

How To Use The TOPPS List

The first thing to remember about any chess resource is that you need time to THINK before using it. Reading this TOPPS list is pointless if a player races through their game without giving themselves time to think about the move they are about to make.

T	=	Threat
O	=	Opportunity
P	=	Plan
P	=	Position
S	=	Safety

Threat

Your opponent has just made their move; your first question must be 'why?'. Does their move pose any sort of a threat to you? If it is threatening to capture an unguarded piece; capture a more valuable piece; fork your King or Queen; or even threaten checkmate; your first thoughts should be on how to deal with it.

Counter the threat with:

A	=	AVOID
B	=	BLOCK
C	=	CAPTURE
D	=	DEFEND
E	=	EVEN BETTER MOVE

A = AVOID

This simply means moving the piece that is under attack to a safer square.

B = BLOCK

This means putting something, a pawn or a piece, in the way of an attack to protect the attacked piece. This option is particularly good if the blocking piece is also attacking the attacker. It is not so good if the blocking piece becomes 'pinned' and cannot move. This piece in turn could then come under attack.

C = Capture

Sometimes players put their pieces onto squares to attack your pieces without looking if any of your other pieces just happen to control the same square. It is therefore worth considering whether you should capture the attacking piece or not, especially if the capturing piece is of equal or lower value to your opponent's attacking piece.

D = Defend

Sometimes you may not want to move a piece that is under attack, particularly if the attacking piece is of greater value than the piece under attack. Using another one of your pieces or pawns to defend it instead may be best especially if you are on the attack and do not wish to retreat.

E = Even Better Move

This is why it is important to think before every move. Just because your opponent has attacked one of your pieces why not think about what you can do? For example, why defend a piece when you are threatening a one move checkmate? Surely the checkmate is better. If your opponent is attacking a Knight valued at 3 points and you are attacking a Rook valued at 5 points; when the pieces come off the board you have gained 2 points.

Opportunity

If you are not facing any sort of a threat look and see if you can threaten your opponent instead. Threaten an unguarded piece; threaten checkmate; if nothing else it will force your opponent to think defensively. And, as long as they are concentrating on defending themselves, they are not attacking you.

Plan

Chess is a series of plans. Developing your pieces; a pawn storm to gain space; trying to Queen a pawn; are all examples of plans. What are you trying to achieve? What can you do to help your plan to succeed? Some plans may involve several moves, what is the next move to make in your plan? The ultimate plan, of course, is to win the game and each of your 'little' plans is heading in that direction.

Position

Every so often in a game it is wise to sit back, just look at the position and ask yourself: can I move my pieces onto better squares? A Knight is generally stronger in the centre than on the side of the board, which is simply because a Knight can cover 8 squares from the centre square while it can only cover 4 squares from the side. If you can see any weak points in your position, and always assume that your opponent has seen them too, what can you do to strengthen those weak points? Are all pawns, and any vulnerable pieces, adequately defended? Especially the backward pawns which must be protected by pieces. A point of entry for your pieces is also a point of entry for your opponent: do you have control of that point of entry? If not, what can you do to take control? Doubled up Rooks on a half open file, or even a completely open file, can be very strong. A good position is one where all your pieces are 'active' and doing something.

Safety

This is a last option for the player with no other moves besides the ones that weaken his position. A safety move, or 'nothing' move, could be something as simple as moving the King back and forth behind his defensive wall of pawns. Even pieces that are doing defensive duties can also move back and forth providing they are still defending what they were defending before they moved.