

**Thinkers' Chess Academy**  
**WITH GRANDMASTER**  

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**THOMAS LUTHER**

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First Steps in Tactics

by  
Thomas Luther



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# KEY TO SYMBOLS

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
=	equality
∞	unclear position
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+ -	White has a decisive advantage
- +	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
△	with the idea of
▷	better is
≤	worse is
N	novelty
+	check
#	mate





# REQUIREMENTS FOR WORKING WITH THIS BOOK

You should know the basics well and no longer make illegal moves frequently.

You should know the elementary endgames of king and queen/rook vs. king.

You should have a standard size chess set (king's height about 90+ mm and the squares about 5×5 cm). If your set is a bit smaller it is sufficient for the beginning. But it is good to adjust as early as possible to the common tournament size.

I would not advise funny or artful chess men in a Mickey Mouse style, Romans and barbarians or fantasy characters etc. A chess set is inexpensive and can be used for a lifetime. You should not avoid this little investment. It will help you to become a better chess player.



# DEAR READER!

This book is written for chess friends who are beginners or hobby players without much experience and who want to improve to lower club level. If you are already somewhat stronger you may not like the idea of learning from scratch. But sometimes going a step back in order to take two steps forwards is a good idea.

To play chess well one has a lot to learn: opening, middle game, endgame, tactics and strategy etc. Where to begin? In my opinion tactics are the most important area. I always advise players with a rating under 1700 to study tactics, learn some basic endings and start analyzing their own games. That is a good way to reach a higher level.

Tactics are the main topic of this book. Tactics are not only the most exciting and enjoyable part of chess but also the fastest way to improve. On the following pages you will find an introduction to the most frequent tactical motifs and a lot of exercises for each of them. My guess is that in practice you will need about 50 examples or exercises for every motif to make you familiar with it. If you know the motifs you can not only win more often but, even more importantly, recognize the possible threats of your opponent earlier and defend yourself better.

Tactics are helpful for players of all categories. I myself and many of my grandmaster colleagues regularly solve combinations and studies, especially as preparation for a tournament to give the brain a kick.

Have a lot of fun while studying chess and enjoy your improvement!

Yours,  
Thomas Luther  
Grandmaster and FIDE senior trainer



# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Making the best use of this book for you depends basically on your intentions, aims and how much time and work you can and will put in.

**Ambitious readers** ought to work hard and regularly over a longer time. Choose a day (or days) and a time in the week that you can spare for your training session. Start with one to two hours, later three hours. Study and work without any longer breaks. This will increase your concentration and stamina for real tournament games. Solve a large number of exercises, ideally under a time limit. If you do this for some months your brain will adapt to the practice of chess and you'll be able to calculate quickly and precisely. Your understanding of chess will also improve, and you will be able to make better judgements and more logical decisions.

**Less ambitious readers** can work at a more leisurely pace. By working occasionally — reading a chapter from time to time or solving some exercises — you'll learn a lot too, but obviously less consistently as by constantly working. Maybe you will have some gaps in your knowledge.

**Less or non-competitive readers**, who are not particularly interested in tournament chess, can improve their knowledge about chess. You can learn to better understand what is happening on the board if you are a spectator or if you follow big chess events on the internet. In order to achieve this goal you don't need to simulate a tournament situation in your training session; e.g. putting yourself under time pressure. There's no need to improve your stamina, therefore it doesn't matter how many exercises you solve in a row or how many hours you work on your chess.

As you can see there are different ways of working and it's up to you to make your choice. Are you keen to improve for competitive chess, do you just want to play a little better, or do you only want a better understanding of chess? All these possibilities are sound and rewarding. But you should be

goal-orientated and firmly decide what you are aiming for. Be honest with yourself and don't nurture any illusions. If you want to improve, go to work.

Do not expect anything unrealistic. Do not look for shortcuts if you really want to become stronger. For every achievement in life you need time and effort. If you want to improve from beginner to club level, you ought to follow the advice in the book.

## SOME PRACTICAL ADVICE

If you want to improve as fast as possible, here is some practical advice for you.

**Set a regular time:** If you want to increase your strength you need to work regularly, as with any kind of sport. To ensure this it's a good idea to set aside a regular day and time you can keep open for your chess exercises. Let's say on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon. Give yourself at least one or two, later three hours. Don't take a break (except for some quick refreshment) and try to work without any interruptions or disturbances.

**Keep a diary:** Most of the time our memory is not very accurate. "I did a lot of training in the last few weeks," you may think. But is that really true or an overly optimistic view? Write down the days and hours of your training sessions in a kind of diary, add up the time spent and have a critical look what you really have achieved — or not!

Set yourself a goal for every month and for the whole year and try to stick to your plan. As soon as you start habitually skipping your planned sessions the temptation to do not much at all will only increase.

To understand a **complicated position** (especially later in the book with the longer combinations), set it up on a board and study it in more depth. It needs a little bit more time but it's worth it. The best understanding of a position comes from seeing it on a real board. No diagram on paper or a computer can give you the same impression.

**Improve your stamina** by simulating a tournament situation. If you are used to working intensely on exercises for many hours then a four-hour game (or two on a tournament day!) will be no problem for you. Good training should be longer and harder than a game. In addition, it will strengthen your self-discipline, a real asset in tournament chess — and in life too!

**Studying chess together with a friend** makes it more interesting and fun. You can discuss, analyze and compete in a friendly way, which will benefit you both.

And now let's start on our path to chess improvement!