess enjoyment and chess training became very clear for you. My idea isn't to shame everyone for doing things for enjoyment's sake. What I've realized is that many chess improvers are frustrated because they expect improvements even if they just spend time enjoying chess. This can be fixed with a very simple mindset switch:

Whenever you spend time enjoying chess, don't expect to get better.

As you know, it isn't given that you can't improve by spending time on things you thoroughly enjoy. But you leave it up to chance.

Having certain expectations and leaving the results up to chance isn't a great combination, if you ask me. That's why I came up with this little mental switch. It helps many of my students enjoy their time guilt free without getting frustrated.

Now it is up to you to decide if you rather want enjoyment and thus short-term joy. Or to put in time & effort, get the improvement and thus the mid-to-long-term satisfaction.

But before you close this e-book, jump on the sofa, and put on a stream, let me tell you: anything worthwhile I achieved in my life was thanks to improvement and long-term satisfaction, not short-term enjoyment.

Every time I get out of the gym, do some hard writing work, have a tough conversation or do anything that feels hard I feel so much better about myself. There would be a hundred things that might be easier and more (short term) enjoyable for me than writing these lines in an already 30+ pages eBook. But the satisfaction of having my readers read these lines and improve their chess thanks to my and their hard work can never be achieved by just chilling on the sofa.

When I think of the best version of myself, I'm always choosing short term discomfort but long-term happiness. If you want to achieve your chess goals, I recommend you do the same. Not easy, but rather simple and certainly worth it!

Chess Training That Makes the Difference

Now that you know the difference between chess training and what merely feels like training but doesn't improve you at all, let's focus on the chess training that really makes a difference.

The Pareto Principle

All too often I hear "just train whatever you like most and you will get better". While this isn't 100% wrong, it certainly isn't correct. The average reader of mine has a full-time job, several other hobbies and a family. That means you have limited time, but unlimited possibilities to study chess. If you just "pick something you like" it is very likely that you pick something that is pretty easy and that won't move the needle much.

That's why you need to be selective if you really want to achieve visible results in a limited amount of time. And to do so, you need to follow the Pareto principle.

The Pareto principle states that for many outcomes, roughly 80% of consequences come from 20% of causes. That explains why this principle is often also referred to as the 80/20 rule.

Whenever I try to improve anything, I ask myself: what are the 20% of activities that will generate 80% of the results?

This became even more relevant for me after my Brain injury. Since my accident in 2017, I have limited time of focus hours every day. I frequently get headaches, nausea and concentration issues. This means I can only work 2-3 hours every single day and need to make them count. Now I need to be smart about using these hours for my Blog, in my active chess days I needed to find the most effective training.

So, what is this most effective chess training?

The 20% That Matter In Chess

The two main drivers of any training program for amateur chess players below the level of FIDE Master (2300 FIDE rating, about 2500 chess.com/lichess) are Tactics and playing + analyzing games.

According to the Woodpecker Method, a book on Tactics written by two Grandmasters, even on Grandmaster level, around 50% of classical games are decided by tactical mistakes. The lower you go down, the higher this number will be. This means tactics are the bottle neck of your chess improvement.

You can have Grandmaster level opening prep, play a fantastic positional game and reach a winning position by move 25. If at this point you miss a tactic from your opponent, you will either be lucky to escape with a draw or lose the game on the spot.

I know many of you like to study openings, read through game collections or listen to a Grandmaster explain their thought process. These are certainly fun activities.

But they don't belong to the 20% of activities that will generate 80% of the results. Again, it doesn't mean that you aren't allowed to do them. It just means that if you care about chess improvement, you should do more of the things that matter, and less of the things that matter little but are more fun.

Do you really think that professional Basketball players love throwing thousands of free throws every year? Nope. But they understand that this is one of the main drivers of their success. So, they grind it out and are rewarded by scoring the game-deciding free throw in the playoffs.

As most games are decided by tactics it is pretty obvious that this belongs to the 20%, we searched for. But why playing + analyzing games you might think.

It is hard to excel during the games that really count if you don't train the same skills before. At the end of the day, chess is a game of decision making. The better quality of your decision, the better your long-term

results will be. And the decisions you make in training aren't the exact same you will make during games.

When it counts, you have a higher heart rate, feel nervous and don't know if you have a winning tactic or should just develop. Knowing that you can perform even under these circumstances will give you the needed confidence to put you're a-game on whenever you travel to a tournament or play an online tournament that really matters.

The One Third Rule

Obviously, the idea isn't to completely banish strategy, endgame & opening training from your training routine. You just want to have the right importance to each of the areas of chess. To make that as simple as possible, I came up with the One-Third Rule.

The one Third Rule says that you should spend 33% of your chess training time on the following things:

1/3 Learning and Solving Tactics (beyond 2000 rating you can add calculations to this)

1/3 Playing + Analyzing Games

1/3 Strategy, Endgame & opening training

Depending on your personal strengths & weaknesses, you can always adjust a little. No matter what, solving tactical exercises and playing + analyzing games should ALWAYS be part of your routine.

As you know by now, I'm a fan of simplicity. And the third third (is this proper English?!) doesn't look that simple right now. Let's solve this with a simple rule. In any given week, I recommend you only study either strategy, endgame or opening.

You read that right, there will be weeks where you don't study openings at all. Even if this might sound absurd in the area of five part opening series, it works. And if you have made it thus far, I'm positive that you actually care about what works, not what everyone else does. As a matter of fact, doing something different than the mass is what you crave

for. Because the mass is stuck and frustrated. To avoid hitting the same plateau, you need to do things differently!

And the fun thing of playing + analyzing is that in any given week, you still have some openings, middle game, strategy and endgame training.

The key here is that you get a routine where you really analyze your games.

Remember: Playing games without analyzing them is NOT chess training.

On the other hand, if you analyze the games, you will:

- Improve your openings & look for the first move you would play differently next time, that's enough
- Find your strengths & weaknesses → note what causes your losses & wins (I bet most losses are due to tactical mistakes)
- Improve your endgames → study the basic endgame theory if you don't manage to apply it during your games.
- And improve your decision making by applying what you learned in training during a real game.

Overview Areas That Really Matter

In this chapter you learned that not all time spent on chess is improving your chess. Make sure to identify what is chess training and what is chess enjoyment by looking at your main motivation for any given chess activity.

Things like playing without analyzing, watching your favorite streamer and watching random YouTube videos might feel like training, but are not bringing the results you crave.

You don't have to stop these activities altogether but remember to expect no improvement from time you spend enjoying chess.

This will avoid frustration and motivate you to really spend some time studying & training. Whenever you train, you want to make use of the Pareto Principle. Spend time on the 20% that generate 80% of your

results. In chess improvement, these 20% are Tactics Training and playing + analyzing games.

No matter how unique your situation might be, these 2 need to be the cornerstone of the chess training plan you are about to construct.

To keep things simple and avoid overwhelming decision, make sure to split your training into three slots:

1/3 Tactics

1/3 Playing + Analyzing

1/3 Strategy / Endgame / Openings

10. Create Your Own Chess Improvement Plan

You nearly did it! If you keep up this determination and work hard on your chess, I'm sure you will see the results you hope for. And maybe, you will even be surprised by how much you can improve by having a structured plan full of things that actually make a difference.

And that's exactly what you will do now: create your own chess improvement plan.

Remember all the key factors you have learned in this eBook and make sure to apply them right now:

- Start Small
- Quality > Quantity
- Avoid Distractions
- Take Breaks
- Train Chess
- Focus on the 20% that make 80% of the results.

Now look at your notes from Chapter 5 and use them to create your personal training plan. If you haven't written down your goal, the 'Why' and the hours you want to devote to your training, please go back and do it right now.

I can only help you improve your chess if you really follow my advice. I'm giving you the tools, but you need to do the work!

Now take your chess training planner (you can get it on Amazon), a piece of paper or open a word document. If possible, split your weekly time into 6 equal slots. As mentioned before, already 6 times 30 Minutes is enough to see clear results.

Clearly write down when exactly you will do the chess training on any given day and make sure to really plan your day off beforehand.

Remember: clear time slots help you to really do the chess training. If not it is extremely easy to tell yourself “I’ll do it later” or “I’ll feel better tomorrow”. It would be a shame if you made it until here and only don’t succeed because of such a little detail.

Now use the 1/3 rule to fill each slot with something that really makes a difference. You will have two slots of each third.

2x Tactics Training.

2x Playing + Analyzing.

2x Opening/Endgame/Strategy

Before you continue, you should decide which part of the third third is the one you want to focus on right now. If you have an unfinished course, book or other training tool in one of the slots, I recommend finishing this one to keep things simple.

If you start from a blank page, ask yourself: what area costs me the most points? Focus on this area first and then move on to the other one.

Don’t spend too much time on this decision. Your priorities will change over time and that’s fine. The important thing is to have tactics & games in your plan and to get going with one of the other 3 areas.

Now add one training subject to each day. I usually split them up to keep things changing and fun, but you can also do tactics early in the week and openings toward the weekend.

Only one more step and you are ready to go.

If you try to work with this training plan you might sit down on Monday at 6 PM and ask yourself: how am I supposed to train tactics right now?

There are countless different tools & books to choose from. This choice should be done right now, not when you are supposed to train. If not, 20 Minutes will pass and you still didn’t come up with the resource you actually want to train with.

Training with the right tools the right way is a vast topic that goes way beyond the reach of this eBook. If you want a deep dive into how exactly

to train each area of chess, and get recommendations of just the absolutely best resources for each area, you can check out my course [Next Level Training](#).

Once you have decided on a resource you want to focus on, add it to the plan. A planned day will then look like that:

Monday: 6 PM – 6.30 PM, Tactics in Step Method Workbook 2, Page 54

If your weeks look similar, I highly recommend aiming to keep the training plan the same for every week. Changing my gym days every week would only lead to confusion and give me the possibility to find excuses. Additionally, if your training sessions are becoming a habit, it will also be easier for your loved ones to understand at which time you won't be available, even for little questions.

As you want to keep your plan as specific as possible, it is still necessary to write down the plan every week again. This also increases your commitment and thus you will be more likely to really train in the upcoming week.

To review your training, I recommend using just 5 Minutes after each session. Again, you can use the pre-set questions in my Chess Training Planner or come up with your own questions. The key is that you really do it.

Additionally, plan 15-30 Minutes extra after your last session of the week to plan the upcoming week and fill out the weekly review.

Following this scheme, you have a weekly training plan that will soon become a habit and second nature to you. What you now need is a pat on your back (yes I do this myself sometimes), a big smile on your face and to learn what pitfalls you need to avoid to stick to your routine.

11. Common Mistakes in Chess Training You Need to Avoid

“Only a fool learns from his own mistakes. The wise man learns from the mistakes of other.”

--Otto van Bismarck

Before I let you go train chess on your own, let me warn you from some of the most frequent mistakes you might be tempted to make. I have made many of these mistakes myself and saw hundreds of students and readers do the same mistakes.

Just like in a chess game, we want to think ahead and understand what could go wrong. With that prophylactical thinking you will be able to get the consistency of training that you need to reach your chess goals.

Mistake #1: Missing Two Sessions In A Row

Never ever miss twice in a row!

This is a general rule that applies to any habit you want to stick to. I learned it from James Clear, the author of the Bestseller “Atomic Habits”. As a side note, if there is any non-chess book one must read to get better at chess training, it is this book. Highly recommended!

Clear writes in his article Avoid the second mistake:

“One mistake is just an outlier. Two mistakes is the beginning of a pattern.”

We are all humans. There will come the time where you miss one training. Either because you really felt lazy, because of a family emergency or a long day at work. That’s fine. Nobody is perfect. But avoid the second consecutive miss at nearly all costs. What starts with two small misses, which mostly are also explicable, usually ends up destroying the whole training habit you worked so hard to put in place.

I know this all too well. As you read in this eBook, my digital habits aren’t great. So, I decided to do a 30-day digital Detox as recommended in the

book “Digital Minimalism”. I deleted basically all apps from my phone and did not watch a second of TV, YouTube or Twitch for a full month. Instead, I used this time to work with even better focus, spend time with my loved ones, read and enjoy the beautiful nature in Switzerland.

I didn’t only get more things done, but also felt more relaxed and slept much better. Only one month after this amazing experience, I was nearly back to my old bad digital habits. Spending way too much time watching silly YouTube videos or searching the internet for just some more news (about something I don’t really care about...).

How did it happen? It all started by missing twice. Shortly after the digital detox I got sick and had a few rough nights. So, one day I told myself: no more digital constraints for today, just watch whatever you want. While this is risky, it might still work.

But then the next day I felt watching a little YouTube video wasn’t that bad. The day after I started checking my phone before work in the morning. And there went all the good habits!

If you are anything like me, the same will happen to your great chess habits if you miss twice in a row.

So how do you avoid missing twice in a row? Lets defer once more to the “King of Habit”, James Clear. In another article called “How To stick to your goals when life gets crazy” he writes:

“I’ve written previously about adopting the mentality of “[reducing the scope, but sticking to the schedule](#).” The basic idea is that on any given day it is more important to stick to your schedule than it is to meet your expectations.”

For our chess purposes, this means on a very hectic day, it is much better to reduce your tactic session from 30 to 10 minutes rather than not doing it at all. You still showed up and got in some reps. Even if those reps weren’t amazing on a particularly hectic day you keep the habit in place for better days.

If you want to use even more prophylaxis, you can use the If-Then Technique Clear describes in the same article.

“All you need to do is complete this phrase: “If [something unexpected], then [your response].”” – James Clear

For example:

“If I work late, I will solve 5 exercises on my commute home.”

Make sure to always have a Step Chess Method book in your bag if you plan to do this. And just like that, you can prepare for things going badly and still stick to your routine.

Isn't that amazing?!

Mistake #2: Playing For Short Term Rating Gains

If you stick to a good training routine, you will improve. Depending on the time you can invest every week, this improvement might only show incrementally in your (online) rating. That's where some of my readers get impatient.

When they feel that their level is higher than their rating, they want to get in as many games as possible to quickly raise their rating. This leads to disaster very frequently. Playing for rating gains and not for enjoyment and improvement will decrease the quality of your decisions. And your increased amount of playing will inevitably take away time from other areas (mostly tactics).

Even if you win a little bit more rating points in a given time, you sacrifice both your training habits and your future improvement for it. That is never worth it.

Remind yourself that chess improvement is a marathon. Go at a pace you can keep up for a long time. Don't squeeze in games just because you are in good form. Nor cancel playing sessions because you are in bad shape. Stick to your outlined routine and enjoy the ride. The results will come, most likely just not when you expect them.

Obviously, it is fine to increase the volume of your training and thus also play a little more. Just make sure to plan your games beforehand and to roughly stick to the 1/3 rule.

Mistake #3: Say Yes To New Things

You've read it before. Chess improvement isn't about the latest hot opening course. Somehow, those courses (and the great marketing) still manage to destroy so many good training routines every single day.

I'm sure your plan will help you say no to new things. But the risk doesn't go down to 0. That's why you should be ready for it. As you know by now, you will have periods of stagnation even if you work with a great plan.

In these periods you might see Tweets of people raising their rating by 100 points by "following this great opening course on how to win easily with White".

This sounds tempting, especially because you likely train harder and seem to get worse results in this exact moment. But as you know, results don't come easy & immediately. If you stick to your routine, you will outperform everyone else in the long run.

So, be ready to say no a lot.

12. It Is Your Time To Shine

Congratulations for making it thus far. Reading this eBook from start to finish did not only give you the necessary knowledge and tools you need to train chess the right way. It was also the first proof to yourself that you are indeed ready to work smart & hard to take your chess to the next level.

Or in the words of Sterling, a reader of mine who suffered from a blitz addiction:

“But more importantly, I was able to prove to myself I could lay off the blitz and prioritize better and more fulfilling things in order to get closer toward my goals. It's given me hope and confidence that I can go on in my chess journey with more intention.”

As Sterling says, what's ahead of you now is not only going to massively impact your chess results but will be also more fulfilling. I hope you are as excited as I am for you.

What Now?

It is your time to shine now. Put in the work and you will get the results. I'm really proud of you for going on this journey of long-term chess improvement by becoming a better version of yourself. This will certainly also sprinkle over to other areas of your life.

Chess is so much more than just a game! It has always been my playground to learn skills that I can use anywhere in life. I hope, in part thanks to this eBook, it will be the same for you.

Before I let you jump right into your training, I'd like to ask you for a small favor.

If you enjoyed this eBook, please spread the word. There are so many frustrated and unhappy chess improvers out there who need to get the motivation and tools you hopefully got out of this eBook. My goal is to reach as many of you as possible, and you can help me do that.

To spread the word, you can:

- Write a tweet on what you liked most about the eBook and tag me @NoelStuder
- Forward the eBook to a friend
- Spread the word on chess platforms such as lichess, chess.com or chess hangouts like Discord Channels and chess forums.

How To Experience Exponential Growth

I'm sure you will be able to improve your chess thanks to the strategies you learned in this eBook. Along the way, you will have questions, face obstacles and plateaus.

Hopefully, you will be able to solve them by yourself. But if you want to move even faster and avoid mistakes I did in the past, here is how I can help you experience exponential chess growth:

Chess Training Planner

Thanks to the three different sections: Plan your week, daily review & weekly review the Planner will make it easy for you easy to create and stick to a great chess training plan.

It is the best way to apply what you learned in practice. Every week, you will be able to tick off your successful chess training and improve the quality of your training.

I also love to watch back and read through all the things I learned in the past couple of months. This process is made much easier if you have one place for all your chess training notes.

The planner is available [on Amazon](#) in most countries. The PDF version is currently only available for students of my course, Next Level Training.

Next Level Training



If you want to do everything right and learn to train chess like a Grandmaster, check out my course, '[Next Level Training](#)' where I dive even deeper into the art of Chess Training.

You will learn how exactly to study each part of chess, how to build an opening repertoire (without having to buy huge courses!) and how to analyze your own Chess games. As I'm not taking on private students at the moment, this is the most private and direct way to learn from myself.

Additionally to 10+ hours of video content, you will get exclusive access to a Discord group with a direct communication to myself. In other words, whenever you have a problem on your chess improvement journey, you can ask me directly how to solve it.

Don't take my word for it. [You can read through some of the recommendations of my happy students](#), just like Bonicardo who said

"Wished I had signed up with you much earlier, I would be happier and richer, and my chess would be more enjoyable."

Your time is now! Invest in yourself and become a better version of yourself every day.

GM Noël Studer