Chess Equipment

2026-06-18

Table of Contents

I. Overview 1
II. What do you need to bring with you for chess gear? 2
  A. Essential for play 2
  B. Essential for comfort 2
III. Some USCF rules: 2
  A. King Height 2
  B. Square Size 2
IV. Recommendations for selecting your gear 3
  A. Boards 3
  B. Pieces 3
  C. Clocks 3
  D. Carrying Case 3
V. Buying your chess gear 4
  A. Overview 4
  B. Chess Sets (which rarely include clocks) 4
  C. Chess Bags 4
  D. Clocks 4
  E. Spiral bound scorebook: 4

I. Overview

This document is intended to provide guidance in selecting Chess equipment for those players who have never played in a USCF rated event.

The recommendations presented in this document are made with two primary objectives in mind.

- To use gear compliant with USCF rules
- To avoid difficulties, debate, and disappointment

The gear you use in events should be “utilitarian” in nature; not fancy, not different, not expensive and above all “not a problem.”

Some examples of choices that may present problems.

- Bright colored or oddly colored squares
- Abstract pieces
- Not-standard looking pieces or oddly colored pieces
- Expensive wooden sets
    - This is more about your unhappiness than your opponents:
        - Will you be ok if your opponent tends to smash pieces together when they capture pieces?
        - Will you be ok if the pieces get chipped?
        - Will you be ok when a piece accidentally goes missing?
        - Will you be ok having your board and case away from you when you are playing on the opponent’s gear and there is no room for you to keep your gear next to you?
        - The TD agrees to the opponent’s argument that they need to have notation marked on the board and your board doesn’t have it or isn’t marked for both sides?
        - Carrying the board and storing it during play if not being used takes up space.

II. What do you need to bring with you for chess gear?

Every player is responsible for having chess gear with them so they can play. If both players don't have chess gear, then they can't play. If you happen to forget to bring your gear and your opponent is late, then you will not be able to start their clock. In fact, you will have to play with time removed from you in equal part to that of your opponent.

A. Essential for play

Here is what you need for chess gear:

- A case or bag or some other method to carry all your other gear
  - Board
  - Pieces
  - Clock
  - Method of allowed score keeping (recording of all the moves in the game
  - Score sheet, pad or book, or, approved USCF recording device.
    - No other electronic devices are allowed, e.g. phones or tablets
  - If needed for your method of score keeping, pens or pencils and spares of these

B. Essential for comfort

Be prepared for taking care of yourself for many hours.

- Light jacket and dress to let yourself get warmer or colder
  - Often the temperature will vary throughout the day, cold, colder, hot, hotter, just right
- Spare Glasses and something to clean them with.
- Pens, a small notepad or something to write on.
- Water Bottle in case there is no water available.

III. Some USCF rules:

Most pieces sold as "tournament sets" will conform to the USCF rules and generally you don't need to worry about them complying. This information is more for those who want to try and use "non-standard" pieces.

A. King Height

United States Chess Federation rules call for a king height between 3.375 to 4.5 inches (85.7 to 114.3 mm). A height of about 3.75 to 4 inches (95 to 102 mm) is preferred by most players. The diameter of the king should be 40–50% of its height. The size of the other pieces should be in proportion to the king.

B. Square Size

The United States Chess Federation (USCF) states that the square size of a tournament chess board should be between 2 inches and 2.5 inches, while the king's height should be 3.375 inches to 4.5 inches. The standard USCF tournament set has 2.25-inch squares and a king's height of 3.75 inches.

IV. Recommendations for selecting your gear.

A quick and easy way and usually slightly less expensive is to purchase a "chess set" which is most gear sellers define as

- Pieces, Board and Bag

Some sellers let you selected each of these from a set of options, some come "pre-selected" and you simply choose the trio combination from among those being offered.

In the next few sections are recommendations of Do's and Don'ts for Pieces, Boards and Clocks. After reading those sections we will address Do's and Don'ts for "sets"

A. Boards

- Do have notation for both Black and White (all for edges)
- Do stick to white squares being white or ivory or similar variations on white.
- Do stick to dark squares being dark, specifically these: Black, dark Navy, dark Green.
- Must have Squares of 2.25 inch which is the USCF requirement.
- **Do Not** select bright colors for any squares as black or white.
- **Do Not** select dark Red and dark Blue.
- **Silicon** boards will not crease or curl. Vinyl
  - Vinyl and other types will tend to curl and need to be reversed rolled when stored

B. Pieces

- "Single weighted" or not weight not mentioned is typical.
  - Nicer is "Double weighted. Really nice is "Tripple weighted"
  - Weighted pieces have more heft and are considered to feel better to pick up and place. Also they are less likely to be knocked over from being brushed by.

C. Clocks

Many Clocks are acceptable for USCF rated play. Some are what we would call well established, others are relatively new. We recommend you stay with the more well established. They are generally easy to program, and you will need to program them for different events.

Clocks need to have these capabilities:

- Multiple Time Control capability
  - Be careful, some clocks will only do one time control
- Delay and Increment capability

Recommended clocks:

- SilverBack Chess Clock by Chess Gorilla
  - Has best useful features, many tournament ready settings, physically larger than DGT clocks
- DGT North American
  - Many versions, well known, some common tournament time controls can be tricky

D. Carrying Case

You will need a bag or case to carry the clock, board and pieces. We recommend you select a bag that will also let you carry your scorepad, pens and a few other small supplies

Some people like a separate pouch for each black and white pieces. Some prefer not to have to sort pieces to put them away, thus a single pouch or pieces bag. Some pouches are built in.

Observe what other people are using to give you some ideas of what you may like.

V. Buying your chess gear

A. Overview

There are several big online chess stores. Amazon also has some choices for chess gear as well.

- https://thechessstore.com
- https://www.wholesalechess.com

The links provided may "go bad" over time. We will try and update this document periodically.

What you are looking for is:

- A Bag, pieces, board, clock and score pad

Generally, clocks are a separate matter. Sometimes a Bag pieces and board are bundled together, sometimes not.

B. Chess Sets (which rarely include clocks)

Make sure the board has dark squares for whichever color case you select:

These are just some links to get you started looking around.

- From Amazon - Tripple Weighted, Vinyl board
- From Wholesale Chess – Tripple Weighted, Silicon Board, Drawstring Bag
- From Wholesale Chess – Tripple Weighted, Silicon Board, Deluxe Bag
- From The Chess Store – Silicon Sets
- From The Chess Store – Silicon Pieces, Silicon Board, Large Bag

C. Chess Bags

We recommend you avoid very compact or tube bags. These are designed to hold just the pieces and maybe a board. You won't be able to fit a clock or scorepad and will then need another thing to carry along with you. Generally you want to look for "Tournament Bag".

- From The Chess Store – Tournament Bags – White -

D. Clocks

- From Amazon - DGT North American – widely used but now not the most current
- From Amazon – DGT 3000 – more current
- Available from the other chess sites as well

E. Spiral bound scorebook:

Some people use induvial sheets but most used spiral bound books.

Hard cover books of score sheets are available, but they don't stay flat and take up space.

We recommend you have a spare book around in case you lose, forget or fill up your book.

Recommended: Spiral bound score sheets

- From The Chess Store – Spiral Bound – White -
- From The Chess Store – Spiral Bound – Blue – 50 games