

2

The Greek Alphabet

Sight and Sounds of the Greek Letters (Module B)

The Letters and Pronunciation of the Greek Alphabet
Phonology (Part 2)

Lesson Two Overview

§2.0	Introduction, 2-1
§2.1	The Ten Similar Letters, 2-2
§2.2	The Six Deceptive Greek Letters, 2-4
§2.3	The Nine Different Greek Letters, 2-7
§2.4	History of the Greek Alphabet, 2-12
§2.5	The Greek Alphabet Revisited, 2-18
Study Guide, 2-23	

§2.0 Introduction

Lesson One introduced the twenty-four letters of the Greek alphabet. Building on this foundation, Lesson Two continues with the sight and sounds of the Greek letters by merging simple vowel-consonant and consonant-vowel combinations together into syllables, the building blocks for learning Greek phonics.

The focus of Lesson Two examines the similarities and dissimilarities between the Greek and English alphabetical letters and their phonemes to aid between what is known (English) and what is new (Greek).

Almost without exception, introductory Greek grammars launch students immediately into grammar and vocabulary without first firmly grounding them in the Greek phonemic system. This is appropriate since they assume a Greek teacher will be present while the grammar is being presented, thereby helping with syllable and word pronunciation. However, there is little help in these introductory grammars for those who are “going at it alone”, or a small group who are learning New Testament Greek without the aid of a teacher’s pronunciation.

The introductory lessons of this grammar go to great lengths to present a full-orbed pronunciation of the Erasmian Greek phonemic system. Some may think that the duration in which it is presented belabors it, especially those who have had previous contact with someone who has taught them the Erasmian Greek pronunciation system. If this is the case, then the following few lessons may be unnecessary. However, for those who are new to the Greek language will welcome this help, which will prepare them to read Greek, and not simply to translate it into their native language.

The student needs to saturate himself with the sounds of the Greek language by using the MP3 audio files that accompany every lesson. By doing so, he is immersed in the language, by hearing, reading, and rereading Greek words and sentences. This is different from what a word or a sentence might mean. This is not what is important now; but an awareness of how Greek letters and words sound like is. This approach is similar with how a young child is at first engulfed in a sea of meaningless noise, from which gradually they learn to detect and recognize meaningful patterns and combinations of sounds as words.

§2.1 The Ten Similar Letters

Ten of the twenty-four small Greek letters are easily recognizable because they are very close in appearance to their English counterparts. These letters are:

English letters:	a	b	d	e	i	k	o	s	t	u
Greek letters:	α^1	β	δ	ϵ	ι^2	κ	\omicron	ς^3	τ^4	υ^5

Some important differences between these letters are:

1. The α (*alpha*) should be written as a figure “8” laid on its side and opened on the right.
2. The Greek letter ι (*iōta*) is never dotted.
3. Final *sigma* (ς) does not sit on the line like the English “s”. The final curve crosses and drops down below the line.
4. The Greek letter τ (*tau*) is never crossed below the top of the vertical line like the English “t”.
5. *Upsilon* and *nū* may be easily confused when written. Form *upsilon* with a rounded bottom and turn the right upward stroke outward. The upper case should not be confused with the English upper case “Y”.

We begin with these letters because they look similar in appearance; however, caution needs to be exercised because they are not exactly identical. It is important not to write Greek letters to make them look like their English counterparts, for the respective lines above represent two different alphabets for two different languages. This will help not to fall into the trap of mistakenly pronouncing a Greek alphabetical letter as if it was an English alphabetical letter (*i.e.*, saying “K, k” [kay] for *kappa* [K, κ], or “T, t” [tē] for *tau* [T, τ]).

Practice saying these letters aloud in different combinations with the aid of the drill below. Only the above ten similar Greek-English letters are used. Multi-syllable words are divided for easier identification. If you wish to hear the instructor's pronunciation, click on the audio link, "Hear" beside each row of Greek syllables. The variable vowels (α, ι, υ) may be long or short. Follow the example of the instructor for proper pronunciation.

Hear α (short), αδ, δαδ, ατ, βατ, ατικ
(α-τικ)

Hear ε, εκ, δε, δετ, εδ, δεδ, βετ

Hear ι (short), ιδ, διδ, βιτ, βιδ, κισ

Hear ο, οτ, δοτ, βος, οδ, βοβ, κοδ

Hear υ (short), τυκ, κυκ, κυς, βυκ

Hear δατ, δεκ, δεκα, βικ, δοτ, κακια
(δε-κα) (κα-κι-α)

Hear Κισ, κιτ, κατ, βαδ, ας, κατα
(κα-τα)

Hear κακος, τυτος, βατος, τοτε
(κα-κος) (τυ-τος) (βα-τος) (το-τε)

Hear δικ, ιτ, ατ, ταδ, οκτ, κοτ

Hear ας, βατ, τα, δα, διδακ, δεδακ
(δι-δακ) (δε-δακ)

Hear κοτ, τακ, τος, αββα, Αβια
(αβ-βα) (Α-βι-α)

Hear αδικια, κυτος, δια, δις, κτισις
(α-δι-κι-α) (κυ-τος) (δι-α) (κτι-σις)

§2.2 The Six Deceptive Greek Letters

Six lower case Greek letters (four consonants and two vowels) appear to be identical to English letters, but their appearance is very deceptive. These letters often confuse beginning Greek students, and therefore need to be carefully distinguished. These “deceptive” Greek letters are *gamma* (γ), *ēta* (η), *nū* (ν), *rhō* (ρ), *chī* (χ), and *ōmega* (ω). Their English look-alikes are also displayed in the chart below.

Greek:	γ ¹	η ²	ν ³	ρ ⁴	χ ⁵	ω ⁶
English:	y	n	v	p	x	w

1. The Greek letter, *gamma* (γ), looks like the English letter “y”.
2. The Greek letter, *ēta* (η), looks like the English letter “n”.
3. The Greek letter, *nū* (ν), looks like the English letter “v”.
4. The Greek letter, *rhō* (ρ), looks like the English letter “p”.
5. The Greek letter, *chī* (χ), looks like the English letter “x”.
6. The Greek letter, *ōmega* (ω), looks like the English letter “w”.

Below, each of the six lower case deceptive letters is examined separately. Special attention should be given to the proper pronunciation of these letters so that they may not be confused with their English look-alikes.

§2.2.1 GAMMA Γγ

The lower case Greek letter, *gamma* (γ, capital letter, Γ), is not to be confused with the English “y”. Γ, γ is pronounced as the hard “g” as in “go”. It is never pronounced like the soft “g” as in “gin”. Read the following syllables and words aloud as many times as necessary to be able to recognize the Greek alphabetical letter and its associated phoneme.

Hear γ, γοτ, γιτ, δαγ, βαγ, γετ, αγεν

Hear γυκος, γαβ, γεβ, διγ, γε, γυ, εγ
(γυ-κος)

§2.2.2 ĒTA Ηη

The lower case Greek letter, *ēta* (η, capital letter, Η), does not correspond to the English “n”, but pronounced like the “a” in “gate”. Furthermore, its upper case letter (Η) must not be confused with the English capital letter of “h”, “H”. Read the following syllables and words aloud as many times as necessary to be able to recognize the Greek alphabetical letter and its associated phoneme.

Hear η, ητα, δη, αδη, ηδη, γη, γοης
(η-τα) (α-δη) (η-δη) (γο-ης)

Hear Η, Ητα, δικη, ακοη, ηγ, ητ, τη
(Η-τα) (δι-κη) (α-κο-η)

Hear ης, της, την, κακη, ητε, ητι, τηδε
(κα-κη) (η-τε) (η-τι) (τη-δε)

§2.2.3 NŪ Νν

The lower case Greek letter, *nū* (ν, capital letter, Ν), does not correspond to the English “v”, but is pronounced like the “n” as in “in”. A Greek alphabetical letter does not correspond to the English letter “v”. Read the following syllables and words aloud as many times as necessary to be able to recognize the Greek alphabetical letter and its associated phoneme.

Hear νυ, νυυ, εν, τευ, ανα, ανεβην, διεβην
(α-να) (α-νε-βην) (δι-ε-βην)

Hear αγεν, ναος, νεος, τανη, κιδου, κενη
(α-γεν) (να-ος) (νε-ος) (τα-νη) (κι-δου) (κε-νη)

Hear γεν, γεννα, νυκτα, νικη, γενη, βαν
(γεν-να) (νυ-κτα) (νι-κη) (γε-νη)

Hear γην, γενος, ονος, γυνη, την
(γε-νος) (ο-νος) (γυ-νη)

§2.2.4 *RHŌ* Ρρ

Neither the lower or upper case Greek letter, *rhō* (ρ, capital letter, Ρ), corresponds to the English “p” or “P”, respectively, but pronounced as the “r” as in “roar”. *Rhō* was probably trilled in ancient Greek (as in Modern Greek), but it will suffice for the purpose of these lessons to pronounce it as suggested. Read the following syllables and words aloud as many times as necessary to be able to recognize the Greek alphabetical letter and its associated phoneme.

Hear αρ, γαρ, νεκρος, καρ, εργον, ορος
(νε-κρος) (ερ-γον) (ο-ρος)

Hear ενεδρα, ερις, καρτ, δαρτ, βαρτ
(ε-νε-δρα) (ε-ρις)

Hear Δαρκ, δρανκ, δηρ, κρινα, τρυκ, τρις
(κρι-να)

§2.2.5 *CHĪ* Χχ

Neither the upper or lower case Greek letter, *chī* (χ, capital letter, Χ), correspond to the English “X, x”. *Chī* can be confused with the pronunciation of *kappa* (Κ, κ) unless it is remembered that the breath is not entirely cut off with *chī*. *Chī* is represented phonetically in English by two letters, “kh”. Read the following syllables and words aloud as many times as necessary to be able to recognize the Greek alphabetical letter and its associated phoneme.

Hear χι, χα, χαρα, χαραν, χρονος
(χα-ρα) (χα-ραν) (χρο-νος)

Hear χη, δοχη, Χαρραν, χαρις, χαρητε
(δο-χη) (Χαρ-ραν) (χα-ρις) (χα-ρη-τε)

Hear Τριχας, ηχος, εχαρη, εχει, χαρ
(Τρι-χας) (η-χος) (ε-χα-ρη) (ε-χει)

Hear δοχη, διδαχη, ενοχος, εχιδνα
(δο-χη) (δι-δα-χη) (ε-νο-χος) (ε-χι-δνα)

§2.2.6 *ŌMEGA* Ωω

The lower case Greek letter, *ōmega* (ω, capital letter, Ω), must not be confused with the English “w”. This long vowel is always pronounced as the long “o” in “tone”. Read the following syllables and words aloud as many times as necessary to be able to recognize the Greek alphabetical letter and its associated phoneme.

Hear **εγω, εχω, αρχω, κρινω, δωδεκα**
(ε-γω) (ε-χω) (αρ-χω) (κρι-νω) (δω-δε-κα)

Hear **αγωγη, Ωον, ωδινω, ωδη, ωτιον**
(α-γω-γη) (ω-δι-νω) (ω-δη) (ω-τι-ον)

Hear **αγω, χωρις, χωρος, τω, των**
(α-γω) (χω-ρις) (χω-ρος)

§2.3 The Nine Different Greek Letters

Nine lower case Greek letters (all consonants) are very different in appearance from any English letters. These letters are as follows:

Greek Letter:	ζ	θ	λ	μ	ξ	π	σ	φ	ψ
Greek Name:	<i>zēta</i>	<i>thēta</i>	<i>lambda</i>	<i>mū</i>	<i>xsī</i>	<i>ρī</i>	<i>sigma</i>	<i>phī</i>	<i>psī</i>

§2.3.1 *ZĒTA* Ζζ

The Greek letter, *zēta* (ζ, capital letter, Ζ), is pronounced like the “z” as in “zebra” when it begins a word. Within a word, *zēta* is pronounced like “dz” as in “adds”. Read the following syllables and words aloud as many times as necessary to be able to recognize the Greek alphabetical letter and its associated phonemes.

Hear **ζη, ζητα, ζητεω, τιζα, κτιζω, εζην**
(ζη-τα) (ζη-τε-ω) (τι-ζα) (κτι-ζω) (ε-ζην)

Hear **γαζα, βιαζω, ζυ, ζυγος, κραζω, κραζ**
(γα-ζα) (βι-α-ζω) (ζυ-γος) (κρα-ζω)

§2.3.2 THĒTA Θθ

The Greek letter, *thēta* (θ, capital letter, Θ), is represented phonetically in English by two letters, “th”. The pronunciation of this letter is always like “th” in “**thin**” or “**think**”, and never as in “thy” or “this”. Read the following syllables and words aloud as many times as necessary to be able to recognize the Greek alphabetical letter and its associated phonemes.

Hear θη, θητα, θε, θεος, θυω, θυρα
(θη-τα) (θε-ος) (θυ-ω) (θυ-ρα)

Hear εθνος, Θαν, θρο, θρονος, καθως
(ε-θνος) (θρο-νος) (κα-θως)

Hear θρονω, θηριον, εκαθητο, ορθως
(θρο-νω) (θη-ρι-ον) (ε-κα-θη-το) (ορ-θως)

Hear οθονη, κιθαρα, Θαρα, θανατω
(ο-θο-νη) (κι-θα-ρα) (Θα-ρα) (θα-να-τω)

§2.3.3 LAMBDA Λλ

The Greek letter, *lambda* (λ, capital letter, Λ), is pronounced like the “l” in “lute”. Read the following syllables and words aloud as many times as necessary to be able to recognize the Greek alphabetical letter and its associated phoneme.

Hear λαμβδα, λεγω, λιθος, λυω, Λεγε
(λαμ-βδα) (λε-γω) (λι-θος) (λυ-ω) (Λε-γε)

Hear ελλω, οχλος, αλλα, λογος
(ελ-λω) (ο-χλος) (αλ-λα) (λ-γος)

Hear θελοντος, καλα, καλος, Λιβυη
(θε-λον-τος) (κα-λα) (κα-λος) (Λι-βυ-η)

§2.3.4 *mū* Μμ

The Greek letter *mū* (μ, capital letter, Μ), is pronounced like the “m” as in “man”. Read the following syllables and words aloud as many times as necessary to be able to recognize the Greek alphabetical letter and its associated phoneme.

Hear μυ, μη, μηδε, λιμος, γαμος, βημα
(μη-δε) (λι-μος) (γα-μος) (βη-μα)

Hear μητηρ, τιθημι, Ερημος, Νομος
(μη-τηρ) (τι-θη-μι) (Ε-ρη-μος) (Νο-μος)

Hear Αριθμον, γενηθωμεν, λεγομεν
(Α-ριθ-μον) (γε-νη-θω-μεν) (λε-γο-μεν)

Hear Μετα, βηματος, Καμηλον, μεριμνων
(Με-τα) (βη-μα-τος) (κα-μη-λον) (με-ρι-μνων)

§2.3.5 *xsī* Ξξ

The Greek letter, *xsī* (ξ, capital letter, Ξ), is pronounced like the “x” in “fox”, or in “axe”, and is represented phonetically as “xs” in English. This consonant is never pronounced like the “x” as in “xylophone”. Read the following syllables and words aloud as many times as necessary to be able to recognize the Greek alphabetical letter and its associated phoneme.

Hear ξι, εξ, εξω, ξα, νυξ, ξυ, ξυλον
(ε-ξω) (ξυ-λον)

Hear αξ, αξινη, δοξ, δοξα, Ξυλινα
(α-ξι-νη) (δο-ξα) (Ξυ-λι-να)

Hear τοξ, τοξον, Τεξη, ταξιν, ταξις
(το-ξον) (Τε-ξη) (τα-ξιν) (τα-ξις)

§2.3.6 *PĪ* Ππ

The Greek letter, *pī* (π, capital letter, Π) is pronounced like the “p” in “party” or “poet”. Read the following syllables and words aloud as many times as necessary to be able to recognize the Greek alphabetical letter and its associated phoneme.

Hear πι, πα, πυ, πι, πινω, επι, πο, Πολις
(πι-νω) (ε-πι) (πο-λις)

Hear παρα, απαγω, πλη, πλην, Πε
(πα-ρα) (α-πα-γω)

Hear τοπον, Λυπω, λυπας, κοπος, Κοπτω
(το-πον) (Λυ-πω) (λυ-πας) (κο-πος) (Κο-πτω)

Hear δαπανη, απο, Πυρ, πυρα, πυργον
(δα-πα-νη) (α-πο) (πυ-ρα) (πυρ-γον)

§2.3.7 *SIGMA* Σσς

The Greek letter, *sigma* (σ, capital letter, Σ, final form, ς) is pronounced like the “s” in “sit”. *Sigma* is pronounced like the “s” as in “rose” before the consonants, β, γ, δ and μ (this will be more fully explained in section §4.3.1). Otherwise, both the medial and final forms of *sigma* are pronounced the same. Read the following words aloud and practice pronouncing each letter separately.

Hear συ, συν, σε, σεβω, ση, σης, σηπω
(σε-βω) (ση-πω)

Hear σκολον, συκα, συκη, συκης, κοσμος
(σκο-λον) (συ-κα) (συ-κη) (συ-κης) (κο-σμος)
Sounds like “z” before μ

Hear τας, βατος, ασεβη, Ασια, Χριστος
(βα-τος) (α-σε-βη) (Α-σι-α) (Χρι-στος)

§2.3.8 PHĪ Φφ

The Greek letter, *phī* (φ, capital letter, Φ), is pronounced like the “ph” in “**phone**” or as in “**photograph**”, and is represented phonetically in English as “ph” or as “f”. Read the following syllables and words aloud as many times as necessary to be able to recognize the Greek alphabetical letter and its associated phoneme.

Hear φι, φως, οφισ, φερω, τυφλος
(ο-φισ) (φε-ρω) (τυ-φλος)

Hear φωτα, φωτων, Φωτιζω, οφιν
(φω-τα) (φω-των) (Φω-τι-ζω) (ο-φιν)

Hear κοφινων, βλασφημα, αφελη
(κο-φι-νων) (βλασ-φη-μα) (α-φε-λη)

Hear αφριζω, Φημι, αδελφος, γραφω
(α-φρι-ζω) (Φη-μι) (α-δελ-φος) (γρα-φω)

§2.3.9 PSĪ Ψψ

The Greek letter, *psī* (ψ, capital letter, Ψ) is pronounced like the “ps” in “**lips**” or as in “**steps**”, and is represented phonetically as “ps” in English. Read the following syllables and words aloud as many times as necessary to be able to recognize the Greek alphabetical letter and its associated phoneme.

Hear ψι, ψυχη, ψιλος, ψαλμος, ψηφιζω
(ψυ-χη) (ψι-λος) (ψαλ-μος) (ψη-φι-ζω)

Hear σκαψω, Ψυχος, ψυχρος, ψαλω
(σκα-ψω) (Ψυ-χος) (ψυ-χρος) (ψα-λω)

Hear θλιψις, γραψω, βλεψω, λυψις
(θλι-ψις) (γρα-ψω) (βλε-ψω) (λυ-ψις)

Hear αψις, ψωχω, ψαλμω, Ψυχης
(α-ψις) (ψω-χω) (ψαλ-μω) (Ψυ-χης)

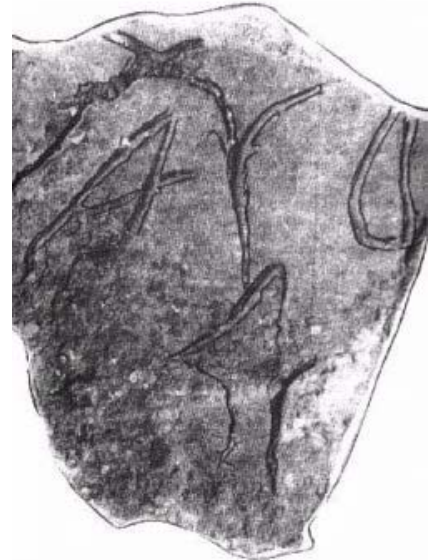
§2.4 History of the Greek Alphabet

An exact history of the development of the Greek alphabet is tentative at best because of its antiquity. The fact that the Greek alphabet derives from an earlier Semitic script is uncontested. However, the exact source(s) of the Greek alphabet are controversial. Some scholars theorize it arose from the Proto-Canaanite and the Phoenician scripts, whereas other theories include Egypt, Assyria, and Minoan Crete. In actuality, the antiquity of the Greek alphabet may be older than originally believed, exemplified by the potsherd to the right.

The historical development of the Greek language may be sketched through five eras: Archaic, Classical, Hellenistic, Byzantine, and finally, Modern Greek. The alphabet is one of the few linguistic elements that remained essentially unchanged between the Classical and Modern Greek Eras, although the pronunciation of its letters has evolved throughout the centuries.

From the shape of ancient Greek letters, many scholars believe the Greeks adopted the shape, order, and names from the Phoenician alphabet. In support of this, in the fifth century BC, the Greek historian, Herodotus, called the Greek letters *phoinichēia grammata* (φοινιχῆια γράμματα), which means, “Phoenician letters”. It is believed that the alphabet was first introduced to Greece during the late ninth century BC by the Phoenicians. The Phoenicians were merchant traders from Lebanon, who had colonies throughout the Mediterranean, including Cyprus. Because of mutual interests, the Phoenicians encountered the ancient Greeks, principally the Minoan and the Mycenaean peoples, and cultural diffusion took place, most importantly, the dissemination of their alphabet.

The Archaic Greek alphabet went under transformation with the alteration of some Phoenician consonants into vowels. Unlike the later Classical Greek alphabet, which contains vowels and consonants, the Phoenician alphabet only



The potsherd above is dated 5500-6000 BC. It was recovered at the islet Yura of Northern Sporades. The Greek letters *Alpha*, *Upsilon* and *Delta* can be recognized. Is this proof that the Greek alphabet predates the Phoenician alphabet?

had consonant letters. The Greeks phonemically altered some of the Phoenician consonants into vowels. For example, the Phoenician letter, *‘aleph* (which is a glottal stop consonant), became *alpha* (a vowel sound). The first vowels were *alpha*, *epsilon*, *iota*, *omicron*, and *upsilon* (copied from *waw*). Eventually, *omega* was introduced as a long “o” sound.

Greek thus became the first known alphabet in the world with letters for both vowels and consonants, and thus the first phonetic alphabet. Many alphabets that contain vowels, notably the Roman and Cyrillic alphabets, are ultimately derived from the Greek alphabet. Because the Roman alphabet is the foundation for Western European languages, and the Cyrillic alphabet for Eastern European languages (and even the Scandinavian Runic alphabet), this makes the Greek alphabet the parent alphabet for all modern European alphabets. The oldest surviving alphabetic inscriptions are written using this new system and date from the late eighth century BC.



The small clay tablet shown left was found among the ruins of the ancient city of Ugarit in 1948, located near the modern Syrian coast. Ugarit flourished from 1400 to 1200 B.C. The tablet is part of a collection of over three hundred clay tablets that have thus far been found. Interestingly, most of the tablets recovered are mythological

texts. However, this one was an abecedarian. The artifact was most probably created by an apprentice scribe practicing his ABC's (hence, an “abecedarian”). However, three characters appear to be missing. This clay tablet is an example of an ancient alphabet, one which is very different from the Greek alphabet.

During its evolution, the Greek alphabet also developed three new aspirate consonants that were appended to the end of the alphabet. These consonants were *phī*, *chī*, and *psī*. These consonants were mainly to make up for the lack of aspirates in the Phoenician alphabet.

Other consonants were used, and then disappeared. For example, the letter, *san*, was used at variance with *sigma*. The letters, *waw* (latter called *digamma*) and *qoppa* disappeared too, the former used in the western Greek dialects.

At first, there were a number of different versions and variants of the Greek alphabet (see next page). These differences were probably due to geographical isolation between Greek city-states including Ionia, Athens, Corinth, Argos, and

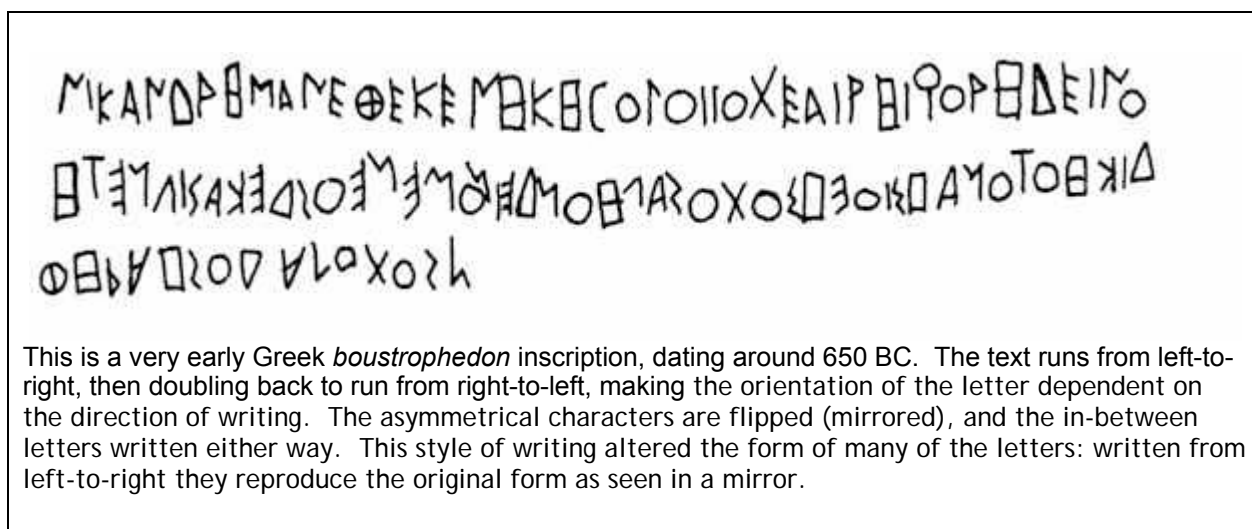
Comparison Chart of the Greek Epichorical Alphabets with Modern Greek

	Ionia	Athens	Corinth	Argos	Euboea	Modern
alpha	ΑΑ	ΑΑ	ΑΑ	ΑΑ	ΑΑ	Α α
beta	Β	Β	Β	Β	Β	Β β
gamma	Γ	Λ	<C	ΓΛ	<C	Γ γ
delta	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ δ
epsilon	ϜΕ	ϜΕ	Β	ϜΕ	ϜΕ	Ε ε
digamma		Ϝ	Ϝ	ϜϜ	Ϝ	
zeta	Ζ	Ζ	Ζ	Ζ	Ζ	Ζ ζ
eta	ΘΗ					Η η
heta		ΘΗ	ΘΗ	ΘΗ	ΘΗ	
theta	⊕⊗⊙	⊕⊗⊙	⊕⊗⊙	⊕⊗⊙	⊕⊗⊙	Θ θ
iota	Ι	Ι	Ξ	Ι	Ι	Ι ι
kappa	Κ	Κ	Κ	Κ	Κ	Κ κ
lambda	ΓΛ	Λ	ΓΛ	Γ	Λ	Λ λ
mu	ΜΜ	ΜΜ	ΜΜ	ΜΜ	ΜΜ	Μ μ
nu	ΝΝ	ΝΝ	ΝΝ	ΝΝ	ΝΝ	Ν ν
xi	Ξ		Ξ	Ξ	Χ	Ξ ξ
omikron	Ο	Ο	Ο	Ο	Ο	Ο ο
pi	Π	Π	Π	Π	Π	Π π
san			Μ	Μ	Μ	
koppa	ϙ	ϙ	ϙ	ϙ	ϙ	
rho	ΡΔ	ΡΡ	ΡΡ	ΡΡ	Ρ	Ρ ρ
sigma	Σ	Σ		Σ	Σ	Σ σς
tau	Τ	Τ	Τ	Τ	Τ	Τ τ
upsilon	ΥΥ	ΥΥΥ	ΥΥΥ	ΥΥΥ	ΥΥΥ	Υ υ
phi	Φ	Φ⊙	Φ⊙	Φ⊙	Φ⊙	Φ φ
chi	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ	ΥΨ	Χ χ
psi	ΥΨ		ΥΨ	Ψ		Ψ ψ
omega	Ω					Ω ω

Euboea. These different Greek alphabets are called *epichorical* alphabets, alphabets peculiar to a particular district or region. Although there are many differences between these epichorical alphabets, enough similarities exist to suggest the Greeks adopted the Phoenician alphabet once and then fractured rapidly into local variants, rather than each city-state adopting the Phoenician alphabet multiple times.

At one time, the alphabet in Greece consisted of twenty-seven letters. Three of these letters, *koppa*, *stigma*, and *sampi*, used for special mathematical symbols, became extinct. With the extinction of these letters, the alphabet was eventually trimmed to the same twenty-four letters which are used today.

From the beginning, Greek letters were written right-to-left horizontally. This was natural since their alphabetical letters opened to the left like their parent Semitic alphabet. However, as the alphabet evolved, the early Greeks adopted an unusual practice of writing every second row in the opposite direction. The Greeks alternated the direction of the letters with every line; first running left-to-right, then right-to-left. This form of early Greek writing, known as *boustrophedon* (βουστροφηδόν, “ox-turning”), resembles the path of an ox-drawn plough across a field.



An example of boustrophedon style of writing may be found in the modern city of Gortys in Crete, where the laws of the city were carved on a wall in this unique method, which are still visible today. Around the fifth century BC, the practice changed to the direction of writing the alphabet on horizontal lines running only left-to-right, which continues to the present day.

The Classical or the Hellenistic Period extends from about 750 BC to 350/330 BC. The Classical Period began with Homer because the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, hexameter poems centering on the Trojan War and anciently attributed to the Ionian poet Homer, constitute the earliest examples of Greek literature.

As an overview, during the Classical Period, the alphabet may be divided into two alphabet-types: Western Greek and Eastern Greek. The difference between these two different alphabet-types differed in the way of writing a few of the letters. The Eastern alphabet later developed into Classical and Byzantine Greek (as well as Cyrillic, Gothic, Coptic, Armenian and Georgian). The Western family led to the creation of the Italic, Etruscan, and Roman varieties.

During the Classical Period, different dialects developed in different regions, as mentioned before, each of which had its own significance for the history of the language. The most influential dialect, however, was the one spoken in and around the region of Athens. This dialect is called, Attic Greek. Along with the Ionic dialect, the dialect spoken mainly in the Greek city-states directly across the Aegean Sea from Athens, these two exerted significant influence on each other as the preferred forms of the language for oratory and philosophical prove, eventually producing a dialect now called Attic-Ionic. Much of the great Greek literature was written in this dialect. Athens' long list of great writers and philosophers includes such names as those of the tragic poets, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides; the comic poet, Aristophanes; the historians, Thucydides and Xenophon; Plato and Aristotle, philosophers; and the orator Demosthenes. Generally speaking, "Classical Greek" is Attic Greek.

Gradually, the different Greek epichorical alphabets moved toward uniformity. In 403 BC, Athens adopted the Ionic alphabet of Miletus as its official alphabet. The rest of the mainland followed Athens' standard, that by the middle of the fourth century BC, almost all the other epichorical alphabets disappeared. The Modern Greek capital letters are almost identical to those of the Ionic alphabet. The minuscule, or lower case letters, first appeared sometime during or after the eighth century AD, which developed from the Byzantine minuscule script.

Alexander the Great himself was schooled in Attic Greek. In connection with the spread of his dominion, this dialect became modified by the languages with which it came into contact. The new dialect became the κοινή διάλεκτος, or "common dialect" of the world.

The Koiné Period extends from 330 BC to the building of Byzantium by Constantine in 330 AD. Koiné Greek was the dialect in which the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures were made, translated in Alexandria in 280 BC by seventy scholars (hence, “Septuagint”). The histories of Polybius, the discourses of Epictetus, and the Greek New Testament also date from this period.

Because of the conquests of Alexander the Great (336-323 BC) the language underwent further changes. Alexander carried the Attic-Ionic form of the language, along with Greek culture more generally, far into the Near East where it became the standard language of commerce and government, existing along side many local languages. Greek was normally adopted as a second language by the native people of these regions and was ultimately transformed into what has come to be called the Hellenistic *Koiné* or common Greek.

The letters of the Greek alphabet, supplemented with three supernumerary letters, were used since at least the third century BC as numerals. The first nine letters of the alphabet stood for the digits, the obsolete *digamma* being retained for “6”, and the remaining letters for tens and hundreds, the obsolete *koppa* being retained for “90”, and the obsolete *sampi* for “900”. Written with a tick or a horizontal line above the letter to indicate that it is to be understood as a number, the letters of the alphabet have the following values:

$\alpha' = 1$	$\eta' = 8$	$\xi' = 60$	$\upsilon' = 400$
$\beta' = 2$	$\theta' = 9$	$\omicron' = 70$	$\phi' = 500$
$\gamma' = 3$	$\iota' = 10$	$\pi' = 80$	$\chi' = 600$
$\delta' = 4$	$\kappa' = 20$	$\rho' = 90$	$\psi' = 700$
$\epsilon' = 5$	$\lambda' = 30$	$\sigma' = 100$	$\omega' = 800$
$\text{F}' \text{ or } \zeta' = 6$	$\mu' = 40$	$\sigma' = 200$	$\text{Ͱ}' = 900$
$\zeta' = 7$	$\nu' = 50$	$\tau' = 300$	$\alpha = 1000$

Diacritical markings were first introduced to the alphabet during the second century BC by Aristophanes of Byzantium (257-180 BC). Aristophanes was the successor to Eratosthenes as head of the Alexandrian Library. These diacritical marks were added for phonetic purposes, making Greek words easier to learn to pronounce by foreigners. These diacritical markings are divided into two types: breathing marks and accents.

There were two breathing marks. Words beginning with a vowel or *rhō* had a breathing mark, either smooth or rough. A right-facing mark (which looks like a single closing quotation mark) was called a “rough breathing mark”, and indicated that aspiration was associated with the letter. A left-facing mark (which looks like a single opening quotation mark) was called a “smooth breathing mark”, and indicated that there was no aspiration (“h”) associated with the letter. In 1982, the diacritical markings representing breathings (which were not widely used after 1976), were officially abolished by presidential decree.















Similar to breathing marks, Greek accents are associated with vowels and diphthongs, but never with *rhō*. Also like breathing marks, accents were employed later than NTGreek times by copyists of Greek manuscripts to assist in the pronunciation of Greek words by those to whom the language was foreign. Since the Second Century BC, Greek words were commonly accented with one of three possible accents: the acute, grave, or the circumflex. The three accents that were used in Greek were one of pitch (tonal accent) rather than one of stress (dynamic accent).




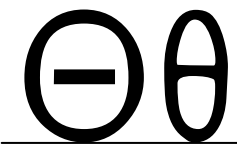


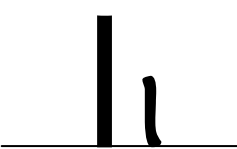












When Greek was written for native Greek readers, or for those well acquainted with the language, the accent and breathing marks were normally omitted (just as English accent marks omitted for English readers). In papyri and the earlier uncial manuscripts, the accent and breathing marks are rare and sporadic. By the seventh century, scribes tend to introduce accent and breathing marks in greater numbers. By the ninth century, they were universally used in uncial and minuscule manuscripts.




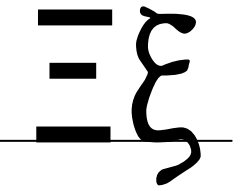








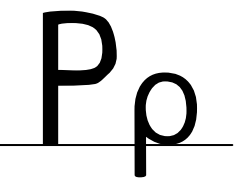



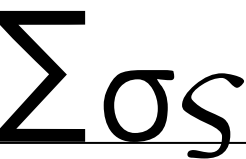



Finally, in Ancient Greek, in some cases when *iota* appeared after certain vowels (a *diphthong*), it was written with a subscript *iota* under the vowel instead. This was called an *iota subscript*. These do not occur in Modern Greek.




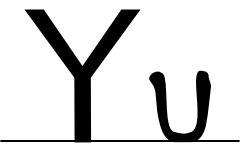



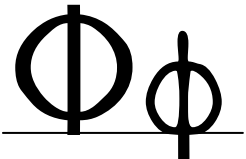


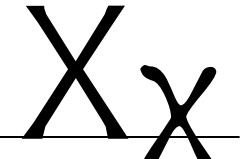


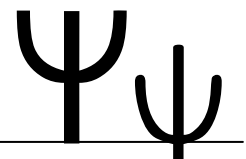



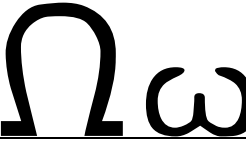


§2.5 The Greek Alphabet Revisited

The importance in learning the Greek letters is not only to recite perfectly their alphabetical sequence, but more importantly, to learn the different phoneme(s) associated with each Greek letter. The Greek alphabetical sequence only represents a convenient arrangement in conventional order to learn these different phonemes. Before pressing forward to the next lesson, know how to pronounce the twenty-four Greek alphabetical letters flawlessly, the foundation for Greek phonics—the principal focus of lessons three through five.

Α α	 Alphabetical Character
	 Short Phoneme (The a as in "dad")
	 Long Phoneme (The a as in "father")
Β β	 Alphabetical Character
	 Phoneme (The b as in "ball")
Γ γ	 Alphabetical Character
	 Phoneme (The g as in "got")
Δ δ	 Alphabetical Character
	 Phoneme (The d as in "dog")
Ε ε	 Alphabet Character
	 Phoneme (The e as in "net")
Ζ ζ	 Alphabet Character
	 Phoneme (initial; like the "z" in "gaze".)
	 Phoneme (medial or final; like the "dz" in "adz".)

	 Alphabetical Character
	 Phoneme (The e as in "obey".)
	 Alphabet Character
	 Phoneme (The th as in "thin".)
	 Alphabet Character
	 Short Phoneme (The i as in "hit".)
	 Long Phoneme (The i as in "machine".)
	 Alphabet Character
	 Phoneme (The k as in "kin".)
	 Alphabet Character
	 Phoneme (The l as in "lot".)
	 Alphabet Character
	 Phoneme (The m as in "man".)

	 Alphabet Character
	 Phoneme (The n as in "new".)
	 Alphabet Character
	 Phoneme (The x as in "axe".)
	 Alphabet Character
	 Phoneme (The ough as in "ought".)
	 Alphabet Character
	 Phoneme (The p as in "party".)
	 Alphabet Character
	 Initial Position Phoneme (with aspiration) (The rh as in "rhino".)
	 Medial Position Phoneme (without aspiration) (The r as in "ride".)
	 Alphabet Character
	 Unvoiced Phoneme (The s as in "sit".)
	 Voiced Phoneme (The s as in "is".)

	 Alphabet Character
	 Phoneme (The t as in "talk".)
	 Alphabet Character
	 Short Phoneme (The u as in "put".)
	 Long Phoneme (The u as in "lute".)
	 Alphabet Character
	 Phoneme (The ph as in "phone".)
	 Alphabet Character
	 Phoneme (The ch as in "chemist".)
	 Alphabet Character
	 Initial Phoneme (The ps as in "psalms".)
	 Medial or Final Phoneme (The ps as in "lips".)
	 Alphabet Character
	 Phoneme (The o as in "note".)

2

Study Guide
The Greek Alphabet
Sight and Sounds of the Greek Letters (Module B)
Phonology (Part 2)

Exercise One: Pronunciation Practice. Practice writing the following Greek letter combinations several times. Most of these examples were taken from the lesson. While forming the Greek letters, say their names aloud several times. The accompanying MP3 audio files pronounce the letters together.

Hear (Set One)

1. αβ _____
2. βατ _____
3. τοδε _____
4. κατα _____
5. βικ _____
6. βιδ _____

Hear (Set Two)

7. διδ _____
8. βατ _____
9. κυτ _____
10. κυβ _____
11. δοτ _____
12. Γαδ _____

Hear (Set Three)

13. γιβ

14. δη

15. δικη

16. βαν

17. την

18. γεν

19. καρτ

20. καλα

Hear (Set Four)

21. χαρ

22. εχω

23. ζη

24. τιζα

25. γαζα

26. θεος

27. εθνος

28. λογος

29. αλλα

Hear (Set Five)

30. μυ

31. εθεμ

32. δοξ

33. δοξα

34. νυξ

35. πα

36. απο

37. Πυρ

Hear (Set Six)

38. σε

39. σης

40. συκα

41. φι

42. φυλη

43. Φημι

44. ψι

45. ψαλω

46. θλιψις

Exercise Two: Similarities and dissimilarities of the Greek-English letters.

Below is a brief review of the similarities and the dissimilarities between the Greek and English letters. Listen to the audio files with your eyes closed, while at the same time imagining what the Greek letters look like.



Never call a Greek letter by what it looks like in English. Remember, in order to learn Greek effectively, you must not translate, but read Greek for what it is—a different language than English.

1. There are ten Greek letters that appear very close to their English counterparts.

Hear

A α	B β	δ	E ε	I ι
K κ	O ο	ς	T τ	υ

- a. How many of these letters are vowels? _____. Which vowels may be pronounced both long and short? _____, _____, and _____. Which two vowels are always short? _____, _____.
- b. Which letter is written as a figure “8” laid on its side and opened on the right? _____.
- c. Which letter is never dotted? _____.
- d. Which letter crosses, then its curve drops down below the line? _____.
- e. Which letter has a “tail” that extends below the line? _____.
- f. Which letters have capitals that are very different from their small letters? _____, _____, and _____.
- g. Which letter has as its capital letter Σ? _____.
- h. Which letter has as its capital letter Υ? _____.
- i. Which letter has as its capital letter Δ? _____.

2. Six deceptively looking Greek letters appear to be like English letters, but are not. These letters will prove difficult unless learned well.

Hear

γ	η	ν	Ρ ρ	Χ χ	ω
---	---	---	-----	-----	---

- a. Which letter are vowels? _____ and _____.
- b. Which letter sounds like the English “r”? _____.
- c. Which letter sounds like the English “g”? _____.
- d. Which letter sounds like the English “n”? _____.
- e. Which letter sounds like “ō” (long “o”)? _____.
- f. Which small letter has a capital that looks like a horseshoe? _____.
- g. Which letter sounds like “ē” (long “a”)? _____.
- h. Which small letter has as its capital N? _____.
- i. Which small letter has as its capital Γ? _____.
- j. Which small letter has as its capital H? _____.
- k. *Gamma* is pronounced as the hard “g” as in “go”, and never as the soft “g” as in _____.
- l. Which letter sounds like something you use to unlock your door? _____.
- m. Which letter sounds like something you do to a boat? _____.
- n. Which letter sounds like the English word “new”? _____.
- o. Finish spelling the following names of the Greek letters:
*gam*_____ *ēt*____ *rh*_____ *ōme*_____ *n*_____ *ch*_____

3. There are nine Greek letters very different from any English letters.

Hear

Ζ ζ	Θ θ	Λ λ	Μ μ	Ξ ξ
Π π	Σ σ	Φ φ	Ψ ψ	

- Which letter has a final form? _____.
- Which letter looks like a cactus? _____.
- Which four Greek letters are represented phonetically in English by two letters? _____, _____, _____, and _____.

Exercise Three: Transposition. Transpose all the following Greek capital letters into their corresponding small letters, using the space provided.

TAXIN _____

ΚΟΣΜΟΝ _____

ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ _____

ΛΙΤΡΑ _____

ΝΥΞ _____

ΚΑΛΩΝ _____

ΑΓΑΠΩΣΙΝ _____

ΨΥΧΗ _____

ΘΕΟΣ _____

ΑΜΠΕΛΟΣ _____

ΦΥΛΑΚΗ _____

ΧΑΡΙΣΜΑ _____

Exercise Four: True and False Questions. Choose whether the statement is true or false.

- The fact that the Greek alphabet derives from an earlier Semitic script is uncontested. True False
- The capital letter for δ is Δ. True False

3. The capital letter for υ is U. True False
4. The capital letter for γ is Γ. True False
5. The Greek dialect spoken in ancient Athens was Attic. True False
6. The Greek alphabetical characters never changed in shape from the time of Archaic Greek to Modern Greek. True False
7. The Greek alphabetical characters never changed in pronunciation from the time of the Classical Period to Modern Greek. True False
8. No examples of boustrophedon style of Greek writing exists. True False
9. Aristophanes of Byzantium is attributed of introducing diacritical markings in connection with the Greek alphabet. True False
10. The Greek letters were used as numbers, written with a tick or a horizontal line above the letter. True False
11. During the Classical Period, the Greek alphabet may be divided into two alphabet-types: Eastern and Western Greek. True False
12. In 403 BC, Athens adopted the Ionic alphabet of Miletus as its official alphabet. True False

Exercise Five: Multiple Choice. Choose the best answer.

1. Examples of Greek epichorical alphabets are:
 - a. Thucydides and Xenophon
 - b. Ionia and Euboea
 - c. Cyrillic and Gothic
 - d. Classical and Koiné
2. At the time of the Classical Period, the Greek alphabet contained how many Greek letters?
 - a. twenty-four
 - b. twenty
 - c. twenty-eight
 - d. twenty-seven

3. Which letters became extinct from the Greek alphabet?
 - a. *alpha* and *koppa*
 - b. *gamma* and *delta*
 - c. *stigma* and *sampi*
 - d. *omikron* and *diagamma*

 4. How many consonants are there in the Modern Greek alphabet?
 - a. fourteen
 - b. fifteen
 - c. sixteen
 - d. seventeen

 5. How many Greek vowels are always pronounced short?
 - a. two
 - b. three
 - c. four
 - d. five

 6. Which alphabet became the first alphabet which contained both vowels and consonants?
 - a. Greek
 - b. German
 - c. English
 - d. Phoenician

 7. The capital letters of the Modern Greek alphabet are almost identical to which ancient Greek epichorical alphabet?
 - a. Corinth
 - b. Argos
 - c. Ionic
 - d. Corinth
-

Having examined and practiced saying and writing the entire Greek alphabet, it may continue to seem strange for a little while longer. This is natural and is to be expected. The reason is because the Greek alphabet has several different symbols to represent different sounds than in English. However, if you discipline yourself to study the Greek alphabet, you will soon know it very well.