



BEGINNER'S FAQs FOR SCHOLASTIC CHESS TOURNAMENT

BEFORE THE TOURNAMENT

Q. What do I need to do to enter a tournament?

A. You need to be sure your memberships are current. Then, you need to choose a section of the tournament to enter. You may register for the tournament in advance, or you may arrive early the day of the tournament and register. We strongly recommend entering in advance. You'll save some money, and you'll avoid waiting in line early in the morning.

Q. What memberships do I need?

A. You will need two memberships. You need to be a member of the United States Chess Federation (USCF), which is the governing body for chess in the country. In addition, for tournaments run by the Massachusetts Chess Association (MACA), you also must be a current MACA member. MACA is the state affiliate of the USCF.

Q. What about memberships for new players?

A. MACA offers a discount for newcomers. If you have never played in a USCF rated tournament before and do not have a USCF ID number, you may enter a novice section of MACA scholastic tournaments for just the cost of the entry fee. You will receive one year of MACA membership, and you will receive a USCF "junior tournament membership" that is valid for that one tournament. If you decide after the tournament that you would like to play in more tournaments (and we hope you will!), you will receive a \$5 credit directly from the USCF towards a one-year USCF membership. (You may go to the USCF web site at www.uschess.org to redeem your credit and purchase your membership.)

Again, please note that this discount only applies to completely new players. If you have a USCF ID, you will need to have current USCF and MACA memberships to enter a tournament.

Q. How do tournament sections work?

A. A tournament is divided into sections based on a player's age, grade, or rating (or, sometimes, a combination of these factors). When you enter a tournament, you must choose a section. Players will only play against opponents in their own section, and players compete for prizes per section.

Q. Which section should I enter?

A. If you have never played in a USCF-rated tournament before, we strongly suggest one of the novice sections. MACA scholastic tournaments often have two novice sections: "novice under 800" and "novice

under 400". The "under 800" and "under 400" refer to the player's rating; any scholastic player whose rating is less than 800 would be eligible to enter the "novice under 800" section, regardless of the player's age or grade in school. The "novice under 400" section is usually a very good section for a player's first tournament, especially if the player is under age 10; older newcomers may find the "novice under 800" section a better experience, but this is not a rigid rule.

In addition to the novice sections, the "Spiegel Cup qualifier" tournaments have four "qualifying" sections based on age: 8/under, 11/under, 14/under, and high school. Don't be deceived by the names of these sections. Although the only limitation is the player's age (or grade, for the high school section), these sections are often not a good choice for newcomers. The level of competition is much more rigorous in these sections. The players in the qualifying sections are experienced and in many cases have played in dozens of tournaments. (In fact, it is not uncommon for the older players in these sections to have also played in open tournaments with both adults and children participating.) These sections are called "qualifying" because the entrants are competing for a slot in the state individual scholastic championship tournament.

If you are taking chess lessons, you should ask your coach or teacher to suggest which section would be a good choice.

Q. OK, I'm ready to register for the tournament. What do I do?

A. Go to the MACA web site and find the tournament on the home page in the "upcoming events" section, or click on the banner at the top of the page for the next upcoming tournament. You will be taken to a page with information about that tournament. You may enter on line from that page (and also take care of any memberships you may need). Or, you may follow the instructions on that page if you prefer to mail your entry through the U.S. mail. However, we think you will find it much more convenient to take advantage of on line entry.

Please note that if you do enter on line, you will not automatically receive an e-mail acknowledgement from MACA. Please be sure to keep your PayPal receipt. Starting perhaps a week before the tournament, or sometimes earlier, a list of advance entries will be posted on the MACA web site. This list is not generated automatically but is instead updated periodically by volunteers who process tournament entries. There may be a delay between the time you submit your entry and the next update of the advance entry list. However, if the "last updated" time of the advance entry list is after you submitted your entry, you should definitely contact MACA and let us know.

THE DAY OF THE TOURNAMENT

Q. When do I need to show up?

A. It is EXTREMELY important to be on time! If you have NOT registered for the tournament in advance, you will need to register the morning of the tournament on site. The tournament information page on the MACA web site will tell you when the first round starts and when on site registration are open. Usually, the first round starts at 9:30 AM, and on site registration is open from 8:00 to 9:00. Please do not be late for registration! If you are late for registration, it is very likely you will not be able to play in the first round of the tournament.

If you HAVE registered for the tournament in advance, you do not need to arrive for on site registration. You should plan to arrive at least 15 minutes before the first round. After on site registration closes, the tournament staff will prepare for the first round and will usually make important announcements before the first round starts.

Q. Do I need to check in if I registered in advance?

A. The tournament staff will post lists of advance entries at the site. If you registered in advance, please check that your name appears on the list AND that you are entered in the correct section. If you are, you do not need to check in UNLESS the words "SEE TD" appear next to your name. (Often, but not always, this means you have an expired or missing membership.)

Q. I entered in advance, but I'm not able to make it to the tournament. What should I do?

A. If you are not able to attend the tournament, please be sure to notify the tournament staff BEFORE the first round. The tournament information page on the MACA web site will provide emergency contact info for the day of the tournament. If you let us know that you cannot attend the tournament before the first round, you will receive a full refund of your entry fee. On the other hand, if you do not let us know and are a "no show", you will lose your full entry fee.

Q. What do I need to bring to the tournament?

A. Please bring a chess set, a chess board, and a chess clock (if you have one). We do not provide equipment, and we do not have equipment available for borrowing. There may be chess equipment for sale at the tournament, but unfortunately this is not guaranteed. (MACA does not sell chess equipment.)

Q. What can I expect at the start of the tournament?

A. After on site registration closes, the tournament staff will make important announcements for both experienced tournament players and newcomers. While the announcements are made, other tournament staff will "post the pairings" for the first round. This means that lists will be put up that show each player's name, the color (white or black) assigned to the player for the first game, the player's opponent's name, and the "board number". The player should find this information and then go into the playing room and find the table with the player's "board number" taped to it.

(For the first round, there will be one list posted with the players listed alphabetically. For later rounds, a "pairing sheet" will be posted for each section listing just those players in that section.)

Once the tournament starts, parents and coaches are generally NOT allowed in the playing area. We do make an exception for our youngest players, who may need some help finding their board number and setting up the board and pieces for their game. However, even in this case, once the two opponents are at the board and ready to start the game, parents and coaches must leave the room.

When the game is done, the players must report the result of the game to the tournament staff. They will then pick up and put away the set and board and then leave the playing area to wait for the next round.

Q. What happens if I don't win the first game? Am I knocked out of the tournament?

A. Absolutely not! Chess tournaments are NOT elimination format. You will play every round, whether you win, lose, or draw. There is one possible exception, though. If there are an odd number of players in your section, then one player will have to "sit out" the round. (Chess is a game for two players; if there is an odd number of players in the section, someone will be left without an opponent.) The player who has no opponent is said to "get the bye". That player will receive a full point towards his tournament score (just as though the player had won that round's game). A player will NEVER get the bye more than once in a tournament. Also, the rules call for us to try as hard as we possibly can to make sure that a new player does not get the bye. (If a player gets the bye, we also try to arrange a "side game" if another player in a different section is available. The "side game" doesn't affect the player's tournament score, since the player keeps the full point from the bye. However, the side game does count for USCF rating.)

Q. When does the next round start?

A. We do our best to keep the tournament moving along. As soon as all the games for a section are done, the tournament staff will make the pairings for that section's next round. The pairings will be posted, and the staff will announce that the round is starting. We don't have fixed times for the later rounds to start, so you should make sure to stay in the waiting area so you don't miss the announcement for the start of the next round.

Q. When is the lunch break?

A. Because we start rounds as soon as possible after all the games in the section from the previous round have ended, there is no fixed lunch break. You should make arrangements to have lunch between your games. (If your game was the last to finish and you need a few minutes' break, please do ask the tournament staff.)

Q. When will the tournament be done?

A. Because we do not have fixed starting times for rounds, it is difficult to tell you exactly when the tournament will be done. However, as a rule of thumb, when the first round starts at 9:30, the novice sections are usually done between 1:30 and 2:00. The 8/under and 11/under sections typically finish between 3:30 and 4:30, and the 14/under and high school sections often run until 6:30 or 7:00 but may in fact go later, since each game in these sections may potentially last two hours.

(In the novice sections, each player is allowed 30 minutes for all the moves, so a game in a novice section could theoretically last an hour. If there is such a game in each of the four rounds, the section would last four hours, plus the time needed for the tournament staff to make pairings between rounds and get the players start, and also the time for the awards ceremony at the end. In general, it is unusual for games in the novice sections to last the full hour.)

Q. What are the prizes? Who wins the prizes?

A. In each section, there are first, second, and third place trophies, and medals. The trophies will be awarded to the three players with the top scores. All players who score at least three points are guaranteed to receive at least a medal, if not a trophy. (A win is worth one point; a draw, one-half point.)

Often, there will be ties for trophies. (For example, there may be one player who scores 4.0, one who scores 3.5, and three who score 3.0.) In the qualifying sections, ties for first place are broken by a "blitz" play-off. Otherwise, ties not involving first place in the qualifying sections are broken by "tie break points", as are ALL ties in the novice sections. Again, any player who ties for a trophy but does not win the trophy owing to lower tie break points will win a medal.

Q. How are tie break points calculated?

A. The short but imprecise answer is: Add up the final scores of your opponents, and drop the lowest. The exception is if any player has been given the bye or has withdrawn before the end of the tournament. A complete explanation of tie breaks may be found here. (Note: insert a link to the "computing tie breaks" document we hand out at the tournament.)

AFTER THE TOURNAMENT

Q. When will I get my rating? How can I find out what my rating is?

A. We submit the rating report for the tournament as soon as possible after the end of the tournament. While it is not guaranteed, the rating report is usually processed the same day as the tournament, and the results are available on the USCF web site (www.uschess.org) the next morning.

Q. Why is the tournament director using an out-of-date rating for me? Why does the USCF web page show an old rating for me?

A. This often trips up both new and experienced players. When you look up your record on the USCF web site, the page will show a "General" tab and a "Tournament History" tab (as well as a "Rating Supplement" tab).

The USCF publishes "official" ratings once a month. These "official" ratings are the ones used to determine the player's eligibility for sections and for prizes that are based on ratings. (So, a rated player is eligible for the "novice under 400" section as long as the player's official rating for that month is less than 400 or the player is unrated.)

When you look at the "tournament history" tab, you can see your most up-to-date unofficial rating. That's where you can see your tournaments in chronological order and how your rating changed after each tournament.

The cut-off date for the official rating list is the first Friday of the previous month. For example, the cutoff for the official ratings for November is the first Friday of October. Tournaments rated after that day are too late to be included in the November rating list and will be reflected in the December list. That means that it could take as long as almost two months for your official rating to reflect the result of a tournament held the weekend after the first Friday of the month.

Q. I've played in a tournament. Why am I still "unrated"?

A. As explained above, there is a sometimes significant delay before your official rating reflects your latest tournament results. Also, if you have played fewer than four games, you will not have an official

published rating (but your results still count for your unofficial rating). Often, the tournament director will use your unofficial rating if you do not have a published rating yet.