

Some Psychological Chess Tricks

Note that all mutterings should be judged so that they are only just audible to your opponent and not to anyone else. Also, the volume should be judged so as to make it look like you don't want them to catch what you say.

- The "Oh my goodness" strategy
The classic "Oh my goodness" ploy has been around forever. You can of course substitute your own expletive but be careful around children. The idea is that you play a move which appears terrible, e.g. leaving your queen where it can be captured. Then you utter something along the lines of "Oh drat". The idea is that your opponent will think that you have made a mistake and quickly take the piece. He will realise too late that taking the queen was a terrible mistake and that you now have a forced win. The "Oh my God Attack", (that's its real name, sorry), runs as follows. 1. e4 e5, 2. Nf3 Nc6, 3. Bc4 Nd4. Then you say "Oh my goodness" or something similar. Your opponent plays 4. Nxe5 and then you calmly play 4. ... Qg5, and await his resignation. (On account of 5. Nxf7 Qxg2, 6. Rf1 Qxe4, 7. Be2 Nf3#).
- The bluff
If you play a really bad move it is usually a good idea to disguise it and not react when you see what is wrong with it. However, some people prefer to smile to themselves and even mutter "Aha, I've got you now". The idea is that the opponent will think that there is some reason why he should not exploit the mistake in the way he intended to and will play some other move. In a desperate position you might even play an inferior continuation and accompany it with "well, that was a narrow escape".
- The "it's so easy I don't even have to think about it" strategy
This is when you are in the middle of an attack against your opponent or he has sacrificed material in return for an attack against you. The strategy involves memorising the position and then standing up and walking away from the board to go and look out of the window. The idea is to make your opponent think that you are so sure of what will happen next that you no longer need to analyse. This is bound to worry him. The trick is to continue to think about the position while you are away from the board so that you don't lose any time. Be sure to look round every so often with a smug look on your face both to check that your opponent hasn't moved yet and to encourage the grain of doubt you have planted in his mind to flourish and grow.
- The other "it's so easy I don't even have to think about it" strategy
This is extremely risky but is sometimes worth a go against stronger opponents if you know that they have a tendency to get themselves into time trouble. Just play your moves very quickly. Choose moderately tactical continuations that you feel comfortable with. Try to steer the game into positions which are sufficiently complex to give your opponent something to think about, but not too complicated that you are likely to make serious mistakes playing quickly. Naturally, you still need to invest time 'blunder-checking' your moves before you play them.
- The distraction
This is highly immoral/unethical but is often effective. Bring something to the board with you that will distract your opponent. A flask of some hot drink or a packet of crisps are the usual choices but sometimes people bring mascots or CD players. Silly hats are my favourite. If you are female then you don't need to bring anything, just select appropriate attire.
- The intimidation strategy
The most effective form of intimidation involves talking loudly with a friend (before your games starts) about some Grandmaster game you saw the other week. Tell your friend, (loudly enough that your opponent can hear), that you have spent weeks studying it and that you and your personal trainer have come up with a novelty which you think wins by force. Make sure that you don't mention the opening or the name of either of the Grandmasters who played the game. Tell your friend that you tried the move on Fritz and won quickly. You might want to expand on this idea by having your friend say something like "well, the last time you sprung a novelty like that you crushed your opponent in less than half an hour".
- The offbeat opening strategy
As the name suggests, the idea here is to play a dodgy opening with the sole intention of gaining a psychological advantage over your opponent. The best offbeat openings for white are the Nimzo-Larsen attack which begins 1. b3, and the St George opening, which begins 1. b4. I know little about the former but have seen the latter on a number of occasions. A sample line runs 1. b4 e5, 2. a3 d5, 3. Bb2 Bd6, (of course not 3. ... Nc6? 4. b5 winning blacks e-pawn) 4. e3 Nf6, 5. c4 when the position is probably equal. However, white may have obtained a psychological edge in that his opponent may have the feeling that what white has done cannot be correct and that there must be some way of refuting the opening outright. There is not and so the player with the black pieces may become frustrated and overpress and will probably be behind on the clock.

Please don't try any of these psychological tricks because such unsportsmanlike behaviour will not be tolerated. But now you know about them, you can see if they are being used against you!