



Training program for juniors

by GM Alex Baburin

Most children playing chess want to get better at the game – to win more often and do better in tournaments. However, few of them have any idea on how to get most of their time spent on chess. Simply playing more or solving puzzles isn't the most effective method. Here I'd like to offer a simple training program, based on my vast experience as a player and a coach.

In this program I distinguish three groups of students – Beginners, Intermediate Players and Advanced Players. This is what I mean by that:

Beginner is a child who recently learnt the rules of chess and plays a bit at home and/or in school. Such players might have played in 1-2 of our junior tournaments.

Intermediate player is someone who has more experience in chess, with some knowledge of basic chess tactics (forks, pins, etc) and strategy (developing pieces, playing in the centre, etc).

Advanced player knows even more about chess (strategy, tactics, openings, endgames, history, players, etc) and has more tournament experience, perhaps having played some tournaments with adults.

Before getting into details, I'd like to mention three points, which I consider very important for anyone studying chess.

1. You must combine playing chess with studying it. There is a lot to learn about this game – strategy, tactics, openings and endgames. You should examine both your own play and study games of masters.
2. Make a plan of study – say for 2-3 months, outlining what you want to do – i.e, learn a new opening, examine games of Magnus Carlsen or study pawn endgames. Designate time for study and try to stick to your plan. Remember, slow but steady wins the race!
3. Time is a key ingredient in any study. You should not only designate time for your study, but take time when thinking about positions, moves and games.

The latter point is especially important. The inability to think longer than a few seconds is the biggest problem which I see when working with students online.

I recently conducted a few simple experiments, giving puzzles or training positions to my students and asking them to either sit on their hands or put them in a lock position, so they can't use the mouse. The challenge is for them to stay still, think about their next move for 2 minutes and only then make it. Very few manage to do that – many can manage it only for a few seconds! I call this phenomenon a '3-sec rule' – most young players rarely spend more than 3 seconds thinking about a move.

Tools & ways to study.

There are many ways in which one can study chess. The key idea is to see as many master games, positions, endgames, etc as possible – ideally with notes and explanations. When you look at them, take time to think and compare your thoughts with those of masters. These are available tools:

1. Books
2. Chess programs
3. Online chess portals
4. YouTube channels
5. Lessons, including online classes.

Let's examine these tools in more detail.

1. Books

It's often said there are more books written about chess than on all other board games combined. Indeed, there are thousands of chess books written, but one does not need that many. This is what you should have:

- a) Beginner – 1-2 books, like these ones: 'How to beat Your Dad at Chess' and 'Chess Tactics for Kids'.
- b) Intermediate Player – add to those two titles mentioned above a few more books – 'Chess Puzzles for Kids', 'Chess Openings for Kids', 'Chess Endgames for Kids' and 'Chess Strategy for Kids'. You don't need to get them all at once – you can add and study them in the order I gave.
- c) Advanced Player – add another book on tactics (i.e. a collection of puzzles), a collection of annotated games (covering a top tournament or career of a top player) and later add books on specific openings, strategy, calculation, endgames, etc - you should build up your library as you grow as a chess player.

I'd like to mention that all players must have a tournament size chess set at home. Intermediate and advanced players might like to add a score-book (for recording one's games) and a chess clock (i.e. DGT 2000). **NB:** you can buy that and the books which I mentioned online or from me – simply email me if interested. I'll be happy to give advice on this as well.

2. Chess programs

These are mostly for the Advanced players. Most serious players are using programs like ChessBase, Fritz, etc. They are used to record, analyse and annotate games, search chess databases for specific opponents, openings and endgames, etc. Curiously, 10 years ago up-and-coming young chess players used ChessBase a lot more than their modern counterparts, who get stuck with free online tools (like those on lichess or chess.com).

3. Online chess portals

ChessKid (www.chesskid.com) is a perfect place for players of all levels to play and study. ChessKid is a subsidiary of chess.com, the biggest chess portal in the world. I offer 1-year CK gold membership for €30 (€50 for two siblings), which compares favourably with the usual price of \$49. Gold membership give students unlimited access to lessons, puzzles, etc. In addition, students become members of my Grandmaster Chess Club, where I hold regular tournaments, like this one: <https://www.chesskid.com/play/fastchess#t=2229709> – New Year Blitz tournament, 7 rounds; 3 min + 3 sec increment, starts at 17:00, 3 medals for the winners. Or the one on the 5th of January: <https://www.chesskid.com/play/fastchess#t=2229895>, 6 min + 3 sec, 5 rounds, starts at 17:00, a medal for the winner.

In January 2025 I will be promoting chess activity in our CK club, with leaderboard and prizes for the best students. Join us to learn more about chess using ChessKid! If interested, simply email me.

I'd like to add that Advanced players might also like to use other portals – like chess.com and lichess.org In all these portals your games are automatically saved and you can replay and analyse them later, for example using programs called engines (Stockfish is the best known of them!). Games are stored in PGN format, which any chess program can work with.

4. YouTube channels

The most popular chess channel on YouTube is Gotham Chess, by American IM Levy Rozman (<https://www.youtube.com/@GothamChess>), which has over 5m

subscribers and which was the first chess channel to get over 1 billion views. However, there are many other good channels – you can search YouTube for key phrases like “Scholar’s mate’, ‘Chess Tactics’ or ‘Magnus Carlsen’ – and get a free lesson. To Advanced players I recommend PowerPlayChess channel by English GM Daniel King: <https://www.youtube.com/@PowerPlayChess>

5. Lessons

You can learn a lot in chess classes in your school, if you are lucky to have them there. However, even these classes won’t cover everything, so consider joining my online classes. For more details and to register, see:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSerrg3q4J3kmeBgSxaa40LRqILOI9IWOPQ-45fI4Fs9sxKWvA/viewform>

Also, Intermediate and Advanced players can join a chess club in their area. See <https://www.icu.ie/clubs> for details. I have a few places available in my junior chess club in Mount Merrion CC, meeting on Tuesdays between 7 pm and 8 pm. There will be 10 sessions this term, starting on the 7th of January. If you are interested in joining, email me and I’ll send you a link to the registration form.

Finally, I’d like to mention three earlier articles which I posted on my website:

<https://www.alexbaburin chess.com/chess-school/chess-tips/>

<https://www.alexbaburin chess.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/3-seconds-Rule.pdf>

<https://www.alexbaburin chess.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Chess-for-parents-April-2023.pdf>

I hope that this information will help you to become a better chess player! Also, don’t forget to practice – in casual games, online chess or in tournaments like our junior tournament on the 11th of January in St Conleth’s College:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc1YGIbVXkYPgPxpZmal9pXGUbVmWGXaqHQU66_37I3NwTUA/viewform?usp=preview

Best of luck with your chess in 2025!

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