

Determining if you should use Fritz, ChessBase, or both

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I. Overview

Fritz and ChessBase are software programs from the same company. Each has a specific focus, but overlap in some functionality. Both programs can be considered specialized interfaces that sit on top of a proprietary chess database from the ChessBase company. Both programs let you import and export games with the standard known as PGN (Portable Game Notation). PGN is a lowest common denominator of game information presented in printable text. ChessBase has the ability to save other game-related data not supported by PGN.

A. Fritz's Focus

Fritz focuses on you, the user, playing against it. It will give you hints and talk to you as you play it. It will do a complete analysis of a game, and will let you add your own annotations. The game analysis will find tactics that you missed. This feature alone should justify to you the purchase and use of the program.

B. ChessBase's Focus

ChessBase is designed to enter and annotate games, do searches to locate games based on players, exact positions, tournaments or material. You can use it to create an opening tree of variations and it will show you how successful particular lines have been.

II. Not Discussed

- Cloud computing features
- The PlayChess.com site which is ChessBase's online playing site

III. New information since previous versions of this document

The first release of this document was in December of 2012. In 2014 ChessBase began making available both the Houdini and Komodo chess engines as a product with Fritz as the interface. It is essentially the Fritz product but rebranded with the name of the engine. They also continue to sell their own engine; Deep Fritz also packaged a similar way. By providing separate and branded packages it allows someone to buy a specific engine without the need to figure out or discover that they need a user interface for it. They will have the Fritz program rebranded for and using the engine.

IV. Chess Engines

A chess engine is a program designed to be used by many chess programs to evaluate a position. Think of it as a different brain that can be swapped in or out by you, the user. Different engines have

different playing strengths and often are designed to excel at specific types of evaluations, such as endgames. Fritz the chess program has as its primary engine, the Fritz engine. ChessBase also comes with a slightly older version of the Fritz Engine so as to not undercut its own product lines. For the most part, the strength of the Fritz engine doesn't change much from release to release so having a slightly older version of the Fritz engine won't matter much. When Fritz gets updated, it is usually the Fritz interface more than the engine that is improved. A nice feature though is that if you do purchase the latest version of Fritz, thereby getting the latest Fritz engine, it will automatically install the engine so that it is immediately available for you to use in ChessBase.

V. Why most ChessBase owners will want to purchase Fritz as well.

Fritz will analyze the entire game for you and will put in variations for any move it thinks deserves them. You can set the threshold for how much material will be gained by a tactic, and if that amount of material will be won, it will put the variation into the game. This allows you to vary the sensitivity. You can make it very sensitive to see alternate ideas or the opposite, show only blunders.

ChessBase will not analyze the entire game for you. You must select the move you are interested in and then ask ChessBase to analyze it. This is a very significant difference between ChessBase and Fritz.

- Fritz will find tactics you missed on any move of the game.
- With ChessBase, if you don't realize you missed the tactic, you won't know to analyze that move.

This is why many ChessBase owners purchase Fritz. Their process would generally be to:

- Enter recent games into ChessBase as it is designed for ease of game entry (Fritz is not)
- Switch over to Fritz and do a "full analysis" of all the unanalyzed games they have and let it run overnight. Using default settings and a speedy PC, a game will take about 2 hours to analyze.
- Return the next day, exit Fritz and use ChessBase to look over the now annotated games. Using the analysis the engine did, they will likely add their own comments and ask ChessBase to analyze a few critical positions to do some "what if" scenarios that they are curious about. A very nice feature when analyzing a particular position in ChessBase is that you can tell it to select any number of the best or even a not best line to put into the game notation.

VI. Comparing the features

The statements about features in the table below are not intended to be precise or exhaustive. In the comparison chart, when a feature is said to exist in one but not the other, the reader should take it with a grain of salt. The measurement is based on the idea that if you had both programs side by side and tried to do the same thing with both, you would clearly want to use one program over the other.

Often, one program is designed to make the operation easy, the other is not, because it is not the focus of the program.

The features of relevance for the comparison with ChessBase are as follows:

Which program would be best to use for the feature listed:	Fritz	ChessBase
Can easily play against the computer	Yes	No
Will go through the entire game once entered and add annotations	Yes	No
Will add, without user intervention, annotation text and the best line	Yes	No
Will let you play against it in a particular opening over and over (Fritz 8 and higher only)	Yes	No
Will analyze the game with multiple engines for comparison.	Yes	No
Can save a game you enter	Yes	Yes
Can add annotation to a game	Yes	Yes
Will show you all possible opening moves that can be made and comment on them	Yes	Yes
Will take you to the PlayChess.com site	Yes	Yes
Will let you easily email a game to someone (in ChessBase/Fritz format called .CBV)	Yes	Yes
Easily select from among other chess Engines to use for alternate game analysis	Yes	Yes
Will analyze a specific position with multiple engines for comparison.	No	Yes
Will analyze a position and present best lines that you can add into the game score	No	Yes
Has extensive and easy use of Database functionality	No	Yes
Can easily filter by player, positions, material, tournament, date, color winning, etc	No	Yes
Produces win/loss and other statistics on a collection of games.	No	Yes
Instant Opening Tree from Reference Database	No	Yes
Will let you instantly group games by player, opening, ending, tactics, tournaments, and more	No	Yes
Will show you the success rate of a given line in the opening tree	No	Yes
Will give you an "opening report" showing the main variations, which players use it, and the expected success	No	Yes
Will look up and include as variations the main line variations of the opening of your game	No	Yes
Find all games in a database with the same position as in your game	No	Yes
Find games in order of similarity to your game	No	Yes
Create playable games for posting on web sites	No	Yes

VII. Recommendations

If you primarily want to play and have feedback and have a place to store a bunch of games, then you only need Fritz.

If you are trying to put together optimal play based on the thousands of master level games out there, then ChessBase is the program you want. If you get ChessBase then you should get Fritz as well so that you can get the complete game analysis for you to learn from.

If you're not sure how much you will use the programs, start with Fritz, as it is relatively inexpensive and it will show you what you and your opponents missed tactically in the game.

VIII. Additional resources

There are many training packages and opening CDs available for ChessBase. I would recommend that you get ChessBase first and start using it before you purchase these specialty items.

Caution: I no longer recommend Lite. It is no longer being offered from ChessBase and has very specific limitations compared to the full version of ChessBase. One such limitation is that it starts deleting databases intentionally after you've created some number of them. In the past I knew the number to be 8 databases. If you are planning on using Fritz as your primary tool, you will not find ChessBase Lite of much benefit. ChessBase Lite is designed to let you see the power of the product, but its limitations make you yearn for the full version.

To really get a feel for the power of the two programs, I recommend you check the various resources made available for free on the site. For example:

- Video Tutorials generally located in the Service and Download area of the site.
- T-Notes – a discontinued but archived collection of in-depth examinations of using ChessBase and Fritz.

The ChessBase site is: www.ChessBase.com