

A Basic Guide to King Pawn Openings (1.e4)



1.e4

King pawn openings are generally open games (i.e., a game characterized by many open lines and largely clear of obstructing pawns) that have active play where the players tend to “slug it out.”

Why White Played 1.e4:

1. The pawn on e4 controls central square d5
2. The move frees the Queen and Bishop on f1.

White's Basic Goals:

1. Rapid development of pieces.
2. Control the Center.
3. Play d4 when possible
4. Castle quickly
5. Attack enemy King (usually king side) ASAP

Black can response in many ways to 1.e4, and his first move indicates Black's general plan of how he plans on handling White's basic goals.

Black First Move	Black's General Plan
1. ...e5	Fight (move for move) for center control and development.
1. ...e6	Maintain a center pawn (center control) and give up space (piece mobility).
1. ...c6	Give up a center pawn (center control) for development.
1. ...c5	Meet 2.d4 with cxd4. Black will have central pawn majority (more center control) and give White a lead in development.
1. ...d5	Counter-attack. Neutralize the pawn on e4.
1. ...d6 1. ...Nf6 1. ...g6	Let White control the center and Black will attack it from the flank (side)

The Italian Game



1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4

The Italian Game is one of the oldest recorded chess opening, and the game defining move is 3.Bc4 (the so-called "Italian bishop") in preparation for an early attack on Black's vulnerable f7 square. The term "Italian Game" is now used interchangeably with Giuoco Piano, though that term technically refers to a game after Black plays 3...Bc5. The Italian Game is usually characterized by aggressive play from both White and Black.

White's Ideas / Goals	Black's Ideas / Goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bishop on c4 attacks the vulnerable f7 pawn 2. Prepare d4 by first playing c3 3. Rapid Development 4. Catch King in Center or Attack King Side 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Castle ASAP 2. Rapid Development 3. Counter attack when possible 4. Play d5 if necessary

Italian Game Variations*:

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4

A. Main Line (48%)

3. ... Bc5

A1. Giuoco Piano: Greco (53%)

4.c3 Nf6 5.d4 exd4 6.cxd4 Bb4+ 7.Nc3¹ Nxe4 8.O-O Nxc3² 9.bxc3 Bxc3

¹7.Bd2 Bxd2 8.Nbxd2 d5 9.exd5 Nxd5 10.Qb3

²(79%) 8. ... Bxc3 9.d5 Bf6 10.Re1 Ne7 11.Rxe4 d6

(21%) 8. ... Bxc3 9.bxc3 d5 (if Nxc3, the 10.Qe1+ forks King and Knight)

A2. Giuoco Piano: Pianissimo (16%)

4.d3 Nf6 5.c3 d6 6.O-O O-O

A3. Evans Gambit (11%)

4.b4 Bxb4¹ 5.c3 Ba5 6.d4 exd4

(83%) 7.O-O dxc3 8.Qb3 Qf6 9.Bg5 Qg6 10.Nxc3

(16%) 7.Qb3 Qe7 8.O-O Bb6 9.cxd4 Nxd4 10.Nxd4 Bxd4

¹4. ... Bb6 5.a4 a6 6.Nc3 Nf6 7.Nd5 Nxd5 8.exd5 Nd4

B. Two Knights Defense (44%)

3. ... Nf6 4.Ng5¹ d5 5.exd5 Na5² 6.Bb5+ c6 7.dxc6 bxc6 8.Be2 h6

¹4. d3, the most popular move (59%), leads to the Giuoco Piano

²5. ... Nxd5 6.Nxf7 Kxf7 7.Qf3+ Ke6 8.Nc3 Ncb4 9.Bb3 c6

C. Hungarian Defense (6%)

Considered a solid (yet drawish) Defense that avoids the complexities of other lines.

3. ... Be7 4.d4 d6 5.dxe5¹ dxe5 6.Qxd8+ Bxd8 7.Nc3 Nf6

¹5.d5 Nb8 6.Bd3 Nf6 7.c4 O-O 8.Nc3 Nbd7

* Percentages are from a database of approximately 1,200,000 master level games. The shown continuations are the commonly layed moves from the database games. All variations not shown.

Ruy Lopez (The Spanish Game)



1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5

The Ruy Lopez, also called the Spanish Game, is named after a 16th century Spanish priest who systematically studied the opening (and others) in 1561. The opening, however, did not come to prominence until about 1850. The Ruy Lopez has more than 30 named “lines” of which the “Closed Defense” (1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5.O-O Be7) and associated subvariations account for approximately 52% of all Ruy Lopez games.

The Ruy Lopez is a very popular opening, and it accounts for almost 46% of all master level games that start with 1.e4 e5 and for about 62% of all master level games that start with 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6.

White's Ideas / Goals	Black's Ideas / Goals
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Bishop on b5 indirectly helps to control the center by attacking the only defender of the pawn on e5 2. Keep pawn at e4 3. Support d4 by first playing c3 4. Castle King-side (Queenside in Exchange Var.) 5. King side attack 6. Restrain Black's central pawns 7. Most of the time: Retain King's (White) Bishop 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Keep pawn at e5 2. Adequate piece development 3. Castle King side (Queenside in Exchange Var.) 4. Attack Queen side 5. Possible: play c5

Ruy Lopez Variations:

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5

A. Main Line [Morphy's Defense] (76%)

3. ... a6

A1. Main Line (88%)

4. Ba4 Nf6 5.O-O

A1-1. Closed Defense (71%)

5. ...Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3

A1-1A. Closed Defense Main Line (62%)

7. ...d6 8.c3 O-O 9.h3

A1-1A(1) Chigorin Variation (30%)

9. ...Na5 10. Bc2 c5 11.d4 Qc7 12.Nbd2 cxd4 13.cxd4

A1-1A(2) Breyer Variation (18%)

9. ...Nb8 10. d4 Nbd7 11.Nbd2 Bb7 12.Bc2

A1-1B. Marshall Attack (38%)

Black sacrifices a pawn for an attack

7. ...O-O 8.c3¹ d5 9.exd5 Nxd5 10.Nxe5 Nxe5 11.Rxe5 c6 12.d4 Bd6 13.Re1 Qh4
14.g3 Qh3 15.Be3 Bg4 16.Qd3

¹h3 or a4 (anti-Marshall Attack moves)

A1-2. Arkhangelsk (13%)

5. ...b5 6.Bb3 Bb7 7.Re1 Bc5 8.c3 d6 9.d4 Bb6

A1-3. Open Defense (12%)

(94%) 5. ...Nxe4 6.d4 b5 7.Bb3 d5 8.dxe5 Be6

(4%) 5. ...Nxe4 6.Re1 Nc5 7.Bxc6 dxc6 8.Nxe5 Be7

A2. Exchange Variation (11%)

(White has better endgame chances while Black has two bishops)

4. Bxc6 dxc6 5.O-O¹ f6 6.d4 exd4 7.Nxd4 c5 8.Nb3 Qxd1 9.Rxd1

¹ Nxe5 Qd4 6.Nf3 (or 6.Ng4 Qxd4 7.Ne3) Qxd4 7.Qe2 Qxe2 8.Kxe2

B. Berlin Defense (11%)

3. ...Nf6 4.O-O Nxe4¹

(86%) 5.d4 Nd6 6.Bxc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 Nf5 8.Qxd8 Kxd8

(13%) 5.Re1 Nd6 6.Nxe5 Be7²

¹ Ng4 5.h3 h5 (Fishing Pole)

² Nxb5 7.Nxc6+

French Defense:



1.e4 e6



1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5
(Approx. 87% of French Defense Games)

The French Defense is named after a correspondence match played between the cities of London and Paris in 1834; however, earlier games with the opening moves do exist. The French Defense is actually a game for control of the d4 and e5 squares.

White's Ideas / Goals	Black's Ideas / Goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Defend pawn on d4 2. King side attack 3. Possible: White Bishop attacks h7 (from d3) 4. Possible: Support e5 pawn with f4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Play c5 to attack pawn on d4 2. Queen side attack 3. Attack pawn on d4 (play: c5, Nc6, Qb6) 4. Possible: play f6 to attack pawn on e5 (usually after castling) 5. Free Bishop on c8

French Defense Variations:

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5

A. Main Line (46%)

3. Nc3

A1. Winawer Variation (51%):

3. ... Bb4 4. e5 c5 5. a3 Bxc3+ 6. bxc3 Ne7 7. Qg4 O-O 8. Bd3 Nbc6 9. Nf3 f5

A2. Classical Variation (37%):

3... Nf6

(64%) 4. Bg5 Be7 5. e5 Nfd7 6. Bxe7 Qxe7 7. f4 a6 8. Nf3 c5

(35%) 4.e5 Nfd7 5. f4 c5 6. Nf3 Nc6 7.Be3

A3. Rubenstein Variation (9%)

3... dxe4 4. Nxe4 Nd7 5. Nf3 Ngf6 6. Nxf6+ Nxf6 7. Bd3 c5 8. dxc5 Bxc5

B. Tarrasch Variation (31%)

3.Nd2

Closed Tarrasch (39%)

3. ... Nf6 4.e5 Nfd7 5.Bd3 c5 6.c3 Nc6 7.Ne2 cxd4 8.cxd4 f6 9.exf6 Nxf6
10.Nf3 Bd6 11.O-O O-O

Open Tarrasch, Exchange (33%)

3. ... c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.Nf3 Nc6 6.Bb5 Bd6 7.dxc5 Bxc5 8.O-O Nge7 9.Nb3 Bd6 10.Re1 O-O

C. Advanced Variation (14%)

White avoids the exchange of pawns and increases space on the king side. However, this move is not a developing move, and Black seems to gain the initiative.

3. e5 c5 4.c3 Nc6 5.Nf3

Black continues to attack the pawn on d4 (62%)

5. ...Qb6 6.Be2 cxd4 7.cxd4 Nge7 8.Nc3 Nf5 9.Na4 Qa5+ 10.Bd2 Bb4 11.Bc3 b5
12.a3 Bxc3+ 13.Nxc3

A waiting move by Black. Black wants White to show his plans (36%)

5. ...Be7 6.Be2 Qb6 7.O-O Bd7 8.b3 cxd4 9.cxd4 Rc8 10.Nc3 a6 11.Na4 Qc7

D. Exchange Variation (9%)

White avoids a closed center and the unique strategies of the French Defense, but frees the Black's Bishop on c8 and allows retention of a center pawn with no compensation.

3.exd5 exd5 4.Bd3 Bd6 5.h3 Nf6 6.Nf3 O-O 7.O-O h6

King Pawn Opening Variation Summary:

French Defense:

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5

Opening Moves	Variation Name
3.Nc3 Bb4	Winawer
3.Nc3 Nf6	Classical
3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4	Rubenstein
3.Nd2 Nf6	Closed Tarrasch
3.Nd2 c5	Open Tarrasch
3.e5	Advanced
3.exd5	Exchange

The Italian Game:

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4

Opening Moves	Variation Name
3. ...Bc5 4.c3 Nf6 5.d4	Giuoco Piano: Greco
3. ...Bc5 4.d3	Giuoco Piano: Pianissimo
3. ...Bc5 4.b4	Evans Gambit
3. ...Nf6	Two Knights Defense
3. ...Be7	Hungarian Defense

Ruy Lopez (The Spanish Game):

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5

Opening Moves	Variation Name
3. ...a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5.O-O Be7	Closed Defense
3. ...a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5.O-O Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 d6 8.c3 O-O 9.h3 Na5	Chigorin Variation
3. ...a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5.O-O Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 d6 8.c3 O-O 9.h3 Nb8	Breyer Variation
3. ...a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5.O-O Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 O-O 8.c3 d5	Marshall Attack
3. ...a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5.O-O b5	Arkhangelsk
3. ...a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5.O-O Nxe4	Open Defense
3. ...a6 4.Bxc6	Exchange Variation
3. ...Nf6	Berlin Defense