

# Exeter Chess Club: Choosing an Opening Repertoire

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- 1. d4 Lines without 1 ...d5, 1. . . . , ♟f6;
- 1. d4 ♟f6 2. Lines without 2. c4;
- 1. d4 ♟f6 2. c4 Lines without 2. . . . , e6, 2. . . . , g6

**Dr. Dave's advice: Leave these alone** except to work out what to do if someone played them against you. Mostly these are good for surprise value, but you can only surprise me once, and next time I'll be ready for you. The main lines are the main lines because they are the strongest openings. Avoid theory, sure, but don't handicap yourself. The honorable exception to this among these openings are the lines of the Reti/English complex (1. ♟f3/ 1.c4), which are slow but deep and strong. I'd still leave them alone until you are sure you know what you are doing. **Be prepared to defend against them as Black:** I recommend using a Dutch formation.

## 1 The Bottom Line {D}

"A knowledge of tactics is the foundation of positional play. This is a rule which has stood its test in chess history and one which we cannot impress forcibly enough upon the young chess player. "A beginner should avoid the Queen's Gambit and French Defence and play open games instead! While he may not win as many games at first, he will in the long run be amply compensated by acquiring a thorough knowledge of the game" - RICHARD RETI, Masters of the Chessboard

See also a recent post.

## 2 Comments on openings {C}

(following ECO codes)

### 2.1 Irregular openings

- 1. Lines without 1. e4, 1. d4;

### 2.2 Semi-open games

- 1. e4 Lines without 1. . . . , c5, 1. . . . , e6, 1. . . . , e5
- 1. e4 c5

**Dr. Dave's advice: Play these second** after you have got the hang of **C: Open Games**. This section includes some of the most exciting and important openings in chess, like the Sicilian, but they are not IMHO for beginners.

### 2.3 Open Games (and French Defence)

- 1. e4 e6
- 1. e4 e5

**Dr. Dave's advice: Play these first** - this is what Reti advises above. The anomaly is the

French - a half-open defence that ECO groups under C. Despite Reti's admonition, I would not object to a relative beginner playing the French - it is a solid defence in which most of the ideas are easy to understand, and Black's pieces often come to similar squares in each line.

## 2.4 Closed Games (and Grunfeld Defence, a semi-closed line)

- 1. d4 d5
- 1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 g6 + d 7-d5

**Dr. Dave's advice: Play these last of all;** they are among the most demanding of openings. They are slow, which may lead you to think they are safer, but things can go horribly wrong for the novice and there is no point trying these until you are sure you know what you are doing - say, that you are familiar with the material in the 'Strategy' section of the canon. There are one or two 'open' lines that start 1.d4, like the Colle System.

## 2.5 Semi-Closed Games

- 1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6
- 1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 g6 ' d 7-d5

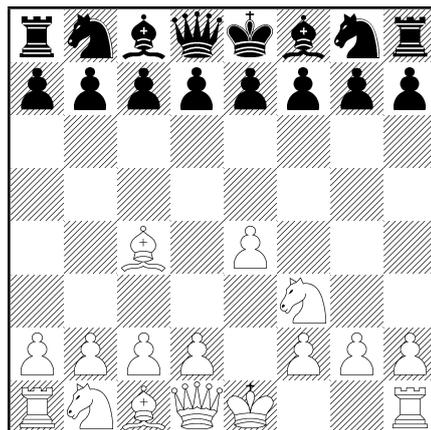
**Dr. Dave's advice: Play these third;** they are, like the semi-open defences, very tasty, but rather strong meat for inexperienced players. You will need to know what to play against 1.d4 as Black, particularly as you improve, and my recommendation is to adopt a counter-attacking line like the Budapest Gambit or the Stonewall Variation of the Dutch Defence

## 3 Putting together a repertoire of variations {B}

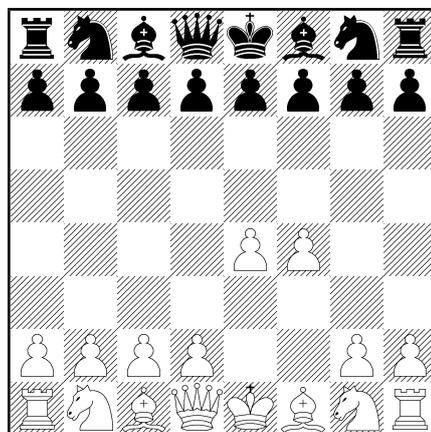
**What do you hope for when you play 1.e4?**

Which opening you choose after 1. ... , e5 will depend on what sort of player you are. What I'd like to do below is suggest how you might proceed if Black doesn't reply 1. ... , e5. First you need to choose a basic plan of campaign:

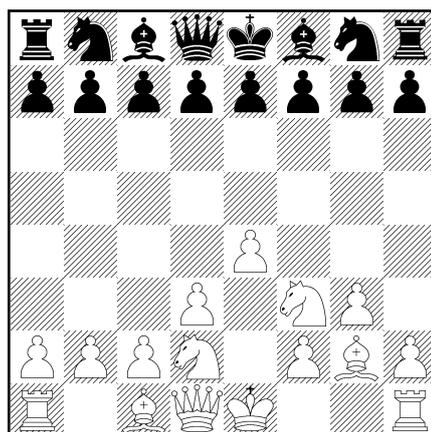
- Fast attacking game with pieces



- Slower attacking game with f4



- King's Indian Attack with g3



- Fast attacking game with pieces

- Giuoco Piano (my main recommendation for junior players) or
- Scotch Game

- **Slower attacking game with f4**

- Vienna Gambit or
- King’s Gambit)

- **King’s Indian Attack with g3**

- KIA with ( 1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. g3 or
- in the Vienna ( 1. e4 e5 2. ♘c3 ♘c6 3. g3)

Which sort of player are you? Larry Evans used to say, **The Crunch or the Crouch?** Hopefully, one of these set-ups appeals to you more than the others: the brisk, the direct, or the more flexible?

[Sadly, the KIA lines haven’t a lot of force and are not very good lines to adopt against 1. ..., e5.]

But the point is, how well does your chosen repertoire fit together? Once I used to play the following lines, together with the King’s Gambit:

Alekhine ( 1. e4 ♘f6) Chase variation ( 1. e4 ♘f6 2. e5 ♘d5 3. c4 ♘b6 4. c5 ♘d5 5. ♙c4 e6 6. ♘c3) Caro-Kann ( 1. e4 c6) Panov-Botvinnik Attack ( 1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. e×d5 c×d5 4. c4) French ( 1. e4 e6) Advance Variation ( 1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. e5) Pirc/Modern ( 1. e4 ...d6/...g6) King’s Indian Attack ( 1. e4 d6 2. d4 ♘f6 3. ♘c3 g6 4. ♘ge2 and 5. g3, 6. ♙g2) Sicilian ( 1. e4 c5) Chamaeleon Variation ( 1. e4 c5 2. ♘c3 ... 3. ♘ge2)

This was an awful lot to keep track of, but more importantly, it didn’t really combine well. Against the Alekhine I played fast, against the Caro I played medium, against the French and Pirc I played slow; the Panov line is main-line established theory with lots to learn and keep track of, the Chamaeleon is a new and obscure line where you have to think at the board.

Now, I’m sure a better idea, and the right idea, is to play similarly against each opening. For example, if you like **gambits** and play the Danish Gambit against 1. ..., e5, try and find a gambit against the lot....

Alekhine ( 1. e4 ♘f6) ( 1. e4 ♘f6 2. ♙c4 ♘×e4 3. ♙×f7+ ♗×f7 4. ♗h5+ g6 5. ♗d5+) or Blackmar-Diemer ( 1. e4 ♘f6 2. ♘c3 d5 3. d4 d×e4 4. f3) Caro-Kann ( 1. e4 c6) Fantasie Variation ( 1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. f3 e5 4. ♘f3 e×d4 5. ♙c4) French ( 1. e4 e6) Variation, Milner Barry Gambit ( 1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. e5 c5 4. c3 ♘c6 5. ♘f3 ♗b6 6. ♙d3 c×d4 7. c×d4 ♙d7 8. O-O ♘×d4 9. ♘×d4/ 9. ♘g5!?) Pirc/Modern ( 1. e4 ...d6/...g6) I don’t know any gambits for White in the Pirc but against the Modern you can try... the Monkey’s Bum! ( 1. e4 g6 2. ♙c4 ♙g7 3. ♗f3 e6 4. d4 ♙g7 5. ♘c3 ♙×d4) [An

invention of Streatham Chess Club, who showed it to one member who said “Well, if that works, I’m a monkey’s bum!”] Sicilian ( 1. e4 c5) Morra Gambit: ( 1. e4 c5 2. d4 c×d4 3. c3 d×c3 4. ♘×c3 or 3. ... Nf6 4. e5 ♘d5 5. ♙c4 ♗c7 6. ♗e2)

I don’t think the Monkey’s Bum is really any good ( 2. ..., d6), but at least we’re thinking along the right lines, even if this isn’t the repertoire we settle on.

”A 1500 player will lose a pawn anyway about every 15 moves, so you might as well invest a pawn to sharpen your tactics.” – Tim Sawyer

Here’s a repertoire based on **pawn advances and space advantages**:

Alekhine ( 1. e4 ♘f6) Four pawns variation ( 1. e4 ♘f6 2. e5 ♘d5 3. c4 ♘b6 4. d4 d6 5. f4 ) Caro-Kann ( 1. e4 c6) Advance Variation ( 1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. e5) French ( 1. e4 e6) Advance Variation ( 1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. e5) Pirc/Modern ( 1. e4 ...d6/...g6) Three Pawns Attack ( 1. e4 d6 2. d4 ♘f6 3. c3 g6 4. f4) Sicilian ( 1. e4 c5) Big Clamp Variation ( 1. e4 c5 2. d3 (...) 3. f4)

Now, what sort of player are you? Whether you like lively piece attacks, slow pawn advances that you can use to force open lines or more flexible systems, there is a repertoire here for you.

**Note:** I simply haven’t the courage to take on a repertoire which includes the **Open Sicilian**, and my experience of playing the Black side of the Sicilian is that not many White club players have either! So I’ll leave those lines to you and any time you have to do your own research. I have a feeling it’s something you come to study as your chess improves. Mine has yet to improve enough...

Let’s have a look at some variations that fit together.

### Piece attack

Alekhine ( 1. e4 ♘f6) ( 1. e4 ♘f6 2. ♘c3 d5 3.e×d5 ♘×d5 4. ♙c4) Caro-Kann ( 1. e4 c6) Main line with 7. ♘h3 ( 1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. ♘c3 d×e4 4. ♘×e4 ♙f5 5. ♘g3 ♙g6 6. h4 h6 7. ♘h3) French ( 1. e4 e6) Alekhine-Chatard Attack ( 1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. ♘c3 ♘f6 4. ♙g5 ♙e7 5. e5 ♘fd7 6. h4) Pirc/Modern ( 1. e4 ...d6/...g6) Austrian Attack ( 1. e4 d6 2. d4 ♘f6 3. ♘c3 g6 4. f4) Sicilian ( 1. e4 c5) Closed: without d4 Rossolimo Variation ( 1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 and 3. ♙e2 (idea 4. c3) or 3. ♙b5(+))

### Slow attack with f4

Alekhine ( 1. e4 ♘f6) (Irregular) ( 1. e4 ♘f6 2. d3 and 3.f4 (sadly, this line has no real force and is not a very good line to adopt) Caro-Kann ( 1.

e4 c6) (Irregular) ( 1. e4 c6 2. ♘c3 d5 3.f4 (a line of the Dunst opening, ( 1.♘c3) French ( 1. e4 e6) (Irregular) ( 1. e4 e6 2. ♘c3 d5 3.f4 (a line of the Dunst opening, ( 1.♘c3) Pirc/Modern ( 1. e4 ...d6/...g6) ( 1. e4 d6 2. d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4. f4 (Austrian Attack) Sicilian ( 1. e4 c5) Closed: without d4 ( 1. e4 c5 2. f4 (Grand Prix Attack) or ( 1. e4 c5 2. ♘c3 ♘c6 3. g3 with 4. ♗g2, 5. d3, 6. f4 (Closed Variation)

### King's Indian Attack

Alekhine ( 1. e4 ♘f6) KIA vs. Alekhine ( 1. e4 ♘f6 2. d3 and 3.g3/Bg2 (sadly, this line has no real force and is not a very good line to adopt) Caro-Kann ( 1. e4 c6) KIA vs. Caro-Kann ( 1. e4 c6 2. d3 d5 3.♘d2) French ( 1. e4 e6) KIA vs. French( 1. e4 e6 2. d3 d5 3.♘d2) Pirc/Modern ( 1. e4 ...d6/...g6) King Fianchetto Variation( 1. e4 d6 2. d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4. ♘ge2 and 5. g3, 6. ♗g2) Sicilian ( 1. e4 c5) Closed: without d4 KIA vs. Sicilian( 1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 and 3.g3)

There are some wrinkles to be ironed out of these suggestions, but I hope they set you thinking in the right way.

## 4 Playing Black and White {A}

It makes a lot of sense for your Black repertoire to be in keeping with your White one.

The easy way out is to play Black openings in reverse, of which the commonest and best of these is probably the King's Indian Attack. But psychologically it's not the same and practically it's not as effective. (See remarks on the Stonewall Dutch ).

The right idea I think is to play openings which have the same ideas - either the same **structure** or at least the same **attitude**. So if you play the English with g3, a line which is structurally similar is the Hyper-Accelerated Fianchetto variation of the Sicilian ( 1. e4 c5, 2. ♘f3 g6), and against 1.d4 the same 'square game' can be had in the Nimzo-Indian, although this is structurally very different. There are king's fianchetto lines in most openings, and strongpoint lines too.

Some suggestions if you are...

1. An attacking player who plays 1. e4, try:
  - *Against 1.d4*: Budapest Gambit, Benoni, Grunfeld
  - *Against 1.e4*: Open Lopez, Petroff, Sicilian Dragon (with ...g6)

2. An attacking player who plays 1. d4/ 2.c4, try:

- *Against 1.d4*: King's Indian, Dutch
- *Against 1.e4*: French Winawer, Closed Lopez,

3. An attacking player who plays the Colle System, try:

- *Against 1.d4*: Semi-Slav Defence or Cambridge Springs (same structure as Colle)
- *Against 1.e4*: Sicilian Paulsen (with ...e6)

4. A solid player who plays 1. e4, try:

- *Against 1.d4*: Nimzo-Indian, QGD, Tarasch Defence, Old Indian
- *Against 1.e4*: Petroff, Philidor (structure like Old Indian)

5. A solid player who plays 1. d4, try:

- *Against 1.d4*: Slav, Queen's Gambit Orthodox Defence.
- *Against 1.e4*: Caro-Kann, Classical French

I would be interested to know about other's preferences. I stuck to the same opening repertoire for the best part of ten years: English Opening with g3 as White, Sicilian and English Defence as Black - all aiming to hit at an opponent's centre, and of course with a strong structural link between the English and Sicilian. The English Defence "feels" more like the English Opening to me than the Queen's-side defence which is structurally most similar, the Benoni.

I think my current recommendation for myself [which must also be true for you :-) ], is two fold:

1. **Be prepared to play any sort of position.** To be prepared to play any sort of position [if not any opening] for either colour is the ideal; you may always have strengths and weaknesses, but avoiding certain sorts of positions altogether seems unhealthy. Try them out in friendly and blitz games, and see if the rest of your game improves.
2. **Be prepared to play main lines.** They are the main lines because they are the best moves, and you may be surprised to find how many players will avoid a main line 'on principle' - perhaps choosing a playable alternative, but often an inferior one.

I find that the combination of the two is quite liberating, at least in friendly games, and I'm sure I'm a more rounded player for it. I haven't quite had the courage (or foolhardiness) to walk into my opponent's main lines when titles are at stake, you are going to get my favourite defence, but it's quite satisfying to invite the club gambiteer to play a gambit and then outplay them in their own game.