



# **New Zealand Chess Tournaments**

## **A Beginner's Guide**

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## **Chess Tournament Types**

There are a few common chess tournament types played in New Zealand:

### **Classical Chess**

Typically known as 'Weekenders' as they are played on weekends or over long weekends.

2 to 3 days in length, 2 Rounds (games) per day (sometimes 3), so usually 5 to 6 Rounds.

Time Controls (see Chess Clocks and Time Controls) of 60+30 or 90+30.

The South and North Island Chess Championships are slightly longer, played over 4 days, with 2 rounds per day – 8 rounds in total.

The annual New Zealand Chess Championships is another longer classical tournament, usually played over 9 days, with 1 round per day.

These events are almost always NZCF and FIDE-rated (see Ratings).

### **One Day Rapids**

Played over 1 day, 5 to 6 rounds.

Time Control (see Chess Clocks and Time Controls) of 25+5 is typical.

These events are almost always NZCF and FIDE-rated (see Ratings).

### **Interschool Chess**

The NZCF (via clubs and local organisers) runs a series of Regional Interschool events, culminating in a National Finals.

These events are typically run during school time, over 1 day, with 5 to 6 rounds.

Time Control (see Chess Clocks and Time Controls) usually 15+5.

The National Finals are held over 2 days, with 7 rounds, time control (see Chess Clocks and Time Controls) of 25+5 – the finals only would be NZCF-rated.

### **Club Chess**

Your local chess club may hold several chess tournaments as part of usual club activities.



These events are likely to be a mix of classical, rapid and lightning chess played on club nights once a week.

There is a more information about NZCF chess clubs here:

<https://newzealandchess.co.nz/clubs-2/>

Some clubs run rated tournament (both NZCF and FIDE – see ratings).

### **Other Junior Events**

Information about these events can usually be found locally, or through your local chess club.

Typically held on a weekend, they run for a morning or afternoon, have 5 or 6 rounds and a typical time control (see Time Controls) is 15+0 or 15+5.

These events are unlikely to be rated.

### **Finding a Chess Tournament**

The NZCF website has a calendar of events:

<https://newzealandchess.co.nz/events/>

Your local chess club may hold several chess tournaments as part of its usual club activities or may know of tournaments that might be of interest to you. There is a more information about NZCF chess clubs here:

<https://newzealandchess.co.nz/clubs-2/>

International events can be found on the FIDE Calendar:

<https://calendar.fide.com/calendar.php>

### **Registration or Entering a Chess Tournament**

Some tournaments allow entries up until the day of the event, but most will specify a deadline for entries, or charge a late entry fee after a certain date.

We advise entering early, to avoid late entry fees and to avoid entry limitations due to venue capacity. This also helps organisers.

Some events have a PDF or Word form to be completed and emailed to the organisers; others have online registration forms e.g. Google Forms.



### **Typical Entry Fees:**

1 Day Rapid \$40-\$60

3 Day Weekender \$60-\$70

4 Day South or North Island Champs \$80-\$100

9 Day NZ Chess Congress \$150-\$250

Most tournaments consider your entry received once you have paid.

### **On the Day(s) – What to Expect?**

Here we will mainly look at One Day Rapid and Classical Weekender events.

For chess at a club, where you typically play 1 or 2 games a night, once a week, things are usually more relaxed and there will be other club members to guide you.

For Interschool Chess, your chess teacher will be given plenty of information and there should be adults and older kids to help and guide you.

So, back to your first event.

As part of the tournament information that was provided when the tournament was advertised, there will be a schedule for the day or days. This will show when each round starts, and when breaks and prizegiving are.

Arrive early, at least 15 minutes prior to the players' meeting, maybe even earlier. This gives you time to ask any questions, find out where things like the toilets are etc.

These events usually take place in one of the following venues:

- a community hall
- a sports centre
- a bowling club
- a bridge club
- a school Hall

When you enter the playing venue, you will most likely be faced with lots of trestle tables with chess boards & sets and clocks, plus plenty of people of course (hopefully). The boards will be numbered.

There should also be a check-in desk, this is often the table where the Arbiter is located. The Arbiter is the official who oversees the running of the event and ensures the rules are followed.

You need to check in to let the Arbiter know that you are there for the event (even though you may have entered weeks before).



Typically, there is a players' meeting 30 minutes before the start of Round 1. This is where the organiser and Arbiter (official in charge) will welcome the players and provide important information about the day or days ahead. If you are uncertain about anything they say, please don't be afraid to ask!

A Pairings sheet will be posted (sometimes announced as well), this tells you where you are playing for that round (the table or board number), who you are playing, and what colour you are playing.

Bo.	White Player	Points	NW	Result	NB	Points	Black Player
1	Bob O'Malley	0.0	1	...	4	0.0	Craig Hooper
2	Ellen Irvine	0.0	5	...	2	0.0	Chris Knight
3	Colin Mitchell	0.0	3	...	6	0.0	John Snow

So, here:

- Bob is White on table/Board 1 versus Craig
- Ellen is White on 2 vs Chris
- Colin is White on 3 vs John

We suggest sitting down at your board a few minutes before the game is scheduled to start (see Etiquette).

Make sure the pieces on the board are placed correctly, with the Queens on squares of the same colour and ensure that the right-hand corner square closest to you is a light coloured one.

Make sure the chess clock has its lever up on the White side.

Remember you need to record your game (unless it is a Rapid or Lightning time control). There should be a scoresheet for each player at each board, if there isn't, ask the Arbiter for one. (see Chess Notation)

Once the arbiter has said that you may begin, the player with the Black pieces should start the clock – usually this is by pushing an old style 'PLAY' in the middle of the other buttons on the clock (see Chess Clocks and Time Controls)

Keep Etiquette in mind as you play (see Etiquette).

When your game has finished, record the result (1/0/0.5) and sign the scoresheets. You can keep the yellow carbon copy, but usually the winner will take both White original sheets to the Arbiter.

In some events, there will be a small results slip. Complete and sign this if there is one, and again, the winner should take it to the Arbiter.

If there is a separate area for relaxing, or for playing casual games (we usually refer to this as an analysis room) then often players will go there and play through and chat about their game with each other.



Remember to check what time the next round starts so that you can be there on time.

## Rules

Chess is governed by the FIDE Laws of Chess

<https://www.fide.com/FIDE/handbook/LawsOfChess.pdf>

**Rules like Touch Move apply in official chess games.**

Each tournament will also have a set of regulations which cover things like prizes, eligibility for titles, appeals, any deviations from the FIDE Laws of Chess. These regulations are likely to be found in the information published when the tournament was advertised. They may also form part of the entry form and should also be displayed in the playing venue.

## Tournament Pairing Systems

Occasionally a Round Robin pairing system is used – this is where every player plays every other player. This is normally reserved for high calibre events, with 10 players playing 9 games each.

However, most chess tournaments in New Zealand use what is called a Swiss pairing system.

### Swiss Pairing System

In a nutshell, this system pairs players against other players on the same score where possible. So, players who are winning every game end up playing other players who are also winning every game. Likewise, players who are losing most of their games will end up playing others with similar results.

This system is designed to be fair, efficient, and allow for a large number of players.

Note every player plays every round – knockout tournaments are rare in the chess world and rarer in New Zealand.

The number of rounds is fixed in advance of the event, allowing a playing schedule to be published.

Players will generally alternate colours, so White in one round, followed by Black in the next – this is not always the case, but over the course of the whole event, the system will try to even up the colours as much as possible.

In the first round, pairings are based on ratings, higher-rated players play lower-rated players (see Ratings).



After the first round, pairings are determined by the results of the previous round. Players are paired with players on the same score where possible.

Other criteria are also used to ensure that pairings are as fair as possible, taking into account factors like score, ratings, colour alternation, and previously played opponents. Arbiters in New Zealand use pairing software which takes this all into account.

## **Fair Play**

Fair play in chess, like in any competitive game, means playing according to the rules, respecting your opponent and the game, and not seeking any unfair advantages. This includes not cheating, not seeking outside help during a game, and not interfering with other players' gameplay.

- **Following the rules:**

Players must adhere to all the established rules of chess, including move legality, time constraints, and other rules and regulations.

- **Respect for opponents:**

This includes showing good sportsmanship, not engaging in disruptive behaviour, and avoiding any actions that could be seen as disrespectful to your opponent.

- **No cheating or outside help:**

Players must not use any form of cheating, such as using chess engines or other programs to assist them during a game or seeking help from others.

- **Integrity and honesty:**

Fair play requires players to be honest and transparent in their actions, including not manipulating ratings or game outcomes.

- **Reporting violations:**

If a player suspects their opponent is cheating or violating fair play rules, they should report it to the appropriate authorities (e.g. the arbiter, platform or tournament organizer).

## **Fair Play, mobile phones and other electronic devices such as smart watches:**

The following is a fairly standard regulation which applies at most New Zealand tournaments.


During a game, players are forbidden to have a mobile phone, electronic means of communication or any device capable of suggesting chess moves on their person

in the playing venue. Such devices may be stored in a player's bag or jacket, which is to be left under their table or the back of their chair during the game unless permission is given by the Arbiter. Such devices are to be switched off and are not to make any noise. Breaches of this rule will result in loss of game unless the Arbiter decides otherwise. This includes smart watches but not standard analogue or digital watches.

## Chess Notation

Chess notation is recording of your chess game.

All classical or standard chess games must be recorded by both players , using algebraic notation, on official scoresheets:

**NEW ZEALAND CHESS FEDERATION** 

Event \_\_\_\_\_

Round \_\_\_\_\_ Board \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

White \_\_\_\_\_ Black \_\_\_\_\_

	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black
1		31			61	
2		32			62	
3		33			63	
4		34			64	
5		35			65	
6		36			66	
7		37			67	
8		38			68	
9		39			69	
10		40			70	
11		41			71	
12		42			72	
13		43			73	
14		44			74	
15		45			75	
16		46			76	
17		47			77	
18		48			78	
19		49			79	
20		50			80	
21		51			81	
22		52			82	
23		53			83	
24		54			84	
25		55				
26		56				
27		57				
28		58				
29		59				
30		60				

**Result**  
:

White \_\_\_\_\_

Black \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

WWW.NZCF.COM

See pages 18-20 of the FIDE Laws of Chess for more information on algebraic notation:

<https://www.fide.com/FIDE/handbook/LawsOfChess.pdf>

## Chess Clocks and Time Controls

### Chess Clocks

Nowadays, digital chess clocks are used in all official chess tournaments and matches.

Digital chess clocks look like this:



There are many different types, but they all have the dual displays, some kind of levers or buttons to press and some on/ off and start/pause buttons).

Traditionally, Black chooses the side of the board on which the clock is placed – however in official tournaments, the Arbiters (officials) usually place clocks on the side giving them the best view.

### How do chess clocks work?

Each player starts with a certain amount of time (displayed as in the examples above). When it is one player's turn to move, their lever is 'up', and their clock will count down. After moving, they push the lever on the clock (we call this 'pushing or pressing their clock') **with the same hand that they moved their piece with**. This stops their timer and starts their opponent's. Their opponent in turn makes a move, pushes their clock (lever) **with the same hand that they made their move with** and the first player's clock with start to count down.

In some cases, an increment is added, which means that each player gains additional time each time they push their clock.

For example, a time control of 60+30 means each player starts with 60 minutes and gains an increment of 30 seconds each time they push their clock.

When a player runs out of time before the game has been completed (we usually say 'their flag fell' – a reference to days gone by when clocks were analogue and had an actual flag that fell – you can see a small red flag at the top of the analogue clock in the picture above), they lose the game (with one exception – if their opponent cannot win the game by any series of legal moves – usually this happens when one player's flag falls and their opponent does not have enough pieces left to deliver checkmate). The clock will show 0:00 and the display will flash).

Using chess clocks allows organisers to plan events more efficiently, as games are more or less limited to a certain maximum time.



## **Time Controls**

The most common time controls in NZ are:

### **Classical**

60+30 (as above) – games generally last up to 3 hours but can go on longer.

90+30 (each player= starts with 90 minutes and gains an increment of 30 seconds each time they 'push their clock') – games generally last up to 4 hours but can go on longer.

An event like the New Zealand Chess Championships uses a longer, more complicated time control of 90 minutes to complete 40 moves, with an increment of 30 seconds per move, with an additional 30 minutes added after each move 40 has been completed. Failure to complete 40 moves before your flag falls again means loss of (with one exception – if their opponent cannot win the game by any series of legal moves – usually this happens when one player's flag falls and their opponent does not have enough pieces left to deliver checkmate) – games generally last up to 5 hours but can go on longer.

### **Rapid**

25+5 (each player starts with 25 minutes and gains an increment of 5 seconds each time they 'push their clock') – games generally last up to 1 hour but can go on longer.

15+5 (each player starts with 15 minutes and gains an increment of 5 seconds each time they 'push their clock') – games generally last up to 40 minutes but can go on longer. Very popular at interschool tournaments.

15+0 (each player starts with 15 minutes and there is NO increment) – games last a maximum of 30 minutes. Very popular at events where time is limited – school or junior events.

### **Lightning**

A very fast time control - there are only a few lightning or Blitz events in NZ. This type of chess is more typically played within a club.

5+0 (each player starts with 5 minutes, but there are no increments – games last no longer than 10 minutes.

3+2 (each player starts with 3 minutes and gains an increment of 2 seconds each time they 'push their clock') – games generally last up to 10 minutes but can go on longer.



## Etiquette

In any game or sport, it's important not only to play by the rules, but also to play in a way that everyone gets a chance to play their best.

At the start of the game, introduce yourself to your opponent if you don't know them, and shake their hand. This shows respect for your opponent.

During the game, remain silent unless you need to clarify something or talk to an Arbiter (Official).

Don't distract your opponent, especially on their turn to move.

Repeated draw offers can be annoying and distracting.

Keep your hands away from the board until you're ready to move.

At the end of the game, shake your opponent's hand and thank them for the game, no matter what the result is. Even though it can be difficult, don't let your emotions overcome you. Don't forget to put away the pieces and board or set them up for the next game.

## Ratings

Chess ratings are an indication of your chess results (and by implication an indication of your chess playing strength).

Ratings are usually represented by a 4-digit number, with a Grandmaster being at least 2500, the world's top players around 2800 and a beginner being under 1000 as a general guide.

Apart from Lightning or Blitz tournaments, all official chess games in New Zealand will be rated by the NZCF.

The NZCF Ratings are published 4 times a year for 3-month periods ending 31 March, 30 June, 30 September and 31 December.

You can read a bit more about the NZCF Rating Regulations here:

<https://newzealandchess.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/NZCF-Rating-Regulations-2025.pdf>

The NZCF Rating list is published here: <https://newzealandchess.co.nz/new-zealand-ratings-list/>

Quite often, games will also be rated by FIDE (the international chess federation).

You can read more about the FIDE rating system here:

<https://handbook.fide.com/chapter/B022024>



The tournament regulations of any event you play in should say whether the event is NZCF rated, or both NZCF and FIDE rated. For club tournaments on club nights, that information may be on their website.

For any queries of more information contact [admin@newzealandchess.co.nz](mailto:admin@newzealandchess.co.nz)