Guide to Chess Notation

Have you ever wondered if there was a way to record your games so that you could study them again later? Well, there is: chess players have developed a system known as *algebraic notation* specifically for this purpose.

Algebraic notation is divided into two basic parts: **the piece being moved** and **the square it is being moved to.**

Every chess piece has an abbreviation in algebraic notation; see the table below:

Type of Piece	Abbreviation in Algebraic Notation
King	K
Queen	Q
Rook	R
Bishop	B
Knight	N
Pawn	None

Generally speaking, a piece's abbreviation will be the same as the first letter of the piece's name.

Notice two things:

a) The knight's notation is *N*. Although the word "knight" starts with a K, we already use K for king.
b) We do not use any special symbol or abbreviation for pawns (recall that pawns do not count as pieces).

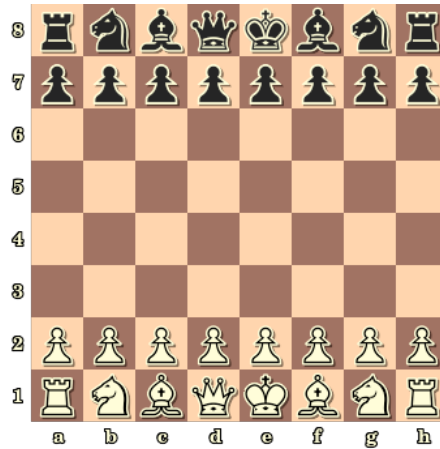A chessboard also has coordinates, as shown in the diagram below:

Diagram 1

Recall that the rows a-h are known as *ranks* and that the columns 1-8 are known as *files.* Each square on the chessboard has a name based on the rank and file that it is located on. For example, here is the square e4 (note that we always put the letter first):
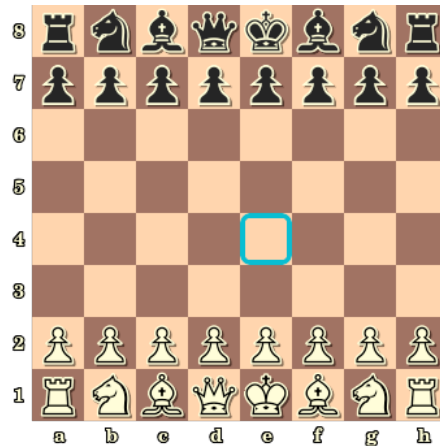

Diagram 2

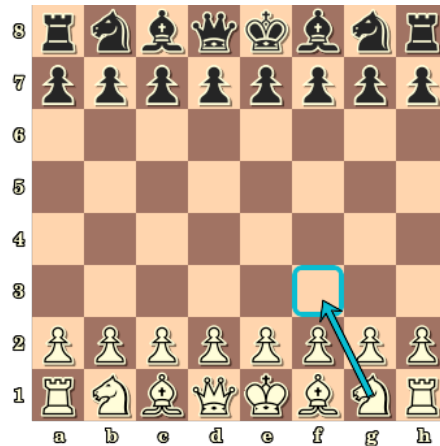Take a look at the diagram below. How would the move shown by the arrow be notated?

Diagram 3

Answer: **1.Nf3**

Captures are denoted with an 'x'; checks are denoted with '+,' and checkmates are denoted with a '#.'

There are also some special cases to be considered.

1. Pawn Promotion

A pawn reaching the 8th rank has the option of promoting to any piece of the same color other than a pawn or king. We denote this by writing the pawn's move in algebraic notation, followed by the sign "=" and the piece the pawn is being promoted to. For example:
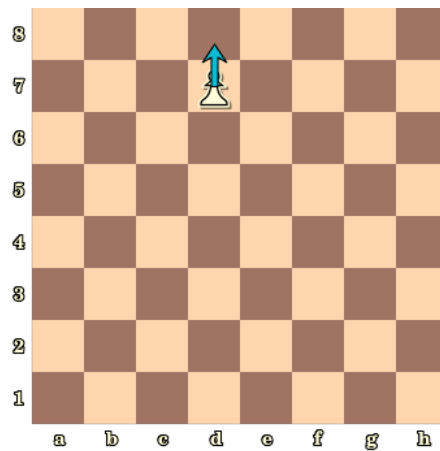
Diagram 4

Let's say white wanted to promote his pawn to a knight. We would then denote this as **d8=N**.

2. Multiple Pieces Can Move to the Same Square

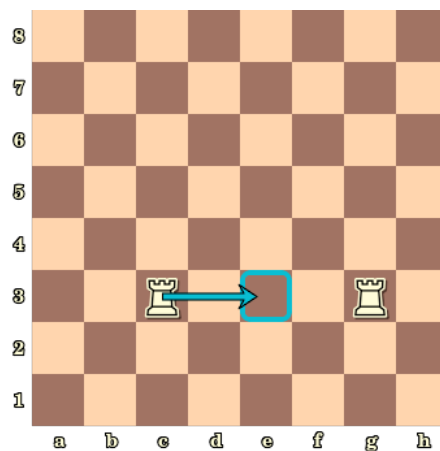Consider the position below. Let's say white wanted to play his Rook from c3 to e3.

Diagram 5

We couldn't just say **Re3**, because both rooks could move to e3! In this case we should write that the rook moving from file *c* goes to e3, e.g. **Rce3**.

Similarly, if we wanted the rook from file *g* to move to e3, we would write **Rge3**.
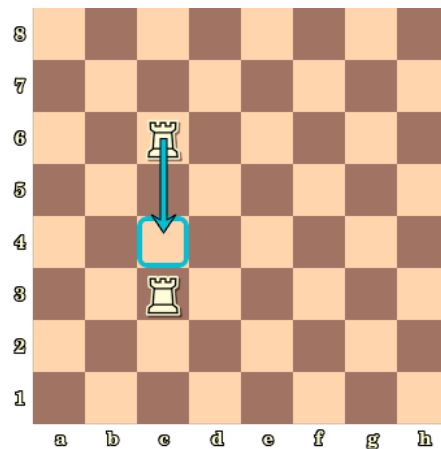
Consider the next diagram:

Diagram 6

Let's say we wanted to move the c6 rook to c4. We couldn't just say **Rcc4** as in the last example, since both rooks are on the c-file! Therefore, we need to differentiate them by ranks -- the correct way is **R6c4**.

3. En Passant

Recall the special rule en passant. When denoting this in en passant, we follow the same basic format as for pawn moves, and add *e.p.* at the end. An example:
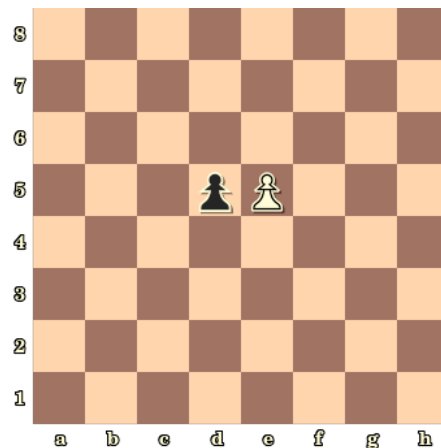

Diagram 7

Black has just played d7-d5. White decides to take en passant. The correct way to record this is exd6 e.p (remember that captures are notated with an x!)

Knowledge of algebraic notation is vital for every chess player. Try to practice writing down your games -- it will be difficult at first, but will get easier with time.