Chess Puzzle Solving for A+ Competitions

Participants will learn how simple-to-administer paper-and-pencil testing, provided by the Texas Tech University chess program, can be used to present an intriguing and educational competition to students. You’ll get information on upcoming invitational competitions as well as tips on how to access training and practice materials. The benefits of chess will be highlighted, and a bibliography of corroborating studies will be provided. No special knowledge of chess is required.

What is Chess Puzzle Solving?

The benefits of chess are well documented for players of all ages, and especially for young people. Chess teaches problem-solving, hones concentration and encourages analytical and strategic thinking. Chess can be a lifelong pursuit and its benefits long-lasting.

Chess puzzle competition is simple to administer and quick and easy to evaluate—requiring no special knowledge of chess.

Texas Tech University provides both training and easy-to-score testing materials, complete with answer keys. Contestants in a chess puzzle contest receive a paper-and-pencil test that includes a series of chess diagrams with pieces in particular positions. Contestants must then determine the most accurate answers to a series of objective questions. For example:

What move checkmates Black immediately?

- a) 1. Rd7
- b) 1. Rc1
- c) 1. Rc8
- d) None of the above

A chess puzzle event provides an avenue for chess participation that does not require the time and resources of actual tournament play. No chess equipment is required! The fixed time limit makes it practical to include in a district meet schedule, and the availability of free resources allows schools (including those that do not currently have chess programs) to include chess puzzle competitions in their slate of A+ events at minimal cost.

Presenter: Al Lawrence, A.B., M.A., M.Ed
Al Lawrence is the new director of Texas Tech University’s championship chess program. An award-winning chess author and World Book Encyclopedia contributor, he served as executive director of the U.S. Chess Federation during a decade of record-breaking growth and innovation and later served as executive director of the World Chess Hall of Fame.
A complete test will present 20 such questions varying in difficulty. Students will have 30 minutes to finish the test. Not all questions will involve solving for checkmate. Other kinds of puzzles will require geometric analysis and computational skills. For example:

![Chess Board]

*Which side has the greater value of material left on the board?*
- a) Black
- b) White
- c) It’s equal.
- d) Can’t be determined until it’s known who is on move.

![Chess Board]

*What move must Black play to stop the White pawn from queening?*
- a) 1. ... Kd5
- b) 1. ... Ke5
- c) 1. ... Kd3
- d) The Black king can’t stop the pawn from queening.

Many other examples and explanations will provided in the actual workshop, including resources and tips on training, as well as where to find studies to document the many benefits of chess. Questions and sharing of experiences will be encouraged.

**Some Benefits of Studying Chess**

- Critical Thinking
- Improved Memory and Visualization
- Decision Making
- Attention and Concentration
- Chance to Meet Interesting People
- Imagination
- Patience
- Confidence
- Mathematical Concepts
- Resilience
- Problem Solving
- Sportsmanship