The first bit of technique to learn in rook endings is how to force a pawn home to the queening square. Look at this position:

XABCDEFGHY  
8-+-+k+K+(  
7+-+-+-zP-'  
6-+-+-+-+&  
5+-+-+-+-%  
4-+-+-+-+$  
3+-+-+-+-#  
2-+-+-+-tr"  
1+-+-+-tR-!  
xabcdefghy

White to move

So far white has played the way you would expect – he has used both the king and the rook to force the pawn to the 7th rank. In order to get the pawn this far white has had to put the king on the queening square. Black has defended as well as possible and now the black king prevents the escape of white’s king to the left while the black rook does the same job on the right. So how is white to extract the king and promote the pawn?

This is the technique: from the 1st diagram

XABCDEFGHY  
8-+-+-+-+(  
7+-+k+-zP-'  
6-+-+-+-+&  
5+-+-+-mK-%  
4-+-+-+R+$  
3+-+-+-tr-#  
2-+-+-+-+"  
1+-+-+-+-!  
xabcdefghy

**1 Re1+** white forces the black king to move across. **1 …Kd7.**

**2 Re4!** You must remember this vital manoeuvre – the white rook goes to the 4th rank. **2 …Ra3** (black can only mark time)

**3 Kf7 Rf3+ 4 Kg6 Rg6+ 5 Kh6 Rh3+ 6 Kg5 Rg3+ 7 Rg4!** reaching the second diagram and revealing the point of white’s 2nd move – black can no longer prevent white from promoting the pawn.

The first step to mastering rook endgames is to learn this technique.

Remember, once the pawn has reached the 7th rank:

* **step 1 – check the enemy king away**
* **step 2 – play the rook to the 4th rank**
* **step 3 – manoeuvre the king back down the board to the 5th rank**
* **step 4 – block the enemy rook’s check with your own rook**

If you take the time to learn and understand this basic technique you will find that you begin to understand the endgame in general much better. Winning endgames is all about co-ordinating the actions of your pieces to achieve the promotion of a pawn.

Now for a vital rule: **Rooks belong behind passed pawns!**

To illustrate this rule look at this position:

XABCDEFGHY  
8r+-+-+-+(  
7zP-+-+-mk-'  
6-+-+-+-+&  
5+-+-+-+-%  
4-+-+-+-+$  
3+-+-mK-+-#  
2-+-+-+-+"  
1tR-+-+-+-!  
xabcdefghy

This position is an easy win for white because the black rook is trapped on the queening square. White will simply march the king up to b7 and either win black’s rook or force it to sacrifice itself for the white pawn, leaving white with an easy mating task. There is nothing black can do to prevent this simple winning idea.

Now look at this position:

XABCDEFGHY  
8R+-+-+-+(  
7zP-+-+-mk-'  
6-+-+-+-+&  
5+-+-+-+-%  
4-+-+-+-+$  
3+-+-mK-+-#  
2-+-+-+-+"  
1tr-+-+-+-!  
xabcdefghy

It is exactly the same position as before except that the rooks have swapped places. Now the position is a simple draw! All black has to do is to shuffle the king between h7 and g7 and wait for the white king to approach the pawn. As soon as it does black begins checking with the rook. When the white king moves away from the pawn the black rook resumes its post behind the pawn. White can never make progress because the white rook cannot move without allowing black to capture the passed pawn.

Black must be a little careful, however. The black king must stay on h7 and g7. If it ventures away from those squares white can win with the aid of a little trick:

1. If black’s king goes forward, let’s say to f6 then white can play Rf8+ followed by a8(Q) forcing black to give up the rook.

2. If black’s king goes to f7 then white can play Rh8! And after black captures the pawn with …Rxa7 white plays Rh7+ followed by Rxa7 again winning black’s rook.

But if black is careful to keep the king on h7 or g7, then white will be unable to win.

So remember that rooks belong behind passed pawns.

If it is your passed pawn your rook will support its advance all the way up the board to the promotion square and simultaneously restrict the activities of the enemy rook which will have to allow itself to become tied down just to prevent the advance of the pawn.

If the passed pawn belongs to your opponent your rook behind it will hinder itws progress down the board to the promotion square.

Watch how knowing the tricks outlined above helped white to win the following ending:

XABCDEFGHY  
8-+-+R+-+(  
7+-+-+-+-'  
6P+-+-+p+&  
5+-zp-zP-+k%  
4r+-+-+-+$  
3+-+-+K+-#  
2-+-+-+-+"  
1+-+-+-+-!  
xabcdefghy

**Kulhanek,T (2392) - Reznicek,T (2278)**

TCh-CZE Extraliga 2005-6 Czech Rep CZE (3), 05.11.2005

White to play

At first glance it seems that white is forced to put his rook on the worst square. This is true, but white can use the tricks to his advantage: **56.Ra8**White has to protect the a pawn but is this not bad? **Kg5** Black hurries to take the sting out of the advance of white’s passed e pawn.**57.e6! Kf6 58.a7!** and now black realized what was happening. White is threatening to advance the e pawn to become a new queen and if black captures it with 58 …Kxe6 59 Re8+ and the a pawn will promote next move and cost black his rook. Alternatively, if black tries to stop the e pawn moving with 58 …Ke7 59 Rh8! Rxa7 60 Rh7+ again costs black his rook. White would then have an easy task to round up black’s stray pawns and then set about the simple technical job of mating black with K and R. So black preferred to resign. **1–0**

Now for an example of someone showing an understanding of the importance of putting the rook behind the passed pawn:

**Georgiev,V (2538) - Krush,I (2447) [A20]**

Winter Invitational Chicago USA (8), 12.01.2006

(diagram at the top of the next page)

XABCDEFGHY  
8-+-+-+-+(  
7+-+-+-zp-'  
6-zp-+-mk-zp&  
5+P+-tR-+P%  
4-+-mK-zP-+$  
3+-+-+-tr-#  
2-+-+-+-+"  
1+-+-+-+-!  
xabcdefghy

White to play

It seems a simple task to win black’s b pawn, but how to proceed after that?

**62.Kd5 Rd3+ 63.Kc6 Rd4 64.Kxb6 Rxf4** so the first step has bee accomplished. White has won the black b pawn in exchange for his own f pawn. The passed white b pawn is very dangerous because it is well advanced and black has yet to create a passed pawn of his own **65.Rc5** obviously white needs to save the rook **g5** black hurries to make a passed pawn of his own **66.hxg6 e.p. Kxg6 67.Ka6** white prepares to advance the pawn **Rf2 68.b6 Ra2+ 69.Kb5 h5 70.b7** sacrificing the rook is hopeless for black: 70 …Rb2+ 71 Kc6 Rxb7 72 Kxb7 h4 73 Kc6 h3 74 Rc3 h2 75 Rh3 and white wins the last black pawn. **h4** Black is hoping that white will fall for 71 b8=Q Rb2+ and the new queen will go back in the box!

XABCDEFGHY  
8-+-+-+-+(  
7+P+-+-+-'  
6-+-+-+k+&  
5+KtR-+-+-%  
4-+-+-+-zp$  
3+-+-+-+-#  
2r+-+-+-+"  
1+-+-+-+-!  
xabcdefghy

**71.Kc6! Rb2 72.Rb5** and white’s rook arrives behind the pawn and black can no longer prevent a new white queen appearing on the board, so he resigned  **1–0**

Now for another important rule: **rooks can cut the enemy king out of the action.**

By controlling all the squares on a rank or file a rook can prevent the enemy king from crossing to the vital part of the board. Look at this example:

**Laurent,B (2316) - Fontaine,P (2100) [B10]**

TCh-BEL 2005-6 Belgium BEL (6), 08.01.2006

XABCDEFGHY  
8-tR-+-+-+(  
7+-+-+-+p'  
6-+kzP-zp-+&  
5+-+-zP-+-%  
4-+-+-+P+$  
3+-+-+K+-#  
2r+-+-+-+"  
1+-+-+-+-!  
xabcdefghy

White to move

White won by cutting off the black from white’s passed pawn:

**63.exf6 Kxd6 64.Re8!** now black’s king can never cross the e file. Black can only use his rook to try and prevent the promotion of white’s passed f pawn while white can use both the king and rook to help it advance. **64 …Rc2 65.g5 h6 66.Kg4 hxg5 67.Kxg5 1–0** It will be a simple matter for white to get the king in front of the pawn and then he can set about the winning technique I showed you right at the beginning of this pamphlet.

In the next example white cuts the black king off along the 7th rank:

**Loncar,R (2371) - Skrbin,K (2176) [E38]**

Open Zagreb CRO (2), 15.01.2006

XABCDEFGHY  
8-+R+-+-+(  
7+-+-+-zp-'  
6-zp-mk-zp-zp&  
5+Pzp-zp-+-%  
4-+P+K+P+$  
3+-tr-zPP+-#  
2-+-+-+P+"  
1+-+-+-+-!  
xabcdefghy

White to play

Both sides are using their rook to attack and win enemy pawns. However, white can create a passed pawn very quickly and then use the rook to keep the enemy king away:

**39.Rc6+ Ke7 40.Rxb6 Rxc4+ 41.Kd5 Rc2 42.Rb7+ Kf8** of course the black king must defend the g pawn, but after **43.b6** black gave up because we have the familiar situation of white able to use both king and rook to help the b pawn advance while black has only the rook to defend with – a hopeless task. **1–0**

A vital thing to remember is that **rooks make great attackers, but pretty poor defenders.** Having an active rook that can attack enemy pawns, cut out the enemy king or help in the effort to promote a passed pawn can often be a decisive advantage. In the following example watch how white’s rook runs rings round its black counterpart:

XABCDEFGHY  
8-+-+-+-+(  
7+r+-+p+p'  
6-+-mk-+p+&  
5+-+-+-zP-%  
4-+PmK-tR-zP$  
3+-+-+-+-#  
2-zP-+-+-+"  
1+-+-+-+-!  
xabcdefghy

**Baena,A (2019) - Jamila,Y [B76]**

Gibtelecom Masters Gibraltar ENG (5), 28.01.2006

White has won a pawn and has two connected passed pawns so the win should not be too difficult. However just look at the versatility of white’s rook in the ensuing play:

**44.c5+ Ke6 45.Rf6+** forcing the black king to lose contact with white’s c pawn, white ensures that black’s rook will be tied to defence. **45 … Ke7 46.Kc3** protecting both pawns which are now ready to advance. **46 … Kd8 47.b4 Re7 48.Kd4 Kc8 49.c6 Kc7 50.Kd5 Kb6 51.b5 Rc7 52.Kd6 Ra7** With the white pawns and king advanced as far as possible it is now the turn of the rook to resume the attack. **53.Rf2** the rook retreats down the f file so that it can manoeuvre around to the a file to dislodge black’s king **53 …Rc7**

XABCDEFGHY  
8-+-+-+-+(  
7+-tr-+p+p'  
6-mkPmK-+p+&  
5+P+-+-zP-%  
4-+-+-+-zP$  
3+-+-+-+-#  
2-+-+-tR-+"  
1+-+-+-+-!  
xabcdefghy

So far black has managed to keep the white pawns under control, but now white’s rook lends a hand and black’s defence crumbles to dust in short order.

**54.Ra2** intending 55.Ra6+ Kxb5 56. Kxc7 Kxa6 57. Kd7 and the c pawn queens.

**54 …Rc8 55.Kd7 Rb8 56.c7 Rb7 57.Rc2** and the arrival of the white rook behind the passed pawn spells the end for black, who resigned. **1–0**

Notice how the active white rook could roam around the board making threats while black’s rook was doomed to passive defence.