

An Opening Repertoire for the Attacking Player

by [S. Evan Kreider](#)

The purpose of this article is not to teach any openings (though our site will include such content in the near future), but rather to help the attacking player decide upon a set of openings which form a consistent and efficient repertoire, as well as to direct the player to resources from which to learn these openings. I have selected this particular repertoire based on the following criteria: a) it is suitable for the aggressive player (i.e., it maximizes tactical opportunities and attacking (or counter-attacking) possibilities); b) it is suitable for the amateur player with a reasonable but limited amount of time and energy to devote to study (i.e., most if not all amateur players); c) it results in positions which are good (or at least equal) for White; d) it results in positions which are equal (or only minimally and reasonably disadvantageous) for Black; e) it contains various structurally and strategically similar lines, when possible; f) it is relatively natural and intuitive to play.

[N.B.: I have linked each opening to an interactive board which will open in a new window for you to follow along with the move list in each description. Simply click on the relevant link, follow along using the VCR style buttons or by clicking on the moves in the move list, and then close the window when you are through.]

Given these criteria, I recommend playing 1. e4 as White. It tends to lead to open games, attacking possibilities, and tactical opportunities, which are usually the keys to success for the amateur / non-Master / hobbyist / club player.

If Black responds symmetrically with 1. ...e5, then I recommend the [Vienna Game](#). Theory suggests that Black can get an equal game if (s)he knows what (s)he's doing, but it's still a sound and reliable alternative to the dense theory of the Italian or Spanish. It's also an especially deadly weapon at the club level, since most club players are not as familiar with it as they are with the other open games. Also among its virtues is the fact that (unlike the Italian, Spanish, or Scotch) it allows you to avoid Petroff's Defense, Philidor's Defense, the Latvian Gambit, and the Elephant Gambit. There are a variety of ways to play the Vienna Game; however, I recommend the aggressive 3. f4 variation, which is a sort of improved King's Gambit, (and which even Judit Polgar has played on a couple of occasions). After the typical 1. e4 e5, 2. Nc3 Nf6, 3. f4 d5, 4. fxe5 (4. d3 exf4! tends to lead to an advantage for Black) 4. ...Nxe4, I like 5. d3. It's more sound than the lines with early queen development (5. Qe2 or 5. Qf3), but less common than the main line 5. Nf3. Black may equalize with extremely accurate play: 5. ...Nxc3 (5. ...Bb4 is fine for Black but a bit draw-ish after 6. dxe4 Qh4+, 7. Ke2 Bxc3, 8. bxc3 Bg4+, 9. Nf3 dxe4, 10. Qd4 Bh5), 6. bxc3 d4, 7. Nf3 dxc3, 8. Be2 Nc6, 9. O-O Nd4, 10. Ng5 Bc5, 11. Kh1 O-O, 12. Bh5 Be6 with an unclear but roughly balanced position. A good book from which to learn the Vienna is IM Gary Lane's *Vienna Game* (Everyman Chess, 2000), which has received good reviews, and contains a good mix of analysis and explanation. It will also show you how to play variations of the Vienna other than 3. f4, if you are so inclined, or would like some variety.

If Black responds with 1. ...e6, then I recommend the [Advance French](#). It's true that if Black *really* knows what (s)he is doing, then the Advance variation leads to equality, but even so, it

is very sound, and it offers a lot of possibilities for White to launch dangerous assaults against the Black king. It also does not require you to memorize a mountain of theory in order to play it well, compared to the main line French. A typical line runs: 1. e4 e6, 2. d4 d5, 3. e5 c5, 4. c3 Nc6, 5. Nf3 Nge7 (5. ...Qb6, 6. a3 c4, 7. Nbd2 leads to a slight advantage for White), 6. Bd3 cxd4, 7. cxd4 Nf5, 8. Bxf5 exf5, 9. Nc3 = . GM Tony Kosten's *The French Advance* (Chess Press Opening Guides, 1998) offers an excellent blend of hard theory with strategic and tactical advice, and Kosten is an excellent writer in addition.

If Black responds with 1. ...c6, then I recommend the [Advance Caro-Kann](#); more specifically, the Short-Nunn attack (White follows 1. e4 c6, 2. d4 d5, 3. e5 Bf5 with 4. Nf3, 5. Be2, and usually 6. Be3 or O-O, developing his forces, and then advancing aggressively on the kingside). I believe this is currently the best approach against the Caro-Kann, and it has the advantage of being less theory-laden than the classical approach (3. Nc3 or Nd2). It also leads to some similar pawn structures as the French Advance, which will maximize your understanding of the positions which arise from either. IM Byron Jacobs' *The Caro-Kann Advance* (Chess Press Opening Guides, 1997) will teach you the Short-Nunn, as well as other approaches to the Caro-Kann Advance, including how to deal with the rarer side-lines which Black might try to surprise you with; furthermore, as is typical with most (if not all!?) of the Chess Press Opening Guides series, hard analysis is combined with explication of the underlying concepts and strategies of the opening.

If Black responds with the Sicilian, then you need to do some serious thinking. The Sicilian may be the most dangerous of Black's responses, and it alone is responsible for turning a lot of players off to 1. e4. However, I am here to tell you that you should not fear! The Sicilian is just as dangerous for Black as it is for White. In addition, White has several sound sidelines to choose from which will allow you to avoid main line Open Sicilian territory. From among them, I recommend the [Sicilian Grand Prix Attack](#). Like most of White's non-main line second-tier Sicilian systems, it probably will not secure an opening advantage against the Black player who really knows her / his stuff, but it's perfectly sound, and leads to lively, dynamic play, with plenty of attacking opportunities for White. Another nice thing about the Grand Prix attack is that it can lead to similar positions and strategies as the 3. f4 Vienna Game, so they complement each other nicely. A typical line runs: 1. e4 c5, 2. Nc3 Nc6, 3. f4 g6, 4. Nf3 Bg7, 5. Bb5 (5. Bc4 is not as b) 5. ...Nd4, 6. O-O Nxb5, 7. Nxb5 d5, 8. e5 = . IM Gary Lane's *The Grand Prix Attack* (Batsford, 1997) has received good reviews; I've heard that it has recently gone out of print, but you can still find it through most online chess stores.

Against the Pirc or the Modern, I recommend the 4. Be3 lines, often referred to as the "[150 Attack](#)" (a.k.a. the "Caveman Attack"). White typically employs a set-up with pawns on e4 and d4, Nc3, Be3, Qd2, O-O-O, and commences a kingside attack with the aid of the queen-bishop battery and a pawn storm. Frankly, there aren't a lot of books detailing this system, but John Nunn's *The Ultimate Pirc* (Batsford, 1998) gives detailed analysis and a bit of commentary.

For the most part, Black's other alternatives provide no real problems for White. Solid main lines will work well against the Alekhine, the Nimzowitsch, and the Scandinavian (a.k.a. Center-Counter Defense). Any standard openings manual or encyclopedia (like *MCO* or *NCO*) can show you what to do, and there will be comparatively little theory involved. You will be best served by playing carefully and actively, and watching out for tactical opportunities for both yourself and your opponent.

Now a Black repertoire. Against 1. e4, an excellent choice for the aggressive, tactical player with only a moderate amount of study time is the ...Nf6 [Scandinavian](#). This line of the Scandi (a.k.a., “Center-Counter Defense”) is not as common at the club level as the ...Qxd5 lines, so the surprise value alone speaks to its advantage. In addition, it’s a sound, equalizing line with plenty of opportunities for sharp, tactical play. A typical line begins: 1. e4 d5, 2. exd5 (2. e5 is bad, since after 2. ...Bf5, 3. ...e6, and 4. ...c5, Black is essentially playing a French without the locked-in bishop) 2. ...Nf6, 3. d4 Bg4, 4. Be2 Bxe2+, 5. Qxe2 Qxd5. GM John Emms' *The Scandinavian* (Chess Press, 1997) offers detailed coverage of the ...Nf6 lines, as well as the ...Qxd5 lines, should you want some variety.

Against 1. d4, I recommend the [Leningrad Dutch](#). It’s a sharp counter-attacking system for Black against the otherwise deadly-dull (from the point of view of the attacking player!) 1. d4 opening. 1. ...f5 also has the advantage of being quite playable against White’s non-1. e4 and non-1.d4 openings choices; for example, 1. c4 f5 and 1. Nf3 f5 often transpose directly to the Dutch, or at the very least allow the Black player to create very Dutch-like positions which (s)he will be comfortable playing. A typical line begins: 1. d4 f5, 2. c4 Nf6, 3. g3 g6, 4. Bg2 Bg7, 5. Nf3 O-O, 6. O-O d6. *The Dutch for the Attacking Player* by IM Steffen Pedersen (Batsford, 1996) is a well-received repertoire book which manages to walk that fine line between theory and explanation, with sufficient coverage and detail of the relevant lines.

These lines should provide the aggressive chess player with plenty of opportunities for sound and active play. Enjoy!

An Opening Repertoire for the Positional Player

by [S. Evan Kreider](#)

The purpose of this article is not to teach any openings (though our site will include such content in the near future), but rather to help the positional player decide upon a set of openings which form a consistent and efficient repertoire, as well as to direct the player to resources from which to learn these openings. I have selected this particular repertoire based on the following criteria: a) it is suitable for the positional player (i.e., it avoids sharp tactical struggles in favor of more strategic battles); b) it is suitable for the amateur player with a reasonable but limited amount of time and energy to devote to study (i.e., most if not all amateur players); c) it results in positions which are good (or at least equal) for White; d) it results in positions which are equal (or only minimally and reasonably disadvantageous) for Black; e) it contains various structurally and strategically similar lines, when possible; and f) it is relatively natural and intuitive to play.

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Although 1.d4 is the usual recommendation for the positional player, I suggest 1.c4 instead. It can be just as sound and positional as many 1.d4 lines while still providing ample opportunity to secure an advantage. It also avoids the immense theory and diversity of the 1.d4 openings.

More specifically, I recommend the accelerated fianchetto variation of the [English opening](#) (1.c4, usually followed by 2.g3, 3.Bg2, and 4.Nc3). There's less theory involved with this variation than others in the English family. It also has the advantage of being a bit less well-known than other openings – below Expert level, relatively few players use the English, much less the accelerated fianchetto variation, so most of your opponents probably won't be too familiar with it. It's a solid yet active opening and it's also very flexible, allowing a wide variety of plans for White including central expansion, queenside play, or a King-side attack.

There are two excellent books available which cover this opening. The first is GM Tony Kosten's *The Dynamic English* (Gambit Publications, 1999). It has received good reviews from Silman and Bauer, among others, and I myself have read it and think it is excellent. Kosten makes a serious effort to communicate not just brute variations, but also the important concepts, plans, and strategies behind the opening. He teaches you to play the opening by understanding it, and not simply by memorizing tons of abstract variations. This is especially important since most of your opponents (other amateurs, presumably) are likely to go "out of book" rather early.

The second is GM Andrew Soltis' *Winning with the English Opening*, revised third edition (Chess Digest, 1997). Soltis has a reputation for turning out some poor opening books, but this one is a well-recognized exception, as long as you get the third edition and stay away from the earlier two.

Both of these are repertoire books, and so provide you with everything you'll need to know to face Black's wide variety of replies to the English. The primary difference between the two is that Kosten chooses more "dynamic" lines (though they are still quite positional – after all, this ain't 1. e4!), while Soltis chooses somewhat quieter lines. I highly recommend buying both if you can afford to do so. That way, you can pick and choose among different lines that you find work best for you or that you're most comfortable playing. If you're a die-hard positional player, you'll probably lean towards Soltis' approach more than Kosten's; and among Soltis' lines, you may favor those involving central expansion or queenside play over those involving the kingside pawn-storm (especially those which can arise from the Botvinnik variation).

For the most part, I approve of their repertoire suggestions. In my experience, the vast majority of amateur players respond to 1.c4 with 1...e5, against which I have found that the accelerated fianchetto English practically plays itself. However, I'm not quite as fond of this variation against 1.c4 c5. It's certainly playable, but it's easy for Black to maintain symmetry safely for a long time, and it's not always obvious when and how White should break the symmetry. As an alternative line, you might consider [1.c4 c5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.d4](#). Theoretically, it probably doesn't contain much advantage for White, but it does at least provide a way to break the symmetry early on in a safe but active manner.

Now for a Black repertoire: Against 1.e4, the [French Defense](#) is an excellent choice. It's a sound, positional system with plenty of scope for counter-play. It avoids the dense theory of the Sicilian or Spanish while still containing enough variety to hold interest after years of play. It's also a very flexible system which provides Black with several variations from which to choose. Among these, the Winawer tends to involve some of the most tactical lines of the French (for example, the Poisoned Pawn variation of the Winawer), so you may want to avoid it in favor of something like the Rubinstein, which is probably Black's most solid approach. The Classical is a balanced option, but can still become somewhat tactical depending on the

particular lines White and Black might choose. To begin with, I'd recommend the Rubinstein, with the possibility of expanding to the Classical someday if you deem it appropriate.

Of course, White has other options besides the main line. You'll also have to be prepared to face the Tarrasch (unless you avoid it with the Rubinstein), the Advance, and a few other minor variations (for example, the Exchange and the King's Indian Attack). The only book you'll need to learn the fundamentals of all of the above is Neil McDonald's & Andrew Harley's *Mastering the French with the Read and Play Method* (Batsford, 1997). For those of you not familiar with Batsford's Mastering series, each book teaches you how to play the respective opening by analyzing the typical pawn structures of each variation and examining their typical plans, tactics, and strategies. It also provides a fair amount of theory via example games. I highly recommend this book.

If and when you're ready for more intense theory, you'll want to check out Stephen Pedersen's two volume work on the French; namely, *The Main Line French: 3. Nc3* (Gambit, 2001) and *The French: Tarrasch and Other Lines* (Gambit, forthcoming). These two books comprise a thorough and current survey of French theory, and will probably be the only other books you'll ever need on the French. (At least, unless later updated editions come out!)

[Chessville's very own David Surratt is also in the midst of writing an excellent series of [instructional articles](#) on the French which you can check out here.]

Against 1.d4, I recommend playing 1...e6. Don't be surprised if your opponent transposes to the French after 2.e4 – that's what you want! This will occur in about a quarter of your games. Just follow up with 2...d5. It'll put you back on familiar territory, and probably not be what your opponent expected.

If your opponent responds with 2.c4, then play 2...d5 and enter the [Queen's Gambit Declined](#). The QGD has a bit of a bad reputation among amateurs, but I think this is because they are mostly familiar with those old, drawish Classical Orthodox variation games. However, there are plenty of other approaches to the QGD which give Black more opportunity for counter-play while still maintaining a positional character. Furthermore, it's always important to remember that classifications such as "drawish" or "lacking counter-play for Black" are usually by and for GMs. At the amateur level, there are going to be so many tactical and positional mistakes by both players that there will always be winning chances for both sides. The important thing is to play an opening which you like, and that suits your style. So if you like to play a solid, positional game, then the QGD is for you.

An excellent book to learn the QGD is Matthew Sadler's *Queen's Gambit Declined* (Everyman, 2000). Sadler is (in my humble opinion . . .) one of the best writers of instructional chess books today. He goes to great lengths to explain the important plans, tactics, and strategies behind the opening moves, while still providing enough theory to keep you happy for a long time. Furthermore, he covers a variety of approaches to the QGD, including the Lasker, Orthodox, and Tartakower variations of the main line, as well as the Exchange variation and Bf4 lines. He doesn't cover the solid-but-active Cambridge Springs defense, so if that particular line interests you, you'll have to look elsewhere – I believe Gambit will be publishing a book on this variation sometime soon.

Another good thing about the QGD is that you can play a QGD-type set-up against many of White's non-1.e4 and non-QGD openings, such as the Catalan, the London System, the Colle,

the English, the Reti, and most others as well. This requires some critical thinking about the best move order in each case, but most of the time you will be able to create a solid and familiar QGD-like position. This may not always be the theoretically best approach, but 9 times out of 10 you'll take your opponents out of book early and play the resulting positions better due to your greater familiarity with the pawn structures and typical attacks & plans springing from them. Later on, if and when you decide to, you can learn some of the "real" responses against these lines. Among them, you may want to look at some of White's Bg5 systems first – they're the least friendly to the QGD-type set-up.

These lines should provide the positional chess player with plenty of opportunities for sound and active play. Enjoy!