

Study Brief: Under 500

What this stage is about

At this stage the engine of your rating isn't opening theory — it's not losing pieces for nothing, and knowing what a checkmate actually looks like when it's sitting in front of you. Every pack and every Train mode below is chosen to reinforce that, not to load you up with memorised lines you don't yet have the board vision to use.

Weekly plan

- **3 sessions on Tactics** (easiest pool). This is where your rating actually moves at this stage.
- **2 sessions on openings**, playing through one White pack and one Black pack below, slowly, reading every coaching note.
- **1 session on Board Vision**. Square colours and piece moves need to become instant, not calculated.
- **1 session of Rush**, once a week, just to see where you stand. Don't chase the score yet.

Recommended packs

As White, in this order:

- Italian Game — the cleanest possible lesson in rapid, natural development and why it matters.
- Scotch Game — opens the centre early; good for seeing simple tactics arrive on the board.
- Four Knights Game — symmetrical and low-risk, a good one to fall back on when you're not sure what else to play.
- London System — a repeatable setup you can play almost every game without fresh preparation, while everything above is still sinking in.

As Black, against 1.e4:

- Philidor Defence — solid, few traps, teaches you to hold the centre without complicated theory.
- Caro-Kann Defence — once Philidor feels comfortable, this gives you a sturdier pawn structure with a clear plan.

As Black, against 1.d4:

- Queen's Gambit Declined — occupy the centre, develop the bishop before the pawn chain locks it in, castle. That's the whole plan at this level.

Don't try to learn all six at once. Pick one White pack and one Black pack, play through the main line a few times against the app, and only add the next pack once the first one feels automatic.

Which Train modes to lean on

Tactics and Board Vision are doing almost all the work for you right now. Woodpecker Method is worth starting once you've solved a reasonable pool of Tactics puzzles once already — it's built for repetition, not first exposure. Leave Visualisation, Tactic or Not, and serious engine analysis for later; they assume a base of pattern recognition you're still building.

When you're ready to move up

You're ready for the 500–1000 brief once you can play through your chosen packs' main lines from memory without looking, and you're clearing the easy Tactics pool at a comfortable pace without obvious blunders in your own games.