

ILLEGAL MOVES AND OTHER IRREGULARITIES

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The content of the following article will be most probably a triviality for most arbiters. The reason behind its writing is that during my career, especially when training novice arbiters and interacting with players, I often find myself in the situation where it's not clear for many of them what counts as an illegal move, what is an infringement of the regulations, and what is an irregularity. And most importantly: what is the difference between handling them. For the sake of simplicity, we're talking about standard games unless stated otherwise.

Let's start with the 'common knowledge': illegal moves. What all kind of them have in common is the following: The penalty for a completed illegal move (don't forget: an illegal move is only completed after the clock has been pressed by the player) is 2 additional minutes mandatorily given to the opponent for the first occurrence from the player, and loss of the game for the second one. Unless the opponent cannot checkmate the player's king by any series of legal moves from the given position, of course. **Please note:** the aforementioned penalties are for illegal moves only! Not for other infringements of the laws of chess, unless it's explicitly stated otherwise, like for an incorrect draw claim.



Article 7.5 of the Laws of Chess deals with illegal moves thoroughly – although the definition of a 'normal' illegal move can be found in 3.10.2: "A move is illegal when it fails to meet the relevant requirements of Articles 3.1 – 3.9.", namely the moves of the pieces. Also, if a player forgets to promote his pawn, or even if he lets it at the promotion square because he's sure that his opponent will capture it immediately, so why bother with replacing it to anything, and presses the clock, it's an illegal move. And a mandatory queen for him as a 'reward'.

Pressing the chessclock without making the move is also considered and penalised as if an illegal move. But please be reasonable! As it's written in the Arbiters' Manual: If a player restarts the opponent's clock instead of pausing it an arbiter may regard this as an accident and punish it less severely. For example: Player B makes an illegal move. Player A, instead of pausing the clock, restarts the opponent's clock. Is this an infringement of Article 7.5.3? In this case Player A had not deliberately started Player B's clock. Where an opponent's clock may have been started in error the arbiter must decide if this action constitutes an illegal move or a distraction.

And now comes the first delicacy: if a player uses two hands to make a single move and presses the clock, it's also considered and penalised as if an illegal move.

But beware: a lot of people believe that this applies to the situation when the player uses one of his hands for making the move and the other one for pressing the clock. It's not true! The latter counts as an improper clock handling, and according to 6.2.3 and 6.2.4 it shall be penalised in accordance with Article 12.9! Usually a simple warning is enough for start. And that's all for illegal moves! Anything else that happens on or around the board is NOT an illegal move.

For example if a player displaces the pieces, presses the clock and starts reinstating them in the opponent's move and time, it's just an irregularity, discussed in 7.4.

In most cases a warning will do to penalise the offending player, but of course in more serious cases (like doing it deliberately to gain time to think) the penalty can include time adjustment or be even harsher, according to most arbiters' favourite article, 12.9.

I also frequently get the request from lower level players to penalise their opponents for illegal move after they touched a piece with which making a legal move is possible, but made a move with another. But this is also not an illegal move, just the infringement of Article 4: the act of moving the pieces. Article 12.9 applies here as well.

These are the most common types of misbeliefs (and sometimes mistakes) I meet when interacting with lower level players and not very experienced arbiters. I hope I didn't bore you with this short clarification, and helped to solve some misunderstandings for some of you!

Finally a very interesting and rather recent situation from my personal career: In a standard game the player with black pieces arrived back to his board, grabbed his opponent's white rook and captured his own black queen with it. After both of them started to laugh, I asked them what happened, and informed Black that he has to capture the rook with his queen, as he touched both and the move is legal. He resigned immediately, but afterwards he asked me an interesting (and absolutely unnecessary) question: why haven't I given two minutes to his opponent's time for the illegal move?

Well, my answer may have been a bit surprising: because it wasn't an illegal move. In Article 3.1-3.9 it's not written anywhere that it's not allowed to capture your own piece with one of the opponent's. Of course it's logical to consider its penalty as of an illegal move and give 2 additional minutes to the opponent (Art. 12.9 allows it), but in the given situation it wouldn't have changed anything. White had lots of time and from that point a queen ahead, so I considered it best not to adjust anything on the clock. Would I declare the game loss for black if he already had an illegal move before? I don't think so. But it's up for everyone to decide.

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