

Learning chess

**Manual for
chess trainers**

Step 2

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The second Step

We start from the standpoint that the lessons in this Step can only be of real use when children have previously successfully finished the first Step. This means more than a pass mark in the tests. The basic skills of the first Step also have to be **applied** by the children in their games. If the students have not mastered the necessary skills, then offering them new knowledge will only backfire.

For the teacher this means that he has to be aware of the didactic approach which was described in the manual of Step 1.

In the manual for Step 2, the stress is on enhancing the students' skills. The emphasis lies on attacking play. We teach about targets and attacking techniques because:

- further mastery of the material becomes possible (winning material in a clever way);
- in chess the attacking side wins;
- attacking is an excellent incentive.

Mastering previously unknown possibilities stimulates the young chess players. They can apply what has just been learned directly in their games.

Basic techniques such as the double attack, the pin and eliminating the defence form the building blocks for combinations. That's why we need to offer these techniques in as structured a way as possible. A good understanding, linked to a well-practised skill is the basis for future success with more difficult parts.

Is it wise to start with Step 2?

Some children and their parents do want that and the tasks in Step 2 will also work partially well. Why is there a 'negative' recommendation? We give chess lessons to learn to play chess better, not to be able to solve tasks. That is a tool that we need, but not the goal. As long as the students are giving away a lot of pieces in their games, it is advisable to make a halt. Unfortunately, children sometimes start with Step 2 because 'they can already play chess'. That almost always means: they know the rules of the game but their understanding is far behind children who have been busy in Step 1 for about a year. They can often still benefit from material from the first Step. In particular, the Step 1 plus workbook gives many children who have started with Step 2 (but are not yet ready for it) more than enough of a challenge.

The importance of the extra and plus books should not be underestimated. A mail from a chess trainer stressed its importance: "For all my students I have come to

the conclusion that the additional training from Step 1 and 2 extra is necessary to improve quickly in playing strength. Even when they are already on Step 3 in the club. After 15 mix-sheets in Step 1 extra they suddenly no longer give pieces away. They win tournaments with ease, while four months earlier they ended somewhere in the middle.”

The early years of the student’s career also play a major role. A few points to consider:

How often does a child play? Only at the club or during the chess lessons at school or more days a week, against friends or on the computer.

Instruction or no instruction? Working only in the workbook? Plus and extra skipped? There are many different possibilities and each of them has an influence on the skills. Is chess still an action game or is it already a bit of a mind game? Do children think things over a little rather than try to play the next move as quickly as possible?

Keeping children at the club

Step 1 paid ample attention to the child’s chess development. We repeat the first paragraph: *“The game of chess has an enormous attraction to children. The shape and different moves of the chess pieces fascinate them. Chess is a game in which you can be boss, and where you face the consequences of your own actions. Good or bad luck, such as you experience in games like ‘Bingo’ or ‘Monopoly’, do not exist in chess. In short, children think it is a nice – even cool – game.”*

Is that attraction for chess still there at the beginning of the second Step? Usually yes, although there are (too many?) children who have already given up chess. This is partly inevitable, not everyone has to like chess. On the other hand, chess is a fantastic hobby for millions of people around the world. For sure it would be nice if more children continued to play chess.

Why does one club succeed better than another in keeping the students of the first Step year after year? The decisive factor is the number of volunteers willing to work with young people. The youth leader with his team cannot be praised enough, especially if their work results in a youth club where a good atmosphere prevails.

The chapter ‘*Running groups*’ from Manual Step 1 explains a number of things in more detail. In short, the conclusion was: *“A peaceful and orderly atmosphere is important, though peaceful must not mean boring. Children who leave a club frequently offer as an excuse: “It wasn’t a nice group” but not “I don’t like playing chess”.*

How to learn to play chess better

The children come to the club to play chess and, above all, to learn to play chess better. We achieve that by giving chess lessons. What that means is not self-evident for everyone.

Learning to play chess better is a total package of:

- **Instruction**
The teacher gives the lesson or part of the lesson from the manual. We cannot explain everything, but we teach it in such a way that the students can discover a lot themselves.
- **Practice**
The students solve the tasks that belong to the lesson. This involves more than just distributing the workbooks. Help, give feedback while they are doing the tasks and don't forget to do so after reviewing the tasks. This must not be limited to right or wrong. Depending on the result, the right feedback is essential here too.
- **Playing games**
The students play games (game fragments, mini-games). During the instruction in a simultaneous against the trainer or one another, after the instruction almost exclusively against each other in a competition.
- **Discussing the games**
This part is new in the current Step. In Step 1, the discussion of games is not prominent. It is limited to offering guidance during, among other things, a simultaneous. We let the students discover that what they have learned can be used in their games. This makes playing more fun and increases the motivation to learn more new 'weapons'.

In short: there is much more than just the workbooks. This has been said since the first publications in 1987.

The manual defines the main direction, but the results of the tasks and the content of the games determine the speed (we can continue, repetition is necessary or simply stop teaching new material and just let the students play). It is different from the situation at schools where the annual programme has to be completed at all costs. If the necessary prior knowledge is insufficiently controlled then as a result the student continues to suffer.

It is impossible to compare the results of working in a workbook and the quality of the games involved. The score obtained in the workbooks misleads many teachers. For them the workbooks and exams determine whether the next Step can be started. That is wrong.

AIM OF THE LESSON

- finding mate quickly

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

- mate
- attacking techniques

ACQUISITION**Concepts**

mating pattern, flight square

Instruction

The following elements are of importance when teaching about mate in two:

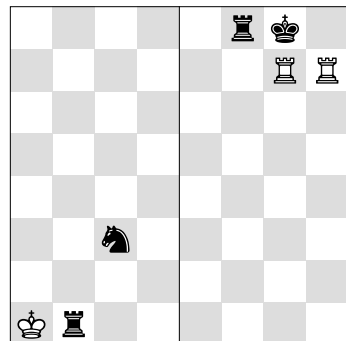
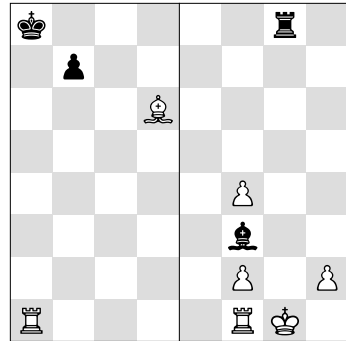
- recognition of a mating pattern (the end position with mate)
- cooperation of the pieces (with supported or assisted mate)

Mating patterns

First we will practise recognising mate, a skill which also played an important role with the mate-in-one exercises.

The positions in the diagrams (⇒) and (⇓) can serve to recall some relevant knowledge. We have to place the piece, which gives mate. This chaser (a term we already used in step 1) can perform several other tasks besides giving mate: it can take away flight squares and protect its fellow pieces (and it can perform the function of a guard as well). The guard keeps the flight squares under control but at the same time it can protect the chaser.

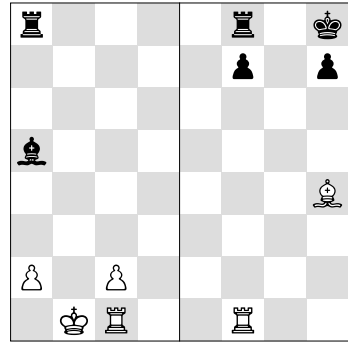
Have the students make up their own exercises on their own board.



We will only turn to positions with mate in two when these mate-in-one exercises do not cause any problems any more.

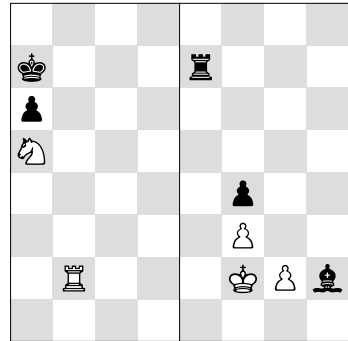
Cooperation of pieces

In most cases the cooperation between the pieces will consist of alternately chasing and guarding. The point is to limit the freedom of the opposing king. On the left in the diagram. (↑) the rook gives check first: **1... Rb8+ 2. Ka1 Bc3#**.



On the right the roles have been reversed: **1. Bf6+ Kg8 2. Rg1#**. The loser has no choice, so the effect of the moves is easy to foresee.

The first condition for giving mate is being able to get at the black king. Giving check has to be possible. Second is the cooperation between the pieces. They have to divide the tasks between them. One piece chases the king to a square so that another piece can intervene. The tasks of the guards weigh heavier in the diagram (⇒). On the left the knight protects the rook after **1. Nc6+ Ka8 2. Rb8#** and takes away the square a7 from the king: a combination of supported and assisted mate.



On the right, there is a similar picture after **1. Bg3+ 2. Kf1 Re1#**. Note that the rook is also taking care of the g1-square.

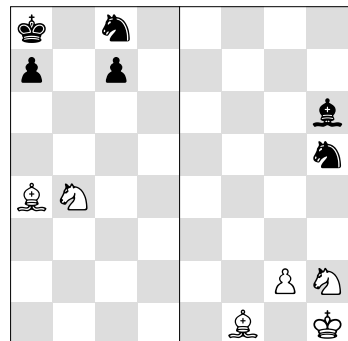
Cooperation entails:

- supporting one another;
- controlling together the flight squares of the enemy king.

When giving mate with two pieces, the ‘help’ of opposing pieces, which get in the way of their own king, is almost always required. In the following example (⇓) in both parts the bishop and the knight work together.

On the left White plays **1. Bc6+** in order to give mate after **1. ... Kb8 2. Na6#**.

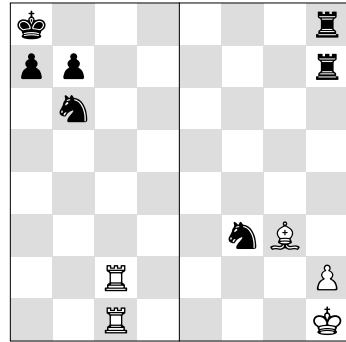
On the right the roles have been reversed. Now



the knight has to give check first; it is only after that that the bishop takes action: **1. ... Ng3+ 2. Kg1 Be3#**.

Twofold attack

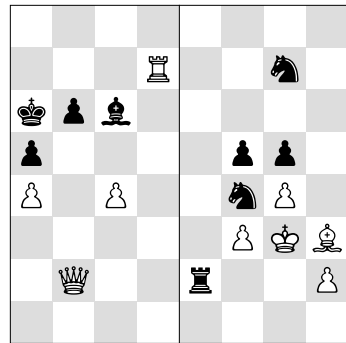
Pieces can also help each other in another way: by sacrificing themselves! On the left in the diagram (♁) we find an easy example. Black's vulnerable back rank is an open invitation to a mate with **1. Rc8+ Nxc8 2. Rxc8#**. White gives mate because of the twofold attack on c8. The situation is hardly more difficult on the right. The bishop on g3 is protecting h2. Black has three attacking pieces and that is sufficient to take out the king and the bishop: **1. ... Rxb2+ 2. Bxb2 Rxb2#**.



The twofold attack is more difficult when the mating pattern is more unusual. On the left in the diagram (♁) White gives mate with **1. Qb5+ Bxb5 2. cxb5#**. Not difficult, but the students need to have seen this type a couple of times before. Giving up your queen just like that is not the first thing they will look for.

The attacker also has a reserve player on standby in the position on the right: **1. ... Nfh5+ 2. gxh5 Nxb5#** (but not 2. ... f4+ 3. Kg4).

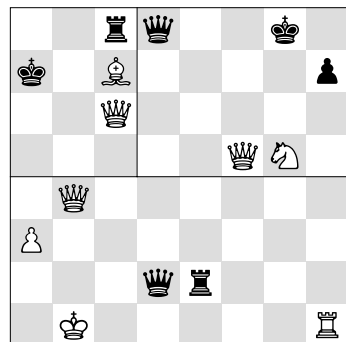
The B-exercise sheet with this lesson is full of mate-in-two exercises utilising the twofold attack.



In the diagram (♁) there are three positions in which one piece retains the role of the chaser. They are very common and worth remembering. On the left, White gives mate with **1. Qb6+ Ka8 2. Qa6#**.

On the right, Black is lost after **1. Qxh7+ Kf8 2. Qf7#** or **1. Qf7+ Kh8 2. Qxh7#**.

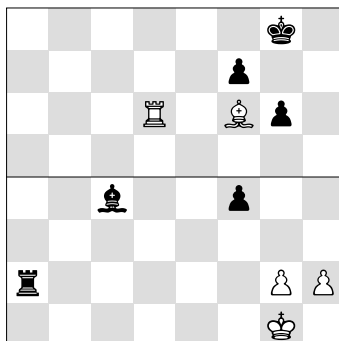
In the bottom half Black can also give mate in two ways: **1. ... Qa2+ 2. Kc1 Qc2#** or **1. ... Qc2+ 2. Ka1 Qa2#**.



The queen especially is a very suitable piece to place the king in a worse position by giving check and then delivering mate.

The rook can also do the job alone. In the top half in the diagram (↑) Black is mated after **1. Rd8+ Kh7 2. Rh8#**.

A well known mating pattern comes into existence in the bottom part after **1. ... Ra1+ 2. Kf2 Rf1#**.




The examples given are sufficient for a first lesson. The students will have to gain more skill in giving mate on their own by practising. Important points are:

- coming closer to the enemy king;
- the cooperating (supporting and assisting or a combination of both);
- recognising typical mating patterns (in which the colour and place do not really matter).

PRACTICE

Workbook

□ *Mate / Composing mate: A* 

Explanation: The two pieces next to the board have to be positioned in such a way that the opponent is mated. The first letter of the piece will suffice.

There will be big differences between the students. With such an exercise the spatial aspect plays a huge role. Not all students are as advanced in this area. In particular the positions where the king is in the middle of the board are difficult for them.

Mistake: The solution is wrong.

Help: Have the students indicate which flight squares are still available to the king. In principle, it is the main piece which has to take away the most squares. The lower value piece mostly has a protective function or will take care of giving check

Mistake: The position is too difficult. The way pieces exert influence on

space is difficult to see. It's possible that a student who usually makes few mistakes in his exercises now has many.

Help:

We will simplify the exercises by:

- a hint (the knight gives check; the bishop has to protect, it is supported mate);
- showing a similar mating pattern;
- telling where one of the pieces should be.

Mate / Mate in two: A



Explanation: Have them indicate both moves until it is mate. Young children who are still drawing arrows can number these with 1 and 2. In all positions one piece will give check first after which another piece gives mate.

Mistake: The solution is not found.

Help: Explain which mating pattern appears on the board (i.e. rook and bishop). Should this hint be insufficient show a similar mating pattern on another part of the board.

Mate / Mate in two: B



Explanation: In all positions the side to move can give mate by initiating a twofold attack.

Mistake: The answer is wrong.

Help: Probably not very necessary. Remove an attacker and defender if necessary so a mate-in-one position remains.

Mate / Mate in two: C



Explanation: The chase on the king (check) and the final blow (mate) is carried out by the same piece.

Mistake: The solution is not found.

Help: Which piece can give check? Where can the king still go?

Mate / Mate in two: D



Explanation: See the A-sheet.

ANSWERS

Mate / Composing mate: A

1) ♖b7, ♘c6

2) ♖a7, ♘a3

3) ♖a4, ♘b3

4) ♖g1, ♘f3

5) ♖a5, ♘d7

6) ♖b5, ♘c3

Additional workbooks

The development of the Step method began in 1985. In 1987 the manual and the worksheets for the first step were published (only in Dutch). Steps 1 to 5 (the basic section) were finished in 1990.

The amount of exercises was quite unusual for that time and met with enthusiasm and acclaim, but there was also doubt. Have the children to solve so many exercises? Time has shown that this question has a positive answer. The chess world agreed. Indeed, after some 15 years the demand came for 'more'.

This resulted initially in two new additions, the workbooks Extra and Plus. More or less simultaneously came the desire for exercises for young children around the age of six. The Stepping Stones appeared. Later the workbooks Thinking ahead and Mix were added.

Thanks to these additional workbooks students can continue practising at more or less the same level and thus spend longer going through a Step. The level of difficulty increases slightly, so that the exercises continue to be challenging.

More training material has several advantages:

- Many students immediately take on the next Step as soon as they have completed the current one. Their playing strength usually does not keep pace, they apply what they have learned insufficiently well in their games. The students would have to play more. Thanks to the additional workbooks students at almost the same level can practice more and so they can do more and spend longer on a Step.
It is important that the degree of difficulty does not mount up too soon. The shortcoming of (too) quickly proceeding to the next Step can be somewhat countered this way.
- When solving exercises the students should look at the positions in a correct way. The more that happens, the greater the chance that they will do so in their games.
- The ability to differentiate is greatly expanded. That goes for the weaker students (extra practice on the same theme) and for the better ones (more and more difficult tasks).
- Repeat. We forget, when we do not repeat, so we must repeat so as not to forget.

At what moment can we implement these workbooks? A general recommendation is not possible. The workbook Step 2 Extra can already be used while working with the basic Step 2 workbook. It is up to the trainer to decide whether parts of the Plus workbook (and lessons) and the Thinking ahead workbook will be discussed in between. That obviously depends on the level of the group but it is easy to imagine that a single theme from one of these books pops up during simultaneous play.

A trainer who has a good picture of the entire second Step and knows what he is doing, can combine things.

Step 2 extra

A workbook with just a single reminder and apart from that only exercises. The first half of the book contains only exercises on the same themes as appeared in Step 2. These are useful not only as additional practice but also particularly so as revision.

In the second half the exercises are all mixed up, and so there is no hint as to the theme of each one. Use the Reminder in the workbook how to solve these kind of exercises. They resemble most closely an actual game. Due to lack of space, there are too few of this type of exercise in the normal book which goes with the Step.

The mixed tasks are difficult for almost all children because extracting the relevant information from a position is for a Step 2 child far from simple. With this kind of mixed exercise children need more encouragement in the beginning to keep trying. The role of the coach is important; these exercises have to be addressed at the right time.

Making mistakes is not too bad but the level of difficulty should remain manageable. By properly solving these challenging tasks, the feeling of competence is growing (“I can do it!”). The self-confidence is growing too and the motivation is again guaranteed for a while. That pays off in a better performance. See the quotation on page 5 and beyond.

The answers can be found on the website at:

<http://www.stappenmethode.nl/en/solutions.php>

Step 2 plus

The classification of the material in the first years of the method (1987 - applies only to the Dutch version) served well enough. But many years of experience showed that a single essential part was discussed insufficiently. That was an important motive for the Plus Series.

In these books there is space for:

- new themes;
- themes to which not enough attention was paid in the normal Step because of lack of space;
- treatment in more depth of important themes;
- themes taken from a previous Step, but at a higher level of difficulty;
- exercises to improve skills (i.e. the board vision).

We deal with all the themes in 9 Plus lessons. Many of these can be short. The main point is that the students are able to solve the exercises in the correct way. We don't advice to skip the instruction.

Step 2 thinking ahead

Dear me, thinking ahead, is that not too much for a chess player who is just starting to learn the game? No, certainly not. The fact that many trainers haven't mastered the skill well enough themselves is not a convincing argument not to pay attention to thinking ahead. It's amazing how fast students, after a hesitant start, progress in this area.

The variety of exercises in the Workbook 2 Step thinking ahead is big. Some of those exercises were already used by Rob Brunia back in the eighties even before the Steps method existed. Only in 2004 did Rob come back to the idea of doing more with these and other skills. Not much later, he unfortunately died. The idea remained dormant and thanks to the inspiring efforts and help of Boris Friesen the idea has now been realised.

In the remaining part of this manual you will find lessons and instructions dealing with the workbook Step 2 plus and the workbook Step 2 thinking ahead.

Step 2 mix

The Mix books are numbered according to the Step they come with. This shows the level of the exercises. That does not mean that is no longer worth working through a Mix book from a lower Step. In the section on differentiation (page 34) it is stated that it is possible to return to the more difficult exercises later on while working through a higher Step. That is absolutely the case when it comes to other supplementary workbooks.

The variety in the Mix booklets is greater than in the mixed tasks in the other student workbooks. All the subjects which have been dealt with reappear, even those from the Plus section.

Most of the tasks are about delivering mate and winning material and in addition there are a lot on defence: getting out of check, parrying and defending against mate. Furthermore, there are route planning tasks in which only White moves. ‘Give check’, ‘Capture all the pieces’ and ‘Deliver mate’. The final four pages contain mate in two problems: tasks in the style of the exercises on page 120 *Mate in two (rook)*.

In Step 2 many new themes are introduced. With these themes everyone starts again in the role of a beginner. By doing tasks which are at first limited only to themes (to a lesser degree also Mix exercises in which a theme is “hidden”), this knowledge is extended. If the student now also plays enough games, clear progress will be visible at the end of the second Step. The condition for this is, however, that feedback is given both on the tasks and on the games played. We can differentiate the stages at which a student is: from more or less still not really competent, via superficial mastery, to more expert (fewer and fewer failures) finally to competent/capable.

The use of knowledge in games gets better and better. Spotting the themes is to a great extent rendered automatic, the student has become a Step 2 expert.

If the progress outlined here is less successful, then the results of the mixed exercises show exactly which areas are weak. Any such individual theme needs to be emphasised again. Insufficient mastery at a low level will still be reflected in the games.

Thinking ahead

The workbook for Step 2 ‘Thinking ahead’ begins with the comment: “A workbook that is slightly different from usual”. That is also true for the trainer. The way of going about things and the type of exercises differ in many respects from the other workbooks. ‘Different’ is also used in the sense of ‘unknown’. The reservations about making use of the workbook within the training lessons are even greater than in the case of the Extra and Plus books. That is both a pity and unnecessary, since these trainers who have tried it out have found the experience to be positive. Every trainer pays attention to thinking things out in his or her lessons right from Step 1. In the strictest sense of the term almost every exercise in one of the workbooks requires the student ‘to think ahead’, even if only a single move is needed. After all, we have to pay attention to what the opponent can do. The students have to check whether the goal of the exercise has been attained: Has Black been mated? Can I capture safely? In a subject like the twofold attack the situation after the second move must be clear before playing the first move. Do I win points or not? In Step 1 Plus and 2 Plus there are route planners in which it is perhaps not a precondition for solving the exercise but thinking things out is nevertheless a great help. In the ‘Give check’ exercises it is often helpful to begin with the final move.

What is true for the first Step is all the more so for Step 2 – if you don’t think ahead, then things just don’t work anymore. So when you get right down to it, there is nothing new under the sun.

Prior knowledge

What do the students need to have mastered in order to continue their work through the workbook with a good rate of success? In the whole, the following:

- to have good control of the board (overview of the board);
- the naming of squares must be totally internalised;
- they must be of the level of Step 2.

Board vision




A good overview of the board is indispensable for thinking ahead. If you do not see that after the first move or any move played a piece is hanging, then learning to think things out at a higher level is not a priority. After considering a position for a few seconds, a good chess player immediately sees whether mate is possible or whether a piece is in danger or can be won. He or she can manage that because

all the basic patterns (the interplay between the pieces and the spatial effects of their movements) have been stored in long-term memory. So what is involved is an automatic process. A beginner at chess has hardly any knowledge to fall back on. A good overview of the board is extremely important since the working memory (with its limitations) that then be used principally for other things.

At the end of Step 2, after the Plus section, the students ought to have a good board vision. Actually in their games they should no longer be giving away pieces, ‘forgetting’ that they can win a piece or missing mate in one. Should this be happening, however, then there is no way the next subject should be started. A basic ability – since at the end of Step 2 control of the board is just that – which has been insufficiently well mastered, will lead in their games to unnecessary and frustrating mistakes.

Naming squares

A satisfactory mastery of the naming of squares and a lack of problems in writing down moves (without looking at the coordinates around the board) are prerequisites. In the first Step we do not as yet require the students to write down the answers to the exercises or to note down their games. On the other hand, in the Step 1 handbook one finds: “In teaching it is extremely practical if the students can name the moves.” At best there should be no fuss and the students can use arrows until the time they have been urged to write down the moves. At the start using arrows makes sense because that is an extra sense organ (touch) sending information to the brain. As soon as the moves of the pieces have become automatic, this advantage can be neglected and the time has come to (gradually) have them write down their solutions.

In the blind exercises a position is given with the white and black pieces (f1 b3 e7); knowing the names of the squares is there absolutely necessary. When thinking things out it is also important for variations to be mentioned quite specifically, whether the variations are written down in the form of notation or given orally. For some children who have a strong visual memory, this presents problems at the start. Specifically these children will benefit enormously if they can convert an oral description into a position. It should actually no longer be the case that the children think: “Then I do this and he does that and then I can take it.” It does not matter whether this is with the help of a finger or not. If things are expressed as notation (e.g. Bxh7+) it is much easier to visualise the moves.

Level Step 2

This is a very imprecise description. Is the possession of the Step 2 certificate automatically the correct level?

The Steps

Books

The following books are available in the ‘Steps Method’ series:



Manuals for chess trainers:	Step 1, Step 2, Step 3, Step 4, Step 5
Manual for independent learners:	Step 6
Basic workbooks:	Stepping stones 1, Stepping stones 2, Step 1, Step 2, Step 3, Step 4, Step 5, Step 6
Extra workbooks:	Step 1 extra, Step 2 extra, Step 3 extra, Step 4 extra, Step 5 extra, Step 6 extra
Plus workbooks:	Step 1 plus, Step 2 plus, Step 3 plus, Step 4 plus, Step 5 plus
Mix workbooks:	Step 1 mix, Step 2 mix, Step 3 mix, Step 4 mix, Step 5 mix
Thinking ahead workbooks:	Step 2 thinking ahead

Updated information can be found at our website:
www.stappenmethode.nl (EN, FR, DE, NL)

All books can be ordered from this website for worldwide delivery:
www.stappenmethode.nl/en/

Software

The Chess Tutor for Windows is a series of chess learning software based on the ‘Steps Method’.



Chess Tutor Step 1, Chess Tutor Step 2 and Chess Tutor Step 3 are available as download or as CD.

You can first try the Chess Tutor using a free demo version.

More information at: <http://www.chesstutor.eu/en>