

The road to a lack of chess improvement.

MY ECF grade has hovered around the 130 mark for many years. What on earth, has someone like me got to offer on the subject of chess improvement. Not a lot! So here are some of my suggestions, gained from many years of experience, on how **not** to improve.

1. When watching matches online, turn the brain off.

I have watched numerous top-level matches on the various internet chess servers, but have done so largely for entertainment. Sometimes, I listen to the commentary not expending any effort on the game myself; sometimes, I stop listening to the commentators and watch the computer evaluation bob up and down without a clue as to why. Over the years I have spent hundreds of hours successfully watching chess online without in anyway improving my chess level.

2. Play endless bullet games online.

I have noticed that I tend to win bullet games that I am losing, but lose games when having gained an advantage I make the radical and misguided step of starting to think.

I'm not sure I even enjoy speed chess. The wins are rarely satisfying and the losses are extremely annoying. Playing speed chess is a very effective way to make yourself disenchanted with the game and meanwhile waste a lot of time without improving your game at all. Thoroughly recommended.

3. Don't study endgames.

The thing about knowing your endgames is that then you know what to aim for in the middle game. My suggestion if you don't want to improve at chess is to rigorously stay away from endgame study. That way not only will you draw winning positions and lose drawing positions but you will also be much more likely to play throughout the game without a logical plan.

4. Buy numerous chess books without reading any of them

This is one of my favourites! Whether it be openings, games collections, or whatever, the idea here is to go to a shop or online store full of good intentions to thoroughly study a book and then end up reading a maximum of 2 chapters. Warning: Be careful! If you read more than 15 pages you are in danger of improving. If you find you can't help yourself reading more than this, make sure that you do not dwell on the ideas and the moves in the book but simply go through them as quickly as possible without any proper engagement.

6. Don't put the effort in at the board

This has several dimensions. A beautiful way of gaining a losing position is to go through the opening moves by rote and then find you don't understand the middlegame position you have gained. Apart from causing problems with your position on the board, this can lead to a crucial loss of time on the clock. One nuance on this theme that I particularly like to follow is when you seem to have survived the middlegame on a par or not far off against a stronger player, telling yourself "oh well, if I lose, at least I managed to play a decent game thus far". This is marvellous because your concentration and intensity dissipates and you can cheerfully lose the game and not beat yourself up.

This is, of course, not an exhaustive list, but simply represents the main ways that have worked for me in successfully keeping my rating from climbing.

Readers are encouraged to find their own techniques and explore them relentlessly but at all times they should try to use the minimum amount of effort possible. Remember, any engagement with chess is dangerous and may lead to improvement unless one is very careful.

Danny Rosenbaum plays for Hackney Chess Club and is the Secretary of the Hamilton Russell Cup. More information at <https://hamiltonrussell.wordpress.com/>