Mr. Russillo is the Chess advisor at Northwest High School and a great Chess player! The following advice come from his [Chess Club](https://russillo.weebly.com/how-to-get-better-quickly.html) page:

***Mr R's Tips:***  
***How To Get Better****(relatively)****Quickly***  
  
YOU HATE LOSING CHESS GAMES! You regard losing as an indictment of your intelligence and a diminishment in your value as a human being. So you vow to get better, but an evil little conundrum reveals itself the moment you realize: ***the way most players get better is by LOSING A BUTTLOAD of games!***  
  
If you are serious about getting better here are five ways to improve quickly, though**"quickly" is very much a relative term.** (Doing any one would be great, doing all five is probably impossible, but if you plan to beat Carlsen, Nakamura and Anand one day, no one will be able to stop you. Will they.)  
  
**1. Write down your moves and analyze your games with a strong chess program.  
2. Play often, against the strongest opponents you can find, *and be excited about learning from the losses.*("**[**Invest in loss**](http://theartoflearningproject.org/educate/resources/investment-in-loss/)**!")  
3. Watch good chess videos.  
4. Read/study good chess books.  
5. Read/Study annotated grandmaster games.**  
  
Piece-o-cake, right? Let's break each down individually:  
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**1. WRITE DOWN YOUR MOVES AND RUN THEM THROUGH A STRONG CHESS PROGRAM.**  
I've been doing this for years, and if you come to club you'll see that--unless I'm using a clock and/or am under time pressure--I write moves for every single game I play. Consider:  
**When you let a computer analyze your games you get a very clear picture not only of how you were doing at any stage of the game, but you'll see important moves you and your opponent may have missed.**This is a WONDERFUL way to get better quickly! (A couple years ago Dr Thomas and I BOTH missed a mate-in-one during a game we played! It was admittedly a very unusual position, but since I wrote it down he and I have worked though the game at length. Now, not only is it unlikely he or I will miss that mate-in-one again, but since we know it's tough to spot we can each try to set up a similar situation in future games.)  
- If you're going to play serious tournament chess, you'll want to write moves down for your own records, but also in case of a disagreement with an opponent.  
- If, during a game, no one has a phone to take a photo when you adjourn (or if you're interrupted by a fire drill and someone bumps the board, say) you can always use your move list to set up the game when you resume. Or if you resume several days (or weeks or months!) after you adjourn, you can play through the game to refresh both of your memories as you get back to where you left off!  
**SO WHICH PROGRAMS TO USE?  
- The**[**Engines built into Chess.com**](https://www.chess.com/play/computer)**are, as of November 2020, stronger than any app I've used.** (Just yesterday I pitted Chess.com's Level 25 engine playing BLACK against the desktop version of HIARCS 1.9.4, and Chess.com/25 freaking [**MURDERED**](http://russillosm.com/21NOV20.txt) it. I played it out to Checkmate to see how these powerful engines work on the middlegame and endgame, but at the Grandmaster level these apps play at, White could have resigned at move 20 if not sooner. Seriously brutal.)  
  
- The strongest free chess app is probably[**Stockfish**](http://stockfishchess.org/)**.**  
**-**[**Christophe Theron's free version**](https://apps.apple.com/us/app/chess-tiger/id522314512)is pretty strong too.  
- So is Ted Wong's**[SmallChess Free](https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/smallchess-free/id616577090?mt=8)**  
  
**Others strong programs include:**  
**-**[**Shredder**](http://www.shredderchess.com/) is commercial, but I don't think it's as expensive as HIARCS.  
- [**Komodo**](http://komodochess.com/) is commercial, but **older versions are free**.  
- [**Houdini**](http://www.cruxis.com/chess/houdini.htm). Commercial, and european, but if you pay with PayPal the conversion occurs automatically.  
  
If you have a SmartPhone there are DOZENS of chess apps. I'm always trying new ones, but I have pretty high standards. (The first question I want to know about a chess app is: does it allow me to set up positions? If not, I pass.) I should mention the [**Chess Tactics**](https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/chess-tactics-free-strategy/id531275673?mt=8) app, by Lockwood. It's quick and easy practice and spotting tactics, great for all players, not just attackers!  
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**2. PLAY AS OFTEN AS YOU CAN AGAINST THE STRONGEST OPPONENTS YOU CAN.**  
     People LOVE to win chess games and it's VERY hard for a strong player to turn down a game they KNOW they'll win. When a weaker player offers me a game, the very first thing I do is ask if they want it to be a "teaching game." (A teaching game is one in which BOTH players think out loud, that way the stronger player can analyze the weaker player's thinking, explain why various moves are good or bad, etc. It also allows the weaker player to see how a stronger player's mind works during a game. **If you really want to get better quickly,** NEVER turn down a teaching game -- or ANY game -- against a really strong player.)  
     If the weaker player who has challenged me *doesn't* want a teaching game? They either figure I'll probably win and they want to see how I'll do it, or they're hoping I blunder and lose. I'm human: IT DOES HAPPEN. (Fairly often actually. And because I'm a 55 year old science-teacher-chess-coach, students assume I'm some sort of wise old genius and are reluctant to challenge me, so when I \*do\* screw up it leads to a kind of funny phenomenon. They win, they tell everyone they know, then whaddaya know: EVERYONE WANTS TO PLAY ME ALL OF A SUDDEN! The lesson of course is PLAY STRONG OPPONENTS. If you win you feel great and your confidence in future games skyrockets. If you lose you learn not only from the game itself, but from your desire to never let that happen again!)  
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**3. WATCH GOOD CHESS VIDEOS** (it's a measure of how behind the times I am that it only occurred to me now [March 2023] to add this.)  
     Which ones? I find myself watching both GothamChess and Anna Cramling videos, but there are  LOT of good streamers out there, so my ultimate recommendation for videos would have to be: Definitely watch **any videos you like well enough** to hop over to a chess board and try stuff out. Or that inspire you to try new ideas in your games.  
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**4. READ & STUDY GOOD CHESS BOOKS.**  
     I mentioned two books in the previous section, DEFINITELY study those if possible.  
     Also, a friend once loaned me Jeremy Silman's clsssic [***How To Reasses Your Chess, Expanded 3rd Edition***](http://www.amazon.com/How-Reassess-Your-Chess-Chess-Mastery/dp/1890085006), and ***my chess life hasn't been the same since.***I jumped something like 400-500 points in the three months it took for me to play though every single example on every single page. (There is a newer, bigger, *cooler* [**4th EDITION**](http://www.amazon.com/How-Reassess-Your-Chess-Fourth/dp/1890085138)if you can afford it, but you can find old copies of the 3rd edition online for pennies.) EVERYTHING IN IT IS CRUCIAL FOR YOU TO KNOW: Knights vs. Bishops, weak squares, good/bad Bishops, pawn structure, etc. I've read it three times now, and I even went so far as to create a summary of important concepts. (And I've now read that summary three or four times!)  
    Yassir Seirawan's [***Winning Chess Tactics***](http://www.amazon.com/Winning-Chess-Tactics-Everyman/dp/1857443861) is a terrific introduction to all the different kinds of tactics: Pins, forks, skewers, mating nets, etc. As with*Reassess Your Chess*, EVERYTHING IN IT IS CRUCIAL TO KNOW.  
     I also recommend highly Seirawan's [***Winning Chess Strategies***](http://www.amazon.com/Winning-Chess-Strategies-Everyman/dp/1857443853) as a sort of condensed version of *Reassess Your Chess*.  
     Worthwhile are Bruce Pandolfini's [***Chess Openings: Traps & Zaps***](http://www.amazon.com/Chess-Openings-Traps-Fireside-Library/dp/0671656902) and [***Traps & Zaps 2***](http://www.amazon.com/More-Chess-Openings-Fireside-Library/dp/067179499X). Even if you're an experienced player it never hurts to inoculate yourself from Scholar's mates and other common fatal errors in the opening. (NOTE: these books have well-documented weaknesses -- typos, etc. -- that you'll surely read about if you research them. I include them here because they each have over 200 positions, and each one is associated with a particular concept -- you learn far more concepts than just openings. There are also specific indexes and glossaries which I found--and still find--handy.)  
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**5. STUDY ANNOTATED GRANDMASTER GAMES.**  
There are a million books and web pages that analyze games played by grandmasters. When you read one, set up a board (or open a SmartPhone app!) and play through the games. ***It's important that you allow YOURSELF to make each move, and after you're sure what the move should be, THEN see what the GMs did. And for Pete's sake TAKE NOTES!*** (This kind of study takes enormous patience but pays HUGE dividends.)  
     **SO WHICH GRANDMASTERS?**  
     *If you like****attack*** ("ACTION & TACTICS" = wide open center, trading pieces often, trying for combinations) look for the games of Mikhail Tal, Alexander Alekhine, Veselin Topalov, Rashid Nezhmetdinov, Paul Morphy, etc. (Vladimir Vukovic's book ***The Art Of Attack In Chess*** is a tactical classic and should be studied by all serious chess players.)  
     *If you play****positionally*** ("QUIET STRENGTH & STRATEGY" = closed (clogged) center, not trading much, reducing your opponent's choices, constricting your opponent like a boa) definitely seek out games of Vladimir Kramnik, Tigran Petrosian, Anatoly Karpov, etc. (Aron Nimzowitsch's book [***My System***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_System), is a positional classic and should be studied by all serious chess players.)  
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**6. TAKE LESSONS FROM A CHESS MASTER**  
This is probably the very fastest way to get better. I didn't include this in the list at the beginning because chess lessons cost at least $20-$30 an hour so almost no one does this, but if -- after giving to charity -- you have cash to burn, this is as good a way as any to burn it, and as I said you will improve faster this way than with any self-directed method.