Contents

The first step

The first step deals with all the rules (laws) of the game of chess. Additionally, a lot of attention is devoted to the basic skills that are necessary to play the game.
The elementary learning material appears to be simple and indeed, some teachers are tempted into rattling through the first step in three months. That is not the best approach, however. Essential chess techniques like mating the opponent require a more extended learning period. It is better to plan a period of a year to really master the basic skills (there will always be exceptions). Just let the students play. You will easily catch up on 'lost' time at a later stage.

How children learn to play chess

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.

Capturing
After learning the way the pieces move and how to capture your opponent's pieces, playing becomes a real treat. For children, the first aim of the game then becomes capturing the opponent's pieces. The captured pieces are then neatly arranged in order of battle along the side of the board, preferably on their own side. The loot is regularly counted. Children will even count the pieces again if nothing has been captured in the meantime.
Capturing becomes the aim of the game for children. It does not really matter a lot to them whether material is lost. Even if they know the concept of mating and are partially capable of executing mate, they will remain so fascinated by capturing that this is what they are after in the first place. They will select a piece (each child having his or her own preference) and will start hunting with it. If the piece is killed in action, then it is the turn of the next piece. When one of the players is mated, it is often by accident and

it comes as a surprise to both players. They would rather continue! “You are mated” is countered by “Yes, but I’ve got your queen.”

The material phase

The period during which children are occupied with the material itself is easily identifiable. We call this period: **the material phase.** The children explore the pieces and the way they move over the board, and by trial and error they become more skilful. They do not hesitate anymore about the way the pieces move. The children will be helped enormously in their chess development, if they get the chance to work through this material phase at their own pace as completely as may be possible. One of the benefits (among others) in later games will be that they do not continue to give pieces away.

The spatial phase

Mastering the concept of mate and focusing on finding a mate will only be properly assimilated if a child learns enough about spatial concepts linked to the board during the material phase. It has to discover that the way the pieces move depends not only on the piece itself but also on the way the board is divided into squares. It is only then that the child really understands the concept of space. The students reach this new plateau, which we call **the spatial phase**, without completely leaving the previous one. To start with this phase without taking the previous one into account will lead to more and unnecessary mistakes in the games of the children. It will then take the children quite some time to reach the following phase.

The time phase

We play moves in chess with a certain goal in mind. We need time to reach that goal.

Time is expressed in moves. Chess players call a move a tempo (i.e. ‘time’ in Italian, with its plural: tempi). The stronger our play becomes, the more important tempi become. Even playing as White is then an advantage, because White is the side that starts the game. For this reason, we call the third phase of development **the time phase**. The fact that it takes a number of years before a child reaches that level requires a bit of explanation.

Students do not have an inkling of the importance of time in the first step. They sometimes invent wonderful plans that are a few moves deep, e.g. to catch a pawn with their king. The opponent unfortunately can counter the threat in just one move when the intended capture is near. In our eyes, this is a waste of time, but we have to realise that children do not yet understand

that they could have utilised those wasted moves better. Even children in the second step merrily pursue with their king an opponent's pawn (White: a4 – Black: Kb3: 1. a5 Kb4 2. a6 Kb5 3. a7 Kb6 4. a8Q). We may conclude from the way they react that they not even consider this strange: "That was close!"
This insufficient understanding of the concept of time is in a way remarkable. Children do not like it when they have to miss a turn during 'Monopoly'. They most certainly realise that they are at a disadvantage as regards their opponents. You never have to miss a single move during chess: you must play whenever it is your turn. Children may *possibly* work out that 'stupid' moves are actually a bit like missing a turn (i.e. losing a tempo), but this does not seem important to them since they expect that their opponent will not see their threat.
As a result of the lessons and comments about their games, they will gradually start to understand during Step 2 the real truth, that a chess game is more than just a sequence of separate moves. Through the exercises they learn the importance of looking a few moves ahead; and as a result of the lessons on the opening (especially on gambits) children learn that you may 'exchange' material for space and time. By then, however, we are already into Step 3. Only then do the concepts of gaining or losing a tempo become more important. When commenting on their games, we shall then follow up on this point: "You can gain a tempo by playing this. You will lose a tempo in development. That is going to cost you a tempo."

None of the three phases described above is a clearly defined and visible period, but they run partially along parallel tracks. Only the initial and final stages of each phase are at a different point in the learning process. Let's clarify this by making the following comparison with the course of a year:
Material phase: from January till June
Spatial phase: from March till September
Time phase: from May till December
Experience reveals that children need all their attention and energy at the start of a certain phase, so that there is no room in their minds nor energy available for the next one. As soon as you observe that they have to some extent mastered the ideas of a phase, you may slowly start with the next phase.

The relevance of this for chess teaching
A chess trainer will do well to take the three stages described above into account during his lessons. He can help the children if he allows them to

play a sufficient number of games and to do the exercises during the material phase. The right concepts and skills will thus be acquired and practised at the right moment. It is a waste of time to teach students about a spatial concept such as mate if at the same time they are also having to think about the way a certain piece moves.
The duration of each phase tends to depend on the individual. This is why our aim should be to adapt chess teaching as much as possible to suit the individual child. In practice, this will of course conflict with a lack of manpower, but we can go quite far in the right direction by making use of the workbooks, and especially by letting the children play enough games.

Consequences for practice

The above-mentioned phases also have importance for the practical game. It does not make sense to point out all kinds of aspects regarding the spatial division of the board during the material phase, nor about giving mate in a certain position. Nor is it important to force children to think about their moves for a long time. The point is that the problem the children face in the game they are playing is represented by the material that is left on the board, and not by any other factors. In practice, we have come across many well-meaning people who think that they are promoting positive development by forcing children to spend a long time thinking about their moves. Unfortunately, the opposite is true. The child is bored until it is allowed to make a move and will lose interest in the game.
It is obvious that playing with a clock at this stage is not appropriate and only causes the child to lose concentration.
Assistance by the trainer during a friendly game along the lines of: “Just have a good look, you can capture a piece” is in a different category altogether and is the right thing to do. During teaching and when commenting on the children’s games we always need to remain aware of which phase the children are at. That way we may be able to correct the child’s errors more effectively.

3 Attack and capture

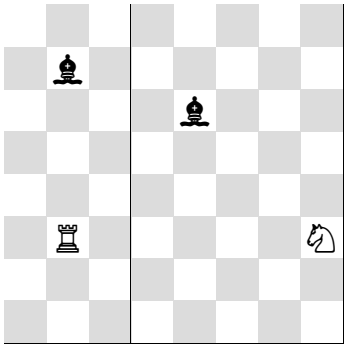
AIM OF THE LESSON
- learning the interaction of chess pieces

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE
- the way chess pieces move
- a rank order of the chess pieces

ACQUISITION

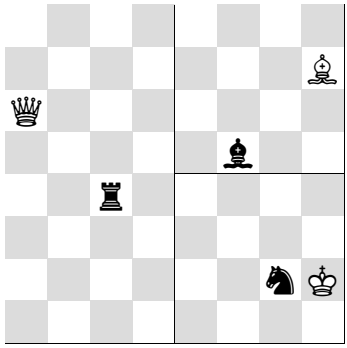
Concepts
attack, capture, move, mobility, vulnerability, mutual

Instruction
In case the students have problems with any of the issues that were covered in the previous lesson, the prior knowledge should be repeated. The easy pieces only need to be covered briefly. Many of the children will still hesitate when making knight moves.
In this lesson, both players' pieces will be standing opposite each other and influencing each other for the first time. This interaction means that the students must watch two pieces. That requires attention.
Indicate in the diagram (⇩) that the rook is looking towards the bishop. In this case, we say that the rook is attacking the bishop. If it is White's turn, he can capture the bishop with the rook: the rook will then take the place of the bishop on b7. The bishop disappears from the board and does not take any further part in the game. In short, the rook has *captured* the bishop.



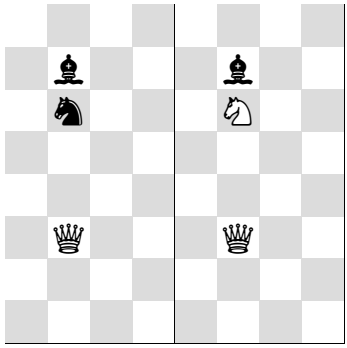
The black bishop on the right side is attacking the knight. It can capture the knight.

Give a few more examples with other pieces. Replace white with black pieces, and vary between forward and backward captures. You will find out that backward captures are more difficult, as are captures over a relatively longer distance. On the left side of the diagram (⇧) the queen is attacking the rook.



In the upper right side of the split diagram the bishops are attacking each other. In this type of position, which bishop can capture the other depends on whose turn it is to move.

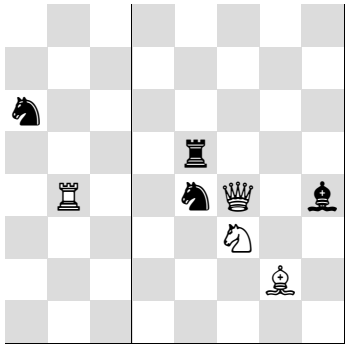
In the lower right side the king can capture the knight. Have one of the students come to the demonstration board to point out the attack and to make the capture.



Capturing is not obligatory! Capturing is, however, subject to certain rules. In the following examples, we will discuss when capturing is not permitted.

In the diagram (⇨) the queen is attacking the knight, but not the bishop. This can be further illustrated by replacing the black knight by a white one (diagram right).

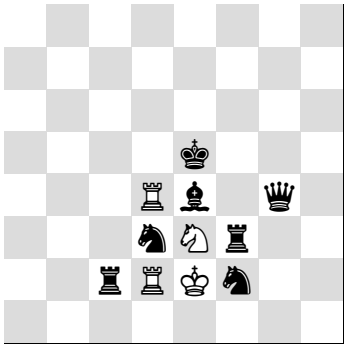
Captures by the knight require special attention. Besides 'normal' captures, the knight is able to capture by 'jumping over other pieces'.



On the left side of the diagram (⇩) the black knight captures the white rook. Nothing special.

In the right side of the diagram, the white knight on f3 can capture both the rook on e5 and the bishop on h4. It does not matter that there are pieces 'in the way' on e4 and f4. The knight can jump over both one's

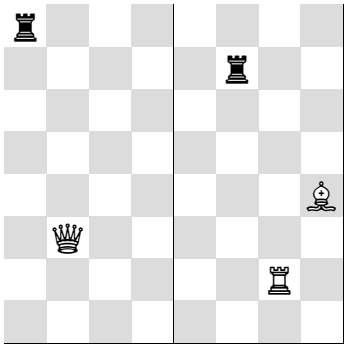
own and enemy pieces. Children (and especially young ones) have trouble with such captures which involve a jump. To them, the pieces are really standing in the way. They take the knight, move it to e4, see an obstacle and then move it the other way. The game '*Which knight eats the quickest*', which will be outlined at a later point in this lesson is a good exercise in this respect.



Finally, we completely lock up the knight on e3 in the diagram (⇧) and only give it one exit (f4). If children now also let it play all its eight moves without hesitation (including two captures), then they will have grasped the concept of capturing with a knight.

We let the children participate on their board as much as possible. We should always remember, however, that the job of transferring relatively complicated positions on the demonstration board to their own board is quite difficult for the children.

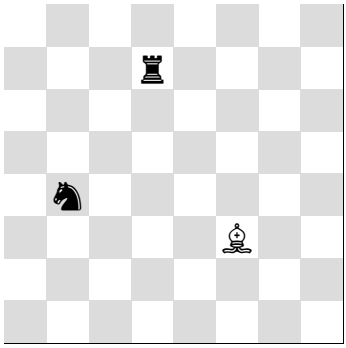
Attacking pieces should be done with the necessary care. When doing so, you have to make sure that the attacking piece cannot itself be captured. In the diagram (⇩) the queen has to attack the rook in a safe manner. This can only be accomplished by means of a diagonal attack. A good move is e.g. **1. Qb3-d5**. In contrast, the queen must attack a bishop straight by means of a vertical or horizontal attack.



In the right side of the diagram, it would not be clever if Black attacked the white rook with his own rook (e.g. 1. … Rf7-g7). But Black can safely attack the white bishop by playing **1. … Rf7-h7 (**or **f4).**

When it comes to attacking, the knight

once more has an exceptional status. A knight can attack any piece except another knight without being captured itself.
During 'attacking actions', you will generally find more than two pieces on the board. Each extra piece means more and more complex interaction! Other pieces of the opponent may act as a spoil-sport when you are attacking a piece yourself.
In the diagram (⇧) the bishop on f3 could attack the black rook from either c6 or g4. The black knight can capture the bishop if it moves to c6. This attack is therefore unlikely to be successful. Thus, the correct attacking move is **1. Bf3-g4**.



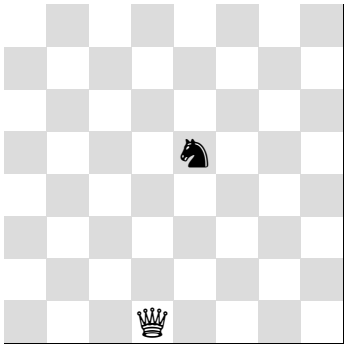
Summary
Enemy pieces that are under attack, may be captured. However, they do not have to be captured since capturing is not obligatory.
The queen, rooks and bishops cannot jump over other pieces. A knight can jump over other pieces and at the end of its jump it can capture enemy pieces. The opponent can attack your pieces too and capture them! If you attack an enemy piece, you should do so with care: make sure that an enemy piece cannot capture your attacking piece.

PRACTICE

Reminder
◇ A*ttacking and capturing*

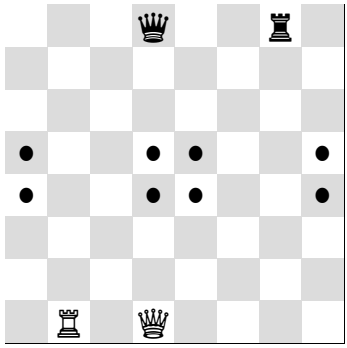
Games

Queen against knight
In the diagram (⇩) the queen must conquer the knight. The knight can only be caught on the edge and on some squares close to the edge of the board.
The children switch colours after each game. When it is a small group, it is also possible for the teacher to play the side of

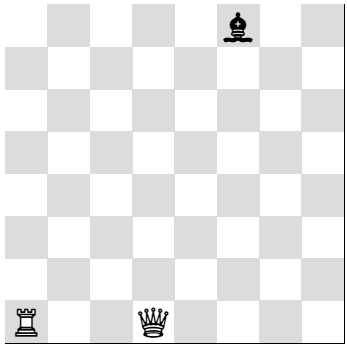


the knight simultaneously against each student.
The concepts of mobility (knight in the centre) and vulnerability (knight more towards the edge) play a role. In the beginning the children will play rather at random. We can come back to this little game after a few lessons. By then, the children will play in a much more focused way.

Capturing
In the diagram (⇨) the pieces must capture the buttons or coins (pawns are less suitable because of their colour).
The idea is to capture as many as possible without being captured yourself. Jumping over the counters is not allowed.
The importance of the centre (squares = d4, d5, e4, e5) becomes apparent in this game.
Variation: Both games have an extra rook.

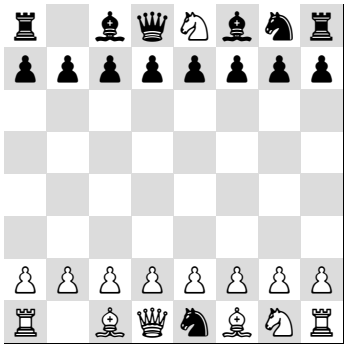


Queen + rook against bishop
A white queen and rook have to catch a black bishop (diagram ⇩). They may start from the square that they occupy in the initial position. This chase will only succeed with correct play if the rook is brought into the game (but protected!), but almost no child will think of this of his or her own accord. If catching the bishop does not succeed, then an extra rook needs to be added to do the job. This is a difficult exercise, and therefore only suitable for your better students.



Knight's move
This exercise was outlined in lesson 2 above. Both players have two knights and the knights are now allowed to capture each other.

Which knight 'eats' the quickest?
The diagram (⇧) comes about by replacing both kings by one of their opponent's knights. Only these knights are allowed to move in this exercise. They have to capture all the enemy pieces surrounding them as quickly as possible. Whoever has 'swallowed' all of them first, wins. Not easy, but nice and instructive. Even at step 5 level, the person who begins will not always win.



Workbook

☐ *Rules of the game / Moves of the pieces: B*

Explanation: The students have to write a plus sign on the squares where the designated piece can go in one move. A circle is to drawn round any opposing piece that can then be captured.

Mistake: Capturing your own pieces.

Help: As a result of the effort put into capturing, other factors are forgotten. Capturing is good fun and the more captures the better! Setting up the diagrammed position on their own board is a good prop. Let them make the move, and ask: "What piece do you capture?" and "Take a good look at that."

Mistake: Capturing too few pieces.

Help: The child is already content after capturing one piece. His reasoning: you are only allowed to capture one piece at a time! Set up the position and ask what other pieces can also be captured.

Mistake: Queen, rook and bishop can 'jump'.

Help: The error could be caused by unfamiliarity with this aspect. What is more likely, however, is that the student identifies himself with the wrong piece (e.g. the piece that he has just captured). It is sufficient to point out that the same piece must play every time.

☐ *Attacking / Creating an attack: A*

Explanation: This exercise sheet requires a good introduction. The

point is that, rather than investigating all the possibilities, the student must find the best solution. In addition, the opponent is not harmless anymore: he gets into the discussion too, as will happen in almost all positions that will follow. Choosing the right approach from the start will pay off!

The students must first look for all possible attacks in the diagram (setting a plus sign on the squares is enough). They can find the best move by comparing all possible attacking moves. The condition is that their own piece cannot be captured. Therefore the motto is: attack safely! The correct move will get an arrow. In some of the diagrams an extra complication is: Which piece should attack?

Mistake: The piece that attacks can itself be captured.

Help: The cause is often that the child is too involved with his own action. We therefore repeat the suggested move on his own board and ask: "What can the opponent play now?"

Mistake: Position 8 or 10 is wrong.

Help: There is a correct attack but the opponent is able to capture a piece with the attacked piece (see answers). We make the move on the child's own board and ask: "What can the opponent play now?"

ANSWERS

☐ *Rules of the game / Movement of the pieces: B*

1) d2, e5, g1, h2, xh4, xg5
2) c4, e6, f7, g8, e4, xb3, xf3
3) c4, b4, e4, xd5
4) d5, e6, e7, e8, d4, f6, f4, xc3, xe4, xf5, xg3
5) c6, c8, a7, b7, d7, e7, f7, g7, h7
6) d2, f4, f2, g1, xg5
7) c4, c3, c6, c7, d5, xb5, xc2
8) g3, g5, g6, f3, f5, h3, h4, h5, xe6, xg7
9) c8, e8, f5, f7, xc4, xe4
10) e1, e3, e4, e5, e6, e7, e8, a2, b2, c2, d2, f2, g2, h2, d1, f1, xd3
11) Drawing
12) b2, c1, e1, f4, xc5, xe5

☐ *Attacking / Creating an attack: A*

1) 1. Be2-g4
2) 1. Ne4-f6
3) 1. ... Rd5-d1 or 1. ... Rd5-e5
4) 1. ... Qd5-d2 or 1. ... Qd5-f7
   1. ... Qd5-a2
5) 1. Rb8-d8
6) 1. Nb7-d6
7) 1. Be2-h5
8) 1. Rg2-g6 (1. Ne2-d4? Bc6xg2)
9) 1. ... Nc5-d3
10) 1. Ba5-b4 (1. Bc6-e4 Rf5xa5)
11) 1. ... Qa8-h8
12) 1. Bg2-d5

Stepping stones

The demand for material suitable for younger children is growing with every passing year. It will come as no surprise that for years there has been a strong trend towards children learning to play chess at an early age. For those clubs which are working with young people, this is in theory a very positive development. Children remain members for longer (the majority of children only give up playing chess when they leave primary school) and become better chess players, which in turn increases the chances that they will remain members. Unfortunately, the reality is not quite so rosy. We are a long way from managing to hang on to these young players. Often, due to the lack of trainers, the children train along with older adolescents. That does not work for more than a short time. The child stops enjoying the training and leaves the club.
So a special way of handling this problem must be found (see below). Perhaps the "Stepping stones" can make a positive contribution here.

The workbooks "Stepping stones 1 and 2" are designed in the first place for children between the ages of six and nine. For children in this age group the workbook for Step 1 has disadvantages. With good will and some care, it can be made to work but it is far from ideal. So what changes have we made compared to that Step 1 workbook?

- The diagrams are bigger.
  Younger child find it easier to recognise larger pieces. In addition there is more space for them to write. Fine motor skills have not yet developed far enough at this age for them to be able to draw the crosses and plus signs in the small diagrams without mistakes creeping in. For that reason there are only six diagrams per page, which has the extra advantage that the amount of work does not appear too great. Moreover, there can be no objection to their doing only some of the tasks.
- In the Stepping stones there is practically no text.
  At the age of six, children can often read without yet being able to grasp the meaning of the text. So there are no reminders.
- The tasks are simpler.
  There are fewer pieces in the diagrams, since young children find it difficult to cope with positions where there is a lot of material on the board.
- Some of the exercises have been changed.

Many basic abilities have not yet been sufficiently well developed. In order for them to learn to pay more attention to what their opponent is doing, we have provided exercises along the lines of: "*Choose the safe route*."

- Many themes have been sub-divided.
  This makes what is being taught more accessible.
- The order of the lessons has been tailored to suit them.
  The lesson "Castling" can now be found between the two lessons on mate. It does no harm if the children take longer to deal with a way of checkmating. The lesson on "The twofold attack" now comes in later. Only the simplest forms of it have been treated.

Children up till the age of six

Children sometimes learn to play chess at the early age of three, above all when there are older siblings who play a lot of chess. Most children can understand the rules of chess from the age of four. At this age, children do not yet need a workbook. But from time to time you can give them a few of the tasks to do.

Children between six and nine

This is the target group for our workbooks. The developmental aspects which are explained from page 5 onwards ("How children learn to play chess") are valid for all age groups. Since younger children learn in different ways from older ones, this target group requires appropriate treatment. The younger the children are, the more important is the way to interact with them. Young children are in a totally different developmental situation from older ones. They still find it difficult to apply their basic abilities.
Since the child is passing through a phase of enormous physical and mental development, acquiring new information and abilities demands a lot of energy. In what follows, some points are mentioned to which we must pay attention, though no attempt has been made to provide an exhaustive list.

Perception
Perception in young children is exercised with completely different senses

than those used by adults, and above all touch plays a great role. They clearly rely far more on their motor skills to acquire information than on the visual and auditory faculties. Experiences are much less frequently expressed verbally. As an answer to the question "How does the bishop move?" it is very likely that the child will indicate a diagonal with a finger and say; "Like that". When we ourselves were children, how often were we told: "Don't point, **tell** me what you want!"
This fact is important in order to deal with a student properly. So it is logical that as often as possible we should allow the children to work at their own board. They should set up on their own boards the position which is on the demonstration board and make the moves on their board. It is also helpful for the children to see how things work. So for that reason it makes sense to bring out a child to the demonstration board. Also when you yourself are showing something, it is important that the visual and auditory elements should be correlated. So when you are moving a piece on the demonstration board and explaining something, the two must happen at the same time: "I am moving the rook into the corner".

The seating arrangement in front of the demonstration board
The spatial orientation of children is not yet perfectly developed. So whenever possible the children should be sitting directly in front of the demonstration board. If necessary, the children can sit next to each other. When they look at the board, their heads should have to move very little, so that their angle of view remains as constant as possible. Above all, this is particularly important when a position has to be set up on their own board. Otherwise, they may have problems reproducing the position, which they may set up as a mirror image or only partially.

Teaching aids
Young children learn in a concrete fashion. All actions should be as concrete as is possible. In the solving of exercises, the use of colours, circles, rectangles, arrows and other ways of marking squares is therefore absolutely necessary.
The children can also create their own visual aids. A few ideas:
- make little pieces to use to mark squares
- draw chess pieces
- make a board of their own from coloured cardboard

Sometimes the immediate surroundings can be used as teaching aids. If you are in a room with tiles on the wall or even the floor, these can be used as a practical way of showing how pieces move.

Additional workbooks

Almost all the students are not yet able to play chess well enough even after finishing the workbook accompanying Step 1. In every game pieces are still being given away and pieces which have been left en prise by the opponent are not always being taken. They do not yet have a sufficiently good overview of what is happening on the board, i.e. they do not yet see all the possible attacking and defensive options. We must tackle this vision as our top priority, or else it will remain a serious weakness for longer than necessary. We should not deal with new material before the children have mastered the basics to a great enough degree. Watch carefully to be sure that they apply in their own games what they have learnt from the lessons and the exercises. Should a child not spot immediately that one of the pieces is hanging, then it makes little sense to want to teach him to look for the double attack (Step 2) in his own games. If, during a game, someone is obliged to look carefully to see if a piece is en prise, then that person will certainly not spot that on the next move two pieces will be in danger!
The best method for the improvement of children's board vision is to let them play games. It is helpful to remember that every child will require a different amount of time to master every phase (as defined in the introduction "How children learn to play chess"). One child may need to play 300 games, another one perhaps 1000. Of course, solving exercises also develops this overview of the board. In addition to the normal workbook for Step 1, we have therefore published more workbooks for this same level.
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.

Step 1 extra

The extra workbook is full of exercises. In the first half of this extra workbook you will find tasks with the same themes as were dealt with in the workbook for Step 1. These serve not only as extra practice but also as revision.
The second half of the workbook contains tasks of the type "Mix". That means that there is no hint as to the theme of the exercise, with the result

that they are more like a real game. Solving exercises of this sort is difficult for those on Step 1. Fortunately the subjects of the exercises are restricted to themes dealt with in Step 1: winning material, delivering mate in one and defending. That was just about everything. For every task the student should go through and tick off the three questions on this list:
– Can I win material?
– Can I deliver mate?
– Is one of my pieces in danger?

You will find the answers to the exercises on the website:
http://www.stappenmethode.nl

Step 1 plus

The themes in the Plus section concentrate very much on the improving of board vision. The material is to a great extent familiar, though there is an important extra: students are asked to choose between two different options. That is true for the lessons “Winning material”, “Defending” (defending is also dealt with in two other lessons) and “Board vision”.
We come up against the spatial aspect, which is still a difficult topic for this Step, in the lessons on mate and draws. We go into both of these concepts in more depth and we set different types of exercise. When a concept is difficult, and “mate” is certainly that, it helps to do a lot of varied practice. In Step 1 the student really has to think, otherwise he won’t succeed. He really has to get into things.
We deal with all the themes in eight Plus lessons. Some of these can be short. The main thing is that the students are able to solve the exercises correctly. For that reason we do not recommend to skip the instruction.

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**
Workbooks:	**Stepping stones 1, Stepping stones 2, Step 1, Step 2, Step 3, Step 4**, **Step 5**, Stap 6
Extra workbooks:	**Step 1 extra**, Stap 2 extra , Stap 3 extra, Stap 4 extra, Stap 5 extra
Plus workbooks:	**Step 1 plus**, Stap 2 plus, Stap 3 plus, Stap 4 plus, Stap 5 plus
Self-Study book:	Stap 6
Thinking ahead:	Stap 2

The English books have been represented in boldface. The other titles are in Dutch (all of them also available in German).

Updated information can be found at our website:
www.stappenmethode.nl

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

Software

The Chess Tutor for Windows is a series of chess learning software based on the ‘Steps Method’.
Chess Tutor Step 1 and **Chess Tutor Step 2** are available as download or as CD-ROM**.** You can first try the Chess Tutor using a free demo version.

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