

Study Brief: 500–1000

What this stage is about

You no longer hang pieces constantly, but you still lose most games to a tactic you didn't see coming, not to being outplayed strategically. The goal here is widening your opening repertoire just enough to reach playable middlegames consistently, while tactics training starts carrying real weight.

Weekly plan

- **3 sessions on Tactics**, moving up a pool once the current one feels easy rather than once it feels solved.
- **2 sessions on openings** — keep rotating through the packs below rather than only ever playing your favourite.
- **1 session on Rush**, tracking your score week to week now — this is where you start measuring progress.
- **1 session split between Board Vision and Visualisation** (start Visualisation here if you haven't already).

Recommended packs

As White:

- Ruy Lopez — the main line every serious player eventually has to understand; worth starting early even if you don't play it every game yet.
- Vienna Game or King's Gambit — pick one as an aggressive alternative; both reward tactical sharpness more than memorisation.
- Colle System and London System — keep both in reserve as low-maintenance systems for days you don't want a theoretical fight.
- English Opening — a good first exposure to flank openings and flexible pawn structures.

As Black, against 1.e4:

- French Defence and Scandinavian Defence — two genuinely different structures, worth knowing both so you're not thrown by whatever White plays.

As Black, against 1.d4:

- Slav Defence — a sturdier structure than Queen's Gambit Declined, worth adding once QGD feels comfortable.

Which Train modes to lean on

Tactics stays the priority, but start treating Rush as a real diagnostic — a dropping score tells you exactly where your calculation is breaking down under time pressure. Woodpecker Method should now be a standing weekly habit, not an occasional extra. Board Vision and Visualisation both deserve regular time here; this is the stage where "I saw the tactic but didn't calculate it properly" starts being your most common loss, and both modes are built to fix exactly that.

When you're ready to move up

Move to the 1000–1500 brief once Rush scores are climbing steadily, you're comfortable in both of your Black repertoires against the opening moves you actually see most often, and you're starting to lose games for strategic reasons rather than one-move blunders.