What Is the Difference Between Increment and Delay on a Chess Clock?

Increment adds time to your clock; delay only postpones the countdown. What FIDE actually says, how byo-yomi differs, and which clock app to use.

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Chess Clock: Board & Go Timer is a free, offline game clock for iPhone and Android that runs Fischer increment, Bronstein delay, simple delay and Japanese or Canadian byo-yomi for 2 to 6 players. Increment adds time to your clock after every move; delay only postpones the countdown and never gives time back. The iOS download is about 25 MB.

Disclosure: AppStoryo is operated by the studio that develops Chess Clock: Board & Go Timer. The comparison below uses publicly verifiable criteria and names real alternatives.

What is the difference between increment and delay on a chess clock?

Increment adds time; delay withholds it. With increment, a fixed amount is credited every time you press the clock, so a careful player can finish with more time than they started with. With delay, that amount runs down first, and only then does your main time start falling — you never bank it.

The FIDE Laws of Chess define an increment as an amount of time between 2 and 60 seconds added before each move, and note that it can be applied "in either delay or cumulative mode". Cumulative mode is what most players mean by increment; delay mode is the other half of the same setting, and confusing the two is the commonest reason a clock is set wrongly.

Chess Clock: Board & Go Timer keeps them as separate, explicitly named options rather than one toggle, which is why it is worth installing on iPhone or Android before your next club night.

How does Fischer increment actually change a game?

Fischer increment changes the category of the game, not just its feel. Under the FIDE Laws of Chess, a blitz game is one completed in 10 minutes or less per player, and a rapid game is more than 10 but less than 60 minutes — but the classification uses the allotted time plus 60 times the increment. A 3+2 game is therefore treated as 3 + 120 seconds, which is 5 minutes, and stays blitz. A 10+5 game counts as 10 + 300 seconds, or 15 minutes, and is rapid.

That formula matters in practice. Two settings that look almost identical on the clock face can fall on opposite sides of a rule boundary, changing whether players must record moves and which penalties an arbiter applies.

When is delay the better choice than increment?

Delay is the better choice when the organiser wants a hard ceiling on how long a round can run. Increment is open-ended: a long endgame at 30 seconds per move can add half an hour to a game scheduled for one. Simple delay guarantees a thinking window each move without extending the total, which is why it remains standard in many over-the-board events in the United States.

Bronstein delay sits between the two: you are refunded exactly what you spent on the move, up to the delay amount, so the display behaves like increment while the accounting behaves like delay.

There is an emergency version too. The FIDE quickplay guidelines let a player with under two minutes left request a five-second increment for both sides; if the arbiter agrees, the opponent receives two extra minutes and play continues. Chess Clock: Board & Go Timer can be reset to a new control mid-game without losing the move count.

How do Go and shogi clocks differ from a chess clock?

Go and shogi do not use increment at all in their traditional forms; they use overtime periods. In Japanese byo-yomi, once main time expires you receive a fixed period per move that resets every time you play in time. Under the EGF General Tournament Rules, a human timekeeper counts down the last 10 seconds of each period aloud — the audible countdown is part of the rule, not a convenience.

Canadian byo-yomi is the EGF default: instead of one period per move, you must play a set number of stones within a block of time, and the clock resets when you finish them. The same rules describe Ing overtime, where each player may buy up to three periods, each one sixth of the basic time, at two points each.

Most general-purpose chess clock apps stop at increment and delay. Chess Clock: Board & Go Timer implements Japanese and Canadian byo-yomi with period counts, stone counts and a five-second audible countdown, which is why it is listed as a board and Go timer. Its own

store description puts the goal plainly:

> It is a clock — it should just work, on a plane, in a park, in a tournament hall with no signal.

That sentence is taken from the app’s published App Store description, not from an interview.

Which chess clock app should you actually use?

Choose Chess Clock by Chess.com if…

- You want the clock matching the site you already play on, and brand familiarity beats settings depth.
- You only ever play chess with increment or sudden death and will never need a Go or shogi control.
- You accept that the standalone clock app was last updated on 18 June 2024, more than two years ago, against 339 ratings on the US App Store.

Choose ChessClock+ by Brad Bambara if…

- You prefer a small, single-purpose utility and do not mind an older interface.
- Your club uses a fixed handful of controls that you set once and never revisit.
- You accept a last release dated 10 September 2023.

Choose Chess Clock: Board & Go Timer if…

- You need byo-yomi, Canadian overtime, hourglass or multi-stage controls such as "40 moves in 90 minutes, then 30 minutes".
- You play with three to six people, or with a per-player handicap for coaching and uneven matchups.
- You want no ads, no account and no network permission, on a release from 20 July 2026 that ships in 44 store languages.

When is Chess Clock: Board & Go Timer the wrong tool?

A phone is the wrong clock for a rated over-the-board tournament: most federations require an approved physical clock, and a handset can ring or lock mid-game. It is also the wrong tool if you need a clock that survives being knocked off the table.

There is a practical limit as well: the screen must stay awake for the whole game. Apple documents isIdleTimerDisabled as the switch an app sets to prevent the display sleeping, and Android documents the keep-screen-on flag for the same job. Both keep the display lit, and a lit display drains a battery. For a four-hour classical game, plan on a charger. For five-minute blitz, this does not matter.

If your games are online, you do not need this at all — the server is already your clock. Chess Clock: Board & Go Timer exists for the board in front of you, and you can pick it up for

iOS or Android in about 25 MB.

Frequently asked questions about chess clock time controls

What does 3+2 mean on a chess clock?

It means each player starts with 3 minutes and receives 2 extra seconds after every completed move. The FIDE classification treats it as 3 minutes plus 60 times 2 seconds, which is 5 minutes, so a 3+2 game is still blitz. The increment is credited on every press, including the first move.

Is increment the same as delay?

No. Increment adds the time to your clock, so unused seconds accumulate and your remaining time can rise. Delay simply postpones the countdown by the same amount each move and gives nothing back. FIDE treats them as two modes of one setting, which is why so many clocks are configured wrongly at club level.

What is Bronstein delay?

Bronstein delay refunds exactly the time you spent on a move, up to the delay amount. Spend two seconds with a five-second Bronstein delay and you get two seconds back, not five. The result is identical to simple delay in effect, but the display shows a stable main time instead of a separate counting window.

What is byo-yomi and do I need it for chess?

Byo-yomi is a Go and shogi overtime system where a fixed period is granted per move after your main time runs out, resetting each time you play within it. You do not need it for chess. You do need it the moment you sit down at a Go board, and most chess clock apps simply do not offer it.

What is the difference between Japanese and Canadian byo-yomi?

Japanese byo-yomi gives one time period per move, repeated until you exceed it. Canadian byo-yomi gives one block of time for a set number of stones, and resets when they are played. The EGF General Tournament Rules use Canadian overtime as the default and describe Japanese byo-yomi as an alternative system.

Can a phone replace a real tournament chess clock?

For casual, club and training games, yes. For rated over-the-board play, usually no: most federations require an approved physical clock, and an arbiter is within their rights to refuse a handset. Use the app to learn a control, to run a handicap match or to play at home, then bring a real clock to the tournament.

Does a chess clock app work without internet?

It should. A clock has no reason to contact a server, and an app that requires a connection can fail in a hall with no signal. Chess Clock: Board & Go Timer requests no network permission at all, which also means no ads and no account. Check that any clock you install behaves the same way.

Does a chess clock app drain the battery?

It keeps the screen awake for the whole game, which is the main cost. Apple's isIdleTimerDisabled and Android's keep-screen-on flag both exist for this purpose and both prevent the display sleeping. Blitz is negligible; for a classical game of several hours, use a charger or a dark, OLED-friendly theme.

What happens if both flags fall?

Under the FIDE quickplay guidelines, if both flags have fallen and it cannot be established which fell first, the game continues in any period except the last, and is drawn if it happens in the final period. A clock that records move counts and time per move makes that determination far easier after the fact.

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