

# THE OFFICIAL RULES OF OTHELLO

## INTRODUCTION

It is the purpose of these rules to prescribe a standardized set of regulations for use in Othello tournaments sanctioned by the United States Othello Association, and to thereby ensure that all tournaments are conducted smoothly, uniformly, and fairly.

The exigencies of tournament play are too many and too various to be subsumed under any set of regulations, no matter how encyclopedic. These rules are therefore not meant to be comprehensive, and the Tournament Director is expected to exercise intelligence and common sense when confronted with contingencies not discussed herein.

These rules have been divided into ten separate sections as follows:

1. Equipment
2. The Starting Position
3. The Move
4. Determining the Winner and Scoring the Game
5. The Timepiece
6. Default
7. Improper Moves
8. General Conduct
9. Penalties
10. Miscellaneous

## SECTION 1: EQUIPMENT

1.1. Othello is played by two players on a board composed of 64 equal squares arranged in an 8-square-by-8-square grid and with 64 discs which are black on one side and white on the other.

1.2. If the disc trays are built into the playing board, then unless both players agree otherwise, the board is placed so that the disc trays are directly in front of the players.

1.3. Before the game begins, the discs are divided equally between the two players.

1.4. If at any point during a game a player runs out of discs, then he may take as many discs as he requires from his opponent, and his opponent must surrender the required discs without delay.

## SECTION 2: THE STARTING POSITION

2.1. Before the game begins, each player places two discs on the board. The discs should be placed on the board's four central squares so that, as each player faces the board, discs with the black side facing upwards lie on the near-left-to-far-right diagonal and discs with the white side facing upwards lie on the near-right-to-far-left diagonal.

### **SECTION 3: THE MOVE**

3.1. When placing discs on the board, one player always places discs with the black side facing upwards and the other player always places discs with the white side facing upwards. The former player is referred to as “Black”; the latter player is referred to as “White”. Discs with the black side facing upwards are referred to as “black discs”; discs with the white side facing upwards are referred to as “white discs”.

3.2. When it is his turn to play, a player places a disc in a vacant square so that in at least one direction (vertically, horizontally, or diagonally) his newly-placed disc, acting in conjunction with a pre-existing disc of his own color, brackets in an unbroken line one or more discs of his opponent's color. The disc or discs thus bracketed are then turned over or “flipped” to become the same color as the newly-placed disc. If a newly-placed disc produces bracketing in several directions at once, then all the bracketed discs in all such directions are flipped.

3.3. A full move consists of placing a disc on a square to which a legal move can be made (a “legal square”) and flipping all the appropriate discs. A move is not complete until all the appropriate discs have been flipped.

3.4. Black makes the first move of the game.

3.5. Except as discussed in Rule 3.7, players take turns making moves.

3.6. When it is his turn to move, a player may not refuse to move if there is a legal move available to him.

3.7. If on a player's turn there is no legal move available to him, then he forfeits his turn.

3.8. If a player on his turn to move touches a disc to a legal square, then the player must move to that square.

3.9. If a player accidentally drops a disc onto the board, then he may retrieve that disc without penalty no matter where it lands. A disc is said to be “dropped” when it is not in contact with the player's hand as it first touches the board.

3.10. When it is his turn to move, a player may, if he wishes, straighten the alignment of the discs on the board.

### **SECTION 4: DETERMINING THE WINNER AND SCORING THE GAME**

4.1. The game is ended when neither player possesses a legal move.

4.2. Except as discussed in Section 6 (Default), if after the game is ended a majority of the discs on the board are black, then Black is the winner; if a majority of the discs are white, then White is the winner. If there are an equal number of black and white discs on the board, then the game is a tie.

4.3. Except as discussed in Rule 4.4 and Section 6 (Default), after the game is ended, Black is assigned a score equal to the number of black discs in the final board position and White is assigned a score equal to the number of white discs in the final board position.

4.4. If a player succeeds in entirely eliminating all discs of his opponent's color from the board, then regardless of the final board position that player is assigned a score of 64 and his opponent is assigned a score of 0.

## **SECTION 5: THE TIMEPIECE**

5.1. During a game, each player is required to complete all his moves within the period of time prescribed by the Tournament Director.

5.2. Time usage is monitored by a timepiece, usually a dual-faced “chess clock” equipped with buttons for starting and stopping each face and a “flag” or similar mechanism for indicating the moment when the prescribed amount of time has expired.

5.3. For the purposes of this section, the phrase “hits his clock” shall mean that a player pushes the button above the clock-face nearest him all the way down so as to stop the clock nearest him (“his clock”) and start the clock nearest his opponent (“his opponent's clock”); the phrase “stops the clock” shall mean that both clocks are stopped by pushing either button half-way down.

5.4. The choice of clock position (that is, whether the clock shall be on the left or right side of the board) is granted to Black. If the Tournament Director has prescribed a fixed position for the clock, then Black is permitted to choose his seat and thereby determine his position relative to the clock.

5.5. It is the joint responsibility of both players to confirm before the start of play that both clocks are stopped and properly set.

5.6. When the Tournament Director gives the signal to begin the game, White hits his clock. Black is then free to make his first move.

5.7. During the course of a game, each player hits his clock after completing each of his moves (that is, after placing a disc on the board and flipping all the appropriate discs).

5.8. If at any point during a game a player on his turn has no legal move available to him, then he shall indicate that his move is forfeited by saying “pass” and hitting his clock.

5.9. If a player fails to hit his clock immediately after completing his move, then his opponent may draw the failure to the player's attention, or he may wait for the player to notice and correct the oversight, or he may proceed with his own next move, as he wishes.

5.10. During the course of a game, only the Tournament Director is empowered to stop the clock.

5.11. Once the clock is stopped, it may be started again only by order of the Tournament Director.

5.12. A player may not obstruct his opponent's view of the clock at any point during a game.

5.13. A player may not keep either of his hands in prolonged contact with the clock during a game.

## **SECTION 6: DEFAULT**

6.1. If at any point during a game, a player's flag falls and his opponent's flag has not previously fallen, then that player is in default.

6.2. Even if a player has completed his final move of the game, he is still required to hit his clock before his flag falls in order to avoid being in default.

6.3. If a player's flag falls while he is in the process of making a move (that is, after he has touched a disc to a legal square but before he has flipped all the appropriate discs), then he shall complete the move before default is declared.

6.4. If the falling of a player's flag goes unobserved, default occurs the moment the fallen flag is first noticed by either player or by the Tournament Director.

6.5. After a player's flag falls, the Tournament Director must be summoned to confirm the default. The defaulting player's clock must be allowed to run while the Tournament Director is summoned; if necessary, the non-defaulting player may hit his clock without making a move in order to prevent his clock from running while the Tournament Director is summoned.

6.6. After the default has been confirmed, the defaulting player is declared the loser of the game and his opponent is declared the winner.

6.7. After the winner has been declared, the Tournament Director stops the clock and resets the defaulting player's clock so as to allow him two minutes of additional play; at a signal from the Tournament Director, the appropriate clock is then hit and the game continues. Likewise, if at any time prior to the end of the game the non-defaulting player's flag falls, the Tournament Director resets the non-defaulting player's clock to two minutes, the appropriate clock is then hit, and the game continues. If at any time either player's flag falls a second time, then play ceases and the Tournament Director declares the game ended.

6.8. A defaulted game is scored as follows: if neither player's flag has fallen a second time, then the game is scored according to the procedures used for non-defaulted games (Rules 4.3 and 4.4) unless the non-defaulting player does not possess a majority of the discs, in which case the game is scored as a 32-31 win for the non-defaulting player; if the defaulting player's flag has fallen a second time, then the game is scored as a 64-0 win for the non-defaulting player; if the non-defaulting player's flag has fallen a second time, then the game is scored as a 32-31 win for the non-defaulting player.

## **SECTION 7: IMPROPER MOVES**

7.1. If in the course of making a move a player flips one or more discs that should not be flipped or fails to flip one or more discs that should be flipped, then he has the right to correct the error (and his opponent has the right to demand a correction) provided that his opponent has not yet committed himself to a subsequent move.

7.2. If a player places a disc of the improper color on the board and if his opponent's preceding move was made with a disc of the proper color, then the erring player has the right to retract his move (and his opponent has the right to demand a retraction) provided that his opponent has not yet committed himself to a subsequent move; however, by virtue of the touch-move rule (Rule 3.8) after the retraction, the erring player must, if possible, make a proper move to the square where the improperly-colored disc was placed.

7.3. If a player places a disc of the improper color on the board and his opponent's preceding move was likewise made with a disc of the improper color, then both improper moves and the resulting reversed color assignments must stand for the remainder of the game.

7.4. The time required to correct an improper move must be charged to the player who commits the error. Accordingly, if a player has hit his clock after making an improper move, then his opponent has the right to hit his own clock (or the erring player must hit his opponent's clock) before a correction is made.

7.5. When asking that an improper move be corrected, a player must indicate clearly the nature of the requested correction. If the improper move in question is an illegal pass, the player requesting the correction must indicate at least one legal move available to his opponent.

7.6. If a player disturbed the board position, then the time required to restore the board to a position acceptable to both players must be charged to the player responsible for the disturbance. If a player disturbs the board position to the point where the board cannot be restored to a position acceptable to both players, then the Tournament Director must be summoned. The Tournament Director is empowered to stop the clock and call upon any available resources (including, but not limited to, transcripts and spectators) in order to resolve the dispute. If the Tournament Director concludes that the game cannot be resumed, then the player responsible for the disturbance shall be declared the loser and his opponent shall be awarded a 64-0 win.

## **SECTION 8: GENERAL CONDUCT**

8.1. A player is permitted to record his games or to have his games recorded by an associate.

8.2. During a game, a player may not confer with any outside party, make use of any reference material, or analyze the game on a separate board.

8.3. During a game, a player may not leave the playing table except with the express permission of the Tournament Director.

8.4. A player may not distract, annoy, or harass his opponent in any manner whatsoever.

## **SECTION 9: PENALTIES**

9.1. The Tournament Director may, at his discretion, warn or penalize any player who is guilty of infractions of the rules or other misconduct.

9.2. Penalties may include, but are not limited to, time dockage, game forfeiture, and enforced bodily

expulsion. A game forfeiture shall be scored as a 64-0 win for the non-forfeiting player.

9.3. When imposing a time dockage, the Tournament Director is empowered to adjust the guilty player's clock so as to eliminate up to one-half the time remaining on the clock. If in the opinion of the Tournament Director the magnitude of the misconduct in question is such that the maximum allowable time dockage constitutes insufficient punishment, then the Tournament Director is empowered to increase the penalty by awarding extra time to the non-guilty player and adjusting the non-guilty player's clock accordingly.

9.4. If during a game, a player suffers a significant loss of time in summoning the Tournament Director, the Tournament Director is empowered to adjust that player's clock so as to restore the lost time.

9.5. The USOA reserves the right to apply sanctions against any player who is guilty of repeated infractions of the rules or flagrant misconduct. These sanctions may include, but are not limited to, stripping of championship titles, revocation of Grand Prix points, probationary exclusion from tournament play, and permanent exclusion from tournament play.

## **SECTION 10: MISCELLANEOUS**

10.1. Ignorance of these rules shall not excuse a player from abiding by them.

10.2. Should any dispute arise during the competition due to factors not specifically discussed in these rules, then the Tournament Director shall settle the dispute in the spirit of these rules and in the spirit of fairness, and his decision shall be binding on all players.

10.3. These rules may, from time to time, be revised or amended by a majority of the Board of Directors of the United States Othello Association.