

# Selected differences between The FIDE Laws of Chess and The US Chess *Official Rules of Chess*

This produce was updated on Sept. 6, 2018 by [Mike Hoffpauir](#), US Chess National Tournament Director and FIDE Arbiter. This document was compiled from multiple sources, including similar documents prepared by NTD and IA Ken Ballou.

This is a brief summary of differences between the FIDE Laws of Chess and the US Chess Official Rules of Chess. This is not meant to be a comprehensive list. Rather it is what I consider a "top ten" list of important differences most likely to arise during tournament play.

## 1. Chess Terms

- a. **Referee:** The term "*Tournament Director*" used in US Chess is called the "*Arbiter*" in FIDE.
- b. **Time Control and how Games are Rated:** Both the FIDE Laws of Chess and the US Chess *Official Rules of Chess* have different rules based on the time control for the game. In both systems the "total time" for each player is based on the base time control, plus time added due to the use of time delay or time increment *over the course of a 60-move game*. For example, in a time control of G/60, d/5, the "total time" for each player is 60 minutes, plus 300 seconds (e.g. 5 minutes, determined by 60 moves times 5 seconds of delay per move) ... for a total of 65 minutes. Similarly, for a Blitz game with a time control of G/5, d/2, the total game time is 7 minutes (e.g. 5 minutes plus 60x2 seconds).

Time Controls in FIDE and US Chess – Total Time is based on a 60-move game	
FIDE – Total time for each player	US Chess – Total time for each player
“Standard” Game: 60 minutes or more	“Regular” Game: 30 minutes or more
“Rapid Play” Game: more than 10 minutes, but less than 60 minutes	“Quick” Game: more than 10 minutes, but less than 30 minutes
Blitz Game: 10 minutes or less	Blitz Game: 5 or more minutes, up to 10 minutes

2. **Rules Differences:** The following table calls attention to selected and significant differences between US Chess regular rules and FIDE standard rules.

	Topic	What FIDE says ...	What US Chess says ...
1	<i>Pairings against Siblings, Relatives, Friends or Club-mates</i>	FIDE <u>does not allow players to request that they not be paired</u> against each other.	US Chess Rule 28T allows players to request that they not be paired against each other.
2	<i>Chess Notation Recording your Moves</i>	You must <u>always</u> write-down your move after you make it. <u>Electronic Notation devices are not allowed</u> unless they are specified in pre-tournament announcements. Scoresheets shall be visible to the Arbiters at all times.	You write-down your move after you make it, especially when using a US Chess-approved electronic notation device. <u>Players using paper scoresheets may write-down their move first</u> unless the rules for the event specify otherwise. Scoresheets must be visible to the TDs at all times.

	Topic	What FIDE says ...	What US Chess says ...
3	<b>Recording your Move</b>  <b>When can you stop taking chess notation??</b>	<p><u><b>You must continue recording moves if you have at least 5 minutes</b></u> on your clock, <u><b>even if your opponent has less than 5 minutes</b></u> remaining.</p> <p>If the time control has an increment of <u><b>at least 30 seconds per move</b></u>, then both players are required to <u><b>record their moves at all times</b></u>.</p>	<p><u><b>Both players may stop recording</b></u> moves for the rest of the time control <u><b>if either player has less than 5 minutes remaining</b></u>.</p> <p>Same as FIDE.</p>
4	<b>Calling the Flag down</b>	The Arbiter can call fallen flags without a claim by the player or the opponent.	Only the players may call a fallen flag.
5	<b>TD or Arbiter calling Illegal Moves or other Infractions</b>	<p>The <u><b>Arbiter will correct all rules violations s/he observes</b></u> (such as illegal moves and "touch move" violations), <u><b>even if the opponent does not make a claim</b></u>. Both players also have the right to make claims, even if the problem was not observed by an Arbiter.</p> <p>In FIDE, 2 Illegal Moves means that player loses if the opponent makes a claim or if the Arbiter observes the illegal moves.</p>	The Tournament Director (TD) corrects illegal moves observed unless either player has less than five minutes remaining in the time control. <u><b>In most US Chess tournaments, the TDs wait for players to make claims</b></u> . In some events, especially scholastic tournaments, the TDs may be restricted from correcting illegal moves unless either player makes a valid claim.
6	<b>Cell Phones or electronic communication devices</b>	Cell phone or other electronic means of communication are not allowed in the playing venue at all, <u><b>even if the device is powered off</b></u> . The penalty is loss of the game, but <u><b>the rules of a competition may specify a lesser penalty</b></u> . The Arbiter may require the player to allow his clothes, bags, or other items to be inspected in private.	A player is forbidden from having a "mobile phone or other electronic means of communication" in the playing venue unless it is completely switched off. A time penalty (usually 10 minutes) is given for the first time a player's cell phone rings, second time is loss of game.
7	<b>Illegal Move Penalties</b>	The <u><b>penalty for the first illegal move</b></u> is to add two minutes to the opponent's time. A second illegal move <u><b>automatically results in loss of the game</b></u> . As of Jan 1, 2018, this rule also applies to FIDE-rated Blitz games.	The penalty for an illegal move is to add two minutes to the opponent's time. There is <u><b>no limit on the number of illegal moves</b></u> a player may make in a game. The TD can impose increasingly severe penalties, and if the illegal moves continue, the TD can call the game lost. <u><b>In Blitz games a properly claimed illegal move is an instant loss</b></u> for the claimant's opponent.
8	<b>Using two hands to make a move, or pressing the clock without moving</b>	<p><u><b>Using two hands to make a move is an illegal move</b></u>.</p> <p><u><b>Pressing the clock without moving is considered an illegal move</b></u>. Both of these violations count toward the "second illegal move results in loss of game" rule (see item 5 above).</p>	US Chess rules do not have an explicit rule requiring moves to be made with one hands (except in blitz). This is implied, however, by rule 16B1. The <u><b>TD may assess a penalty for using both hands to move or for pressing the clock without moving</b></u> . The penalty is likely to be a warning for the first infraction.

	Topic	What FIDE says ...	What US Chess says ...
9	<b>Correcting Illegal Moves</b>	There is <b><u>no limit to how far back in the game an illegal move may be corrected</u></b> . The Arbiter shall use his/her best judgement to determine the times to be shown on the clock. (This does not mean the Arbiter must automatically give time back to both players.)	If an illegal move is not corrected <b><u>within ten moves</u></b> , the illegal move stands. If an illegal move is corrected, the <b><u>players do not get back any time</u></b> they lost after the illegal moves occurred. In Blitz, or in time pressure during a sudden death time control, the illegal move stands after two moves have been made.
10	<b>Pawn Promotion #1</b>	If a player moves a Pawn to the last rank and <b><u>presses the clock without replacing the Pawn with a promotion piece, the player has completed an illegal move</u></b> (see Topic 6, above, for implications) and the Pawn shall be replaced by a Queen of the same color as the Pawn. <b><u>By leaving the Pawn on the last rank and pressing the clock, the player loses the right to choose a different promotion piece</u></b> , even if promoting the Pawn to a Queen causes stalemate. Because of the illegal move, the Arbiter will award 2 minutes of time to the opponent.	If a player does not replace a Pawn on the last rank with a promotion piece and presses the clock, the opponent may immediately press the clock or stop the clock and summon a director (advisable in an increment time control). The player does not lose the right of choice of promotion piece, and this is <b><u>not treated as an illegal move</u></b> .
11	<b>Pawn Promotion #2</b>	When promoting a piece, the piece chosen becomes "official" once the selected piece <b><u>touches the promotion square</u></b> .	Same as FIDE. The change took effect on January 1 <sup>st</sup> 2018.
12	<b>Using an upside down Rook to represent a Queen</b>	<b><u>You may not use an inverted Rook</u></b> to mean "Queen" when promoting a Pawn. If a promotion piece is not readily available, the player must stop the clock and ask the Arbiter for assistance. <b><u>An upside-down Rook is treated as promotion to a Rook</u></b> . If the Arbiter sees this, he will turn the Rook right side up and the game continues.	The US Chess rules explicitly state that, when promoting a Pawn, <b><u>an upside-down Rook is considered a Queen</u></b> .
13	<b>Complete Scoresheet &amp; Calling your own Flag</b>	It is <b><u>not necessary to have a complete scoresheet</u></b> to win on time in a non-sudden death time control.  Calling your own flag to prevent the opponent from filling in moves on an incomplete score sheet won't help.	To claim a win on time in a non-sudden death time control, a player <b><u>must have a reasonably complete scoresheet</u></b> with no more than three missing or incorrect move pairs for the time control.  A player may call his own flag as a means of preventing the opponent from filling in missing moves on the scoresheet. (Once the flag has been called, the opponent may not update the scoresheet.)

	Topic	What FIDE says ...	What US Chess says ...
14	<i>Castling</i>	When castling, the player <b><u>must touch the King first</u></b> . If the player touches the Rook first, castling with that Rook is not allowed, and the touch move rule is applied to the Rook. Attempting to Castle by moving the Rook first is an Illegal Move.	When castling, the player must touch the King first (or the King and Rook at the same time). However, a variation of rule <b>10I2</b> allows the player to touch the Rook first.
15	<i>Late Arrival by one or both players</i>	The "zero tolerance" rule says that, unless specified otherwise, <b><u>a player who is late at all for the start of the round forfeits the game</u></b> . The <b><u>rules of a competition may specify a different "default time"</u></b> for the tournament. If the rules of the competition allow players to arrive late and both players are late, all the elapsed time comes off White's clock—even if Black is not there.	The <b><u>game is lost by a player who arrives at the chessboard more than one hour late</u></b> . If both players are late, the elapsed time from the start of the round until the first player arrives is divided in half, and that time is subtracted from each player's clock. (So, for instance, if the first player is forty minutes late, twenty minutes should be subtracted from both sides of the clock.)
16	<i>Draws when the Time Control has expired</i>	<p>If a player exceeds the time control the game is a Draw if there is absolutely <b><u>no possible sequence of legal moves</u></b> with the pieces on the board that could produce checkmate.</p> <p>In a game where White has mating material, and Black does not, if White's flag falls the game is a draw. If Black's flag falls, White wins because White has mating material. Remember, "mating material" in FIDE rules means mate by any possible sequence of moves, no matter how foolish those moves might be.</p>	<p>In a game where <b><u>one player has only 2 Knights and a King, and the other has a lone King, the game is a Draw</u></b>, even if either player exceeds the time control. The TD, upon seeing such a position, also may immediately intervene and rule the game a Draw.</p> <p>"Mating material" in FIDE and US Chess are not the same.</p>