

Why Play at a Chess Club

What is different about playing at a club instead of my computer?

There's a big difference between sitting in front of a machine and sitting across from another person. When you play another person, it's like having a long conversation without words. When the game is over, you can discuss what happened and what might have been. You can learn much more from playing a person than just getting a pass or fail in your test against a machine. There's another whole dimension to the game as well. The machine usually plays to its potential; people seldom do. When the machine makes a mysterious move, you're generally the one in trouble. When it's a person across from you making the mysterious move, someone's probably in trouble, but it's not necessarily you. Now you have to figure out if a mistake was just made or if you're about to make one. No matter how bad things may be going for you or your opponent, the game is never over as long as someone can goof.

What is different about playing at a club instead of on the Internet?

Much of what we said about playing against a computer also applies to playing on the Internet as well. Internet play has some additional down sides to it though. Unless you have the discipline to play games with long time controls (at least 60 minutes for each player) the tendency is to play "fast" games. It's generally well accepted in the chess world that fast play, while perhaps more exciting, does little to improve one's ability to play the game well. It does in fact train you to move quickly.

We find that most people coming to play the club for the first time have been playing regularly on the internet for a good while. Most of them have to struggle through a difficult transition period of learning to take their time to think about their moves, instead of just moving. While they may have played many games and seen many interesting traps on the Internet, it does them little good when they sit down to play and make their moves in a minute or less while their opponent takes 5 or 10 minutes examining each of those moves to find the flaw in it. It's not unusual for the Internet player to have used about 20 minutes on the clock while their club opponent has used about an hour and a half. You'll find the game takes on a whole other dimension when you learn to play more slowly and thoughtfully, as chess was designed to be played.

Can I watch someone else's game or look around while I play?

No problem. Whether you are playing or have just come to look things over, you can wander among the games in progress. Because play is divided into sections based on skill, you can check out what play is like at the different levels. It's kind of like flipping the channels on the TV when every channel has a different baseball game on it. When you spot one that's got something interesting going on, you can stay there a while and see what happens. Even better, as the players are going over their game together in the skittles room, you can ask them why they did what they did at various points during their game.

I don't have a rating. How do I know I'm good enough to play at the club?

There are over 84,000 rated players in the United States. Just because these people have a rating **does not** necessarily mean they're better than you! A USCF rating is simply a system to let you know how your playing strength compares to that of other rated players. Ratings go from 0 to about 2800. You're considered a master when you have a rating of 2200 or greater. The majority of people are in the middle of the range at about 1500.

It takes about 25 rated games to get a rating that is accurate enough to tell you your playing strength. After your first 25 rated games, every win earns you points on your rating. Of course, losses take your rating in the other direction. Get a rating and find out where you stand. You might be one of the greats, but the world won't know it until you have a rating.

Why shouldn't I be afraid to play at the club (because I am !)?

Many people who haven't played organized chess are fearful of "jumping in". Most of our new members started out this way, but after hanging out at the club, playing some casual games, watching what's going on and getting some pointers on their game, they make the jump. They come to realize that the best way to improve their game is to play and learn. It does take some time to get used to playing with a clock, writing your games down, and actually playing at your potential, all at the same time. At first, all this stuff may be distracting, but after a while, you'll be able to focus sharper on your game than ever before.

Will there be any other new or beginners like me?

Each month we usually have someone, such as you, who has never played a rated game before, joining the club to play. There is **no such thing as "not good enough to play at a club"**. Everybody is at some level of skill. Many have started out at the bottom and worked their way up. Others have found that they were much better than they thought. All you need is the desire to play and learn, and you will have an enjoyable experience at the club.