

# The ABCDE Methodology

A method for listing and choosing candidate chess moves

## What is ABCDE?

ABCDE is a mnemonic used to list various types of candidate moves from which they can be easily prioritized for further review.

Each letter of ABCDE indicates a specific type of move:

- “A” indicates an attacking move (i.e. a threat)
- “B” indicates a blocking move or an interposition
- “C” indicates any capture or check
- “D” refers to a defending move
- “E” indicates an evacuation move (i.e. an escape, manoeuvre, or intermezzo)

## Why use ABCDE?

The ABCDE Method:

- Helps one to avoid tunnel vision
- Eliminates being surprised by an opponent’s move
- Helps you evaluate the strength of your opponent’s move
- Ensures that wide selections of candidate moves are considered.
- Is an easy way to look for a better move than that which is based on an initial gut feeling
- Helps to avoid blunders
- Provides structure when you find it hard to focus or concentrate
- Helps one to avoid reaction moves that may be made after one does blunder.
- Helps one maintain objectivity especially when under pressure

## When to use ABCDE?

Use the ABCDE Method:

- When you no longer are in-book (e.g. between opening and middle-game)
- When you can’t see any tactical patterns
- Whenever you do not have or cannot think of a plan
- When you are under pressure to defend accurately
- When you begin losing focus or concentration
- After a series of forced moves
- Whenever you’re deciding about an unforced exchange of pieces or pawns
- Whenever you want

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## How to use ABCDE?

Step 1: Start by looking at your opponent's type "A" (attacking or threatening) moves. We will assume that you are playing White.

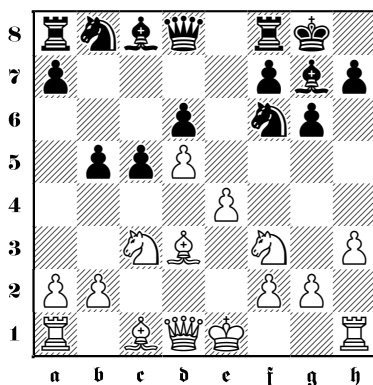


Figure 1

- I) So, beginning with the pawns, and pretending it is Black's turn to move, list all the pawn moves that threaten your pieces. For example,
  - b4 attacks the White knight
  - c4 attacks the White light-squared bishopThere are no more type "A" pawn moves for Black.
  
- II) Continue by looking at your opponent's minor piece type "A" moves  
Starting with the knights, list moves like:
  - Ng4 attacking the f2 pawn and simultaneously freeing the bishop on g7 to attack Nc3Looking at the Bishops, list moves like:
  - moving Black's light-squared bishop anywhere along the c8-g4 diagonal where it continues to attack the h3 pawn
  - and Bb7
  
- III) Continue by looking at your opponent's major piece type "A" moves
  - List Re8 attacking the e4-pawn, and
  - Moving the Queen to a5 attacks the a2-pawn and Nc3.

There are no more type "A" moves for Black.

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## How to use ABCDE? (Continued)

Step 2: Search for your opponent's type "B" (blocking) moves. We still assume that you are playing White.

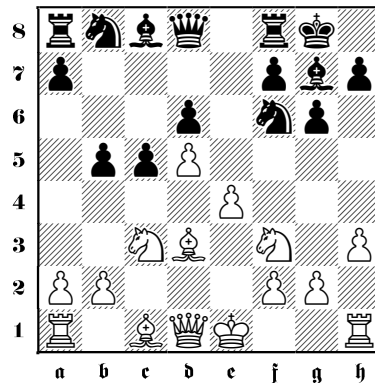


Figure 1

- l) Starting with the Pawns, if it were Black's move, then only c4 blocks the threat by the Bishop on d3 from capturing the b5-pawn.

There are no other type "B" moves for Black.

Step 3: Look at your opponent's type "C" (captures and checks) moves.

- l) The only captures are Nxe4, Nxd5, Bxh3.  
There are no checks that Black can place on White's King.  
Therefore, there are no other type "C" moves for Black.

Step 4: Look at your opponent's type "D" (defending) moves.

- l) The only defending moves are a6, Qa5, and Qb6.  
There are no other defending moves for Black.

Step 5: Look at your opponent's type "E" (evacuation) moves.

- l) The only evacuation move is b4 which escapes the threat of Nxb5 or Bxb5.  
There are no other evacuation moves for Black.

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## Summary of Black's moves

Let's now sum up what we have discovered about your opponent's moves. We still assume that you are playing White. Notice that some moves fall into more than one category.

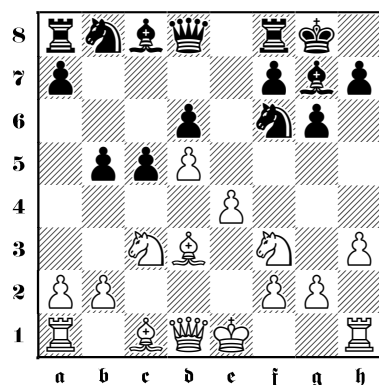


Figure 1

The Type "A" moves for Black are:

- b4, c4, Bd7, Be6, Bf5, Bg4, Bb7, Ng4, Re8, Qa5
- NOTE: any move by the Knight on f6 allows the Bishop on g7 to attack Nc3

The Type "B" moves for Black are:

- c4

The Type "C" moves for Black are:

- Nxe4, Nxd5, Bxh3

The Type "D" moves for Black are:

- a6, Qa5, Qb6

The Type "E" moves for Black are:

- b4

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## Black's main candidate moves

We use our summary of our opponent's moves to determine the most likely and strongest candidates to analyse.

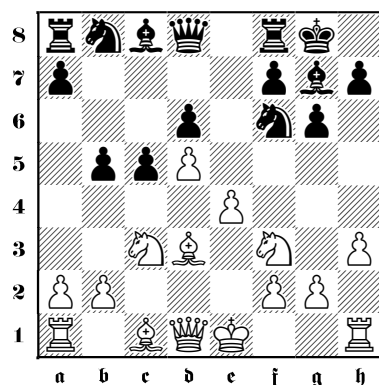


Figure 1

Look first at:

- 1) Moves that win a piece or pawn outright
- 2) Forcing moves such as "C" and "A" type moves
- 3) Moves in more than one type category ( the more, the better )

Primary multiple type candidate moves for Black are:

- c4 – multiple type ("A" and "B")
- Qa5 – multiple type ("A" and "D")
- b4 – multiple type ("A" and "E")

Secondary candidate moves for Black would be:

- Ng4 – Single type "A"
- Re8 – Single type "A"

Inspection of all the type "C" moves indicates that Black will simply lose a piece. Therefore, no "C" type moves are listed as candidate moves.

**As a result, the primary candidate moves to consider if it were Black to move are c4, Qa5 and b4.**

NOTE: If your opponent continually plays one of the top candidate moves, then you know they are a strong player.

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## How to use ABCDE? (Continued)

Step 6: Search for your own type “A” (threatening) moves. We still assume that you are playing White.

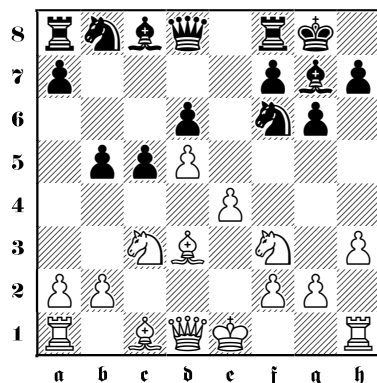


Figure 1

- I) Starting with the Pawns, if it is White’s move, the type “A” moves are: a4, b4, and e5. There are no other type “A” pawn moves for White.
- II) Continue by looking at your minor piece type “A” (threatening) moves.
  - The minor piece type “A” moves are: Na4, Ne5, Ng5, Be3, Bf4, Bg5, Bh6, Bc4, Be2, and Bf1.
- III) Continue by looking at your major piece type “A” moves
  - The major piece type “A” moves are: Qb3, Qa4 and Qe2 (forming a Bishop-Queen battery threatening Black’s b-pawn.)

Step 7: Look for your type “B” (blocking) moves.

- I) There are no type “B” moves for White.

Step 8: Look for your type “C” (captures and checks) moves.

- I) The type “C” moves for White are: Nxb5 and Bxb5.

Step 9: Look for your type “D” (defending) moves.

- I) The defending moves for White are: Qe2, Qb3, Qc2, Bg5 (by indirectly pinning the Knight on f6 to Black’s Queen), Bc4, Nd2, and Ng5.

Step 10: Look for your type “E” (evacuation) moves.

- II) The type “E” moves for White are: e5 (the pawn move is to escape the Knight on f6’s threat)

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## Summary of White's moves

Let's now sum up what we have discovered about your own moves. We still assume that you are playing White. Notice again that some moves fall into more than one category.

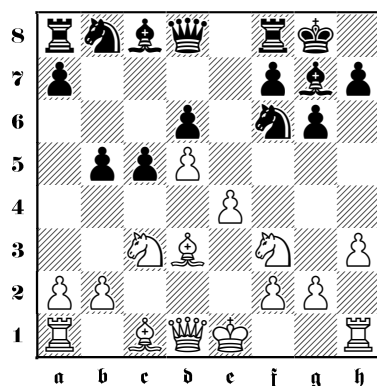


Figure 1

The Type "A" moves for White are:

- a4, b4, e5, Na4, Ne5, Ng5, Be3, Bf4, Bg5, Bh6, Bc4, Be2, Bf1, Qb3, Qa4, Qe2

The Type "B" moves for White are:

- None

The Type "C" moves for White are:

- Nxb5, Bxb5

The Type "D" moves for White are:

- Qe2, Qb3, Qc2, Bg5, Bc4, Nd2, and Ng5

The Type "E" moves for White are:

- e5

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## White's main candidate moves

We use our summary of our own moves to determine the most likely and strongest candidates for us to analyse.

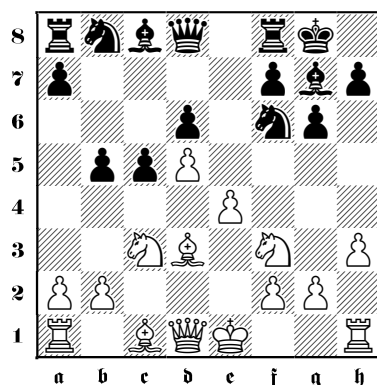


Figure 1

We again look first at:

- 1) Moves that win a piece or pawn outright
- 2) forcing moves such as "C" and "A" type moves
- 3) Moves in more than one type category ( the more, the better )

Our Primary moves that win a piece or pawn outright are:

- Nxb5
- Bxb5

Our Secondary multiple type candidate moves for White are:

- e5 – multiple type ("A" and "E")
- Ng5 – multiple type ("A" and "D")
- Bg5 – multiple type ("A" and "D")
- Qb3 – multiple type ("A" and "D")
- Qe2 – multiple type ("A" and "D")

Therefore, the top candidate moves to consider if it were White to move have to be Nxb5 and Bxb5.  
(NOTE: because Nxb5 allows a check for Black, we would predict that Bxb5 is the preferable capture)

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## Results of Rybka 3.1's analysis

Let's see how our selection of candidate moves is compared to by computer software analysis.

NOTE: Rybka 3.1 is rated at over 3000 ELO

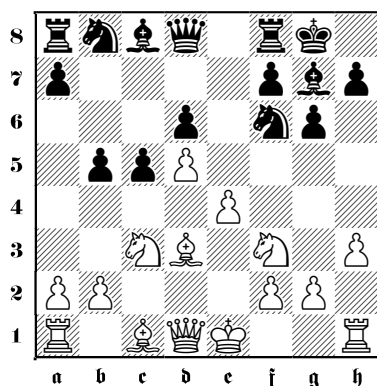


Figure 1

In the above position, with Black to move, Rybka 3.1 selected **c4** as the top candidate move, exactly as the ABCDE method predicted. Recall that our top three choices with Black to move were **c4**, **Qa5** and **b4**.

In the above position, with White to move, Rybka 3.1 selected **Bxb5**, again exactly as the ABCDE method predicted.

So, as you can see by using the ABCDE method, you should be able to select reasonable candidate moves to play. Under different conditions, priorities will change and you still have to use experience to determine how to prioritize the resulting moves, and evaluate them correctly, but at least you have a method that you can fall back on to make move selections should the need arise.

Play well and may the last blunder be your opponent's.