

2

The Greek Alphabet

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

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2.0 Introduction

Lesson One introduced the twenty-four letters of the Greek alphabet. Lesson Two continues to present the building blocks for learning Greek phonics by merging vowels and consonants into syllables. Furthermore, this lesson underscores the similarities and dissimilarities between the Greek and English alphabetical letters and their phonemes.

Almost without exception, introductory Greek grammars launch into grammar and vocabulary without first firmly grounding a student in the Greek phonemic system. This approach is appropriate if a teacher is present. However, it is little help for those who are “going at it alone,” or a small group who are learning NTGreek without the aid of a teacher’s pronunciation.

This grammar’s introductory lessons go to great lengths to present a full-orbed pronunciation of the Erasmian Greek phonemic system. Those who are new to the Greek language without an instructor’s guidance will welcome this help, and it will prepare them to read Greek and not simply to translate it into their language.

The phonic sounds of the Greek language are required to be carefully learned. A saturation of these sounds may be accomplished by using the accompanying MP3 audio files. The student is immersed in the language by hearing, reading, and rereading Greek words and sentences. This approach is similar how a young child is at first engulfed in a sea of meaningless noise, from which they gradually learn to detect and recognize meaningful patterns and combinations of sounds as words.

2.1 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:	a	b	d	e	i	k	o	s	t	u
Greek:	α ¹	β	δ	ε	ι ²	κ	ο	ς ³	τ ⁴	υ ⁵

Some important differences between these letters are:

1. *Alpha* should be written as a figure “8” on its side and opened at the right.
2. The Greek letter *iōta* is never dotted.
3. Final *sigma* does not sit on the line like the English “s”. The final curve crosses and drops down below the line.
4. The Greek letter *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”.

These letters are first introduced because they look similar to English letters; 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 so as not to fall into the trap of mistakenly pronouncing a Greek alphabetical letter as if it was an English alphabetical letter.

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. The variable vowels (α, ι, υ) may be long or short.

[Listen](#)

α (short), αδ, δαδ, ατ, βατ, ατικ

[Listen](#)

ε, εκ, δε, δετ, εδ, δεδ, βετ

[Listen](#)

ι (short), ιδ, διδ, βιτ, βιδ, κισ

[Listen](#)

ο, οτ, δοτ, βος, οδ, βοβ, κοδ

[Listen](#)

υ (short), τυκ, κυκ, κυς, βυκ

[Listen](#)

δατ, δεκ, δεκα, βικ, δοτ, κακια

[Listen](#)

κισ, κιτ, κατ, βαδ, ας, κατα

[Listen](#)

κακος, τυτος, βατος, τοτε

[Listen](#)

δικ, ιτ, ατ, ταδ, οτ, κοτ

[Listen](#)

ας, βατ, τα, δα, διδακ, δεδακ

[Listen](#)

κοτ, τακ, τος, αββα, Αβια

[Listen](#)

αΔΙΚΙΑ, ΚΥΤΟΣ, ΔΙΑ, ΔΙΣ, ΚΤΙΣΙΣ

2.2 Six Deceptive Letters

Six lower case Greek letters 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), *nu* (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”.

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

2.2.1 GAMMA Γ, γ

Gamma’s lower case letter (γ) must not to be confused with the English “y.” It is pronounced as the hard “g” as in “go.” It is never pronounced like the soft “g” as in “gin.”

[Listen](#)

γ, γοτ, γιτ, δαγ, βαγ, γετ, αγεν

[Listen](#)

γυκος, γαβ, γεβ, διγ, γε, γυ, εγ

2.2.2 *ĒTA* Η, η

Ēta's lower case 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 "H."

[Listen](#)

η, ητα, δη, αδη, ηδη, γη, γοης

[Listen](#)

Η, Ητα, δικη, ακοη, ηγ, ητ, τη

[Listen](#)

ης, της, την, κακη, ητε, ητι, τηδε

2.2.3 *NŪ* Ν, ν

Nū's lower case (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".

[Listen](#)

νυ, νυυ, εν, τευ, ανα, ανεβην, διεβην

[Listen](#)

αγεν, νας, νεος, τανη, κιδου, κενη

[Listen](#)

γεν, γεννα, νυκτα, νικη, γενη, βαν

[Listen](#)

γην, γενος, ονος, γυνη, την

2.2.4 *RHŌ* Ρ, ρ

Rhō (Ρ, ρ) does not correspond to the English “P, p,” but pronounced as the “r” as in “roar.” *Rhō* was probably trilled in ancient Greek (as in Modern Greek).

[Listen](#)

αρ, γαρ, νεκρος, καρ, εργον, ορος

[Listen](#)

ενεδρα, ερις, καρτ, δαρτ, βαρτ

[Listen](#)

Δαρκ, δρανκ, δηρ, κρινα, τρυκ, τρις

2.2.5 *CHĪ* Χ, χ

Chī (Χ, χ) does not correspond to the English “X, x.” It can be confused with the pronunciation of *kappa* (Κ, κ) unless remembered that the breath is not entirely cut off with *chī*. *Chī* is represented phonetically in English by two letters, “kh”.

[Listen](#)

χι, χα, χαρα, χαραν, χρονος

[Listen](#)

χη, δοχη, Χαρραν, χαρις, χαρητε

[Listen](#)

Τριχας, ηχος, εχαρη, εχει, χαρ

[Listen](#)

δοχη, διδαχη, ενοχος, εχιδνα

2.2.6 *ŌMEGA* Ω, ω

Ōmega's lower case (ω) must not be confused with the English "w." This vowel is always pronounced as the long "o" in "tone".

[Listen](#)

εγω, εχω, αρχω, κρινω, δωδεκα

[Listen](#)

αγωγη, Ωον, ωδινω, ωδη, ωτιον

[Listen](#)

αγω, χωρις, χωρος, τω, των

2.3 Nine Different Letters

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

Greek Letter: ζ θ λ μ ξ π σ φ ψ

Greek Name: *zēta thēta lambda mū xsī pī sigma phī psī*

2.3.1 ZĒTA Ζ, ζ

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.”

[Listen](#)

ζη, ζητα, ζητεω, τιζα, κτιζω, εζην

[Listen](#)

γαζα, βιαζω, ζυ, ζυγος, κραζω, κραζ

2.3.2 THĒTA Θ, θ

Thēta is represented phonetically in English by two letters, “th.” Its pronunciation is always like “th” in “**thin**,” and never as in “this.”

[Listen](#)

θη, θητα, θε, θεος, θυω, θυρα

[Listen](#)

εθνος, Θαν, θρο, θρονος, καθως

[Listen](#)

θρονω, θηριον, εκαθητο, ορθως

[Listen](#)

οθονη, κιθαρα, Θαρα, θανατω

2.3.3 LAMBDA Λ, λ

Lambda is pronounced like the “l” in “lute”.

[Listen](#)

λαμβδα, λεγω, λιθος, λυω, Λεγε

[Listen](#)

ελλω, οχλος, αλλα, λογος

[Listen](#)

θελοντος, καλα, καλος, Λιβυη

2.3.4 MŪ Μ, μ

Mū is pronounced like the “m” as in “man”.

[Listen](#)

μυ, μη, μηδε, λιμος, γαμος, βημα

[Listen](#)

μητηρ, τιθημι, Ερημος, Νομος

[Listen](#)

Αριθμον, γενηθωμεν, λεγομεν

[Listen](#)

Μετα, βηματος, Καμηλον, μεριμνων

2.3.5 *χσῖ* Ξ, ξ

Χσῖ is pronounced like the “x” in “fox” or in “axe.” It is represented phonetically as “xs” in English. It is never pronounced like the “x” as in “xylophone”.

[Listen](#)

ξι, εξ, εξω, ξα, νυξ, ξυ, ξυλον

[Listen](#)

αξ, αξινη, δοξ, δοξα, Ξυλινα

[Listen](#)

τοξ, τοξον, Τεξη, ταξιν, ταξισ

2.3.6 *πῖ* Π, π

Πῖ is pronounced like the “p” in “party” or “poet”.

[Listen](#)

πι, πα, πυ, πι, πινω, επι, πο, Πολις

[Listen](#)

παρα, απαγω, πλη, πλην, Πε

[Listen](#)

τοπον, Λυπω, λυπας, κοπος, Κοπτω

[Listen](#)

δαπανη, απο, Πυρ, πυρα, πυργον

2.3.7 SIGMA Σ, σ, ς

Sigma is pronounced like the “s” in “sit”. However, before β, γ, δ, and μ, it is pronounced like the “s” as in “rose” (this will be more fully explained later). Otherwise, both the medial and final forms of *sigma* are pronounced the same.

[Listen](#)

συ, συν, σε, σεβω, ση, σης, σηπω

[Listen](#)

σκολον, συκα, συκη, συκης, κοσμος

[Listen](#)

τας, βατος, ασεβη, Ασια, Χριστος

2.3.8 PHĪ Φ, φ

Phī is pronounced like the “ph” in “phone” or as in “photograph,” and is represented phonetically in English as “ph” or as “f.”

[Listen](#)

φι, φως, οφισ, φερω, τυφλος

[Listen](#)

φωτα, φωτων, Φωτιζω, οφιν

[Listen](#)

κοφινων, βλασφημα, αφελη

[Listen](#)

αφριζω, Φημι, αδελφος, γραφω

2.3.9 *PSĪ* Ψ, ψ

Psī is pronounced like the “ps” in “lips” or as in “steps,” and is represented phonetically as “ps” in English.

[Listen](#)

ψι, ψυχη, ψιλος, ψαλμος, ψηφιζω

[Listen](#)

σκαψω, Ψυχος, ψυχρος, ψαλω

[Listen](#)

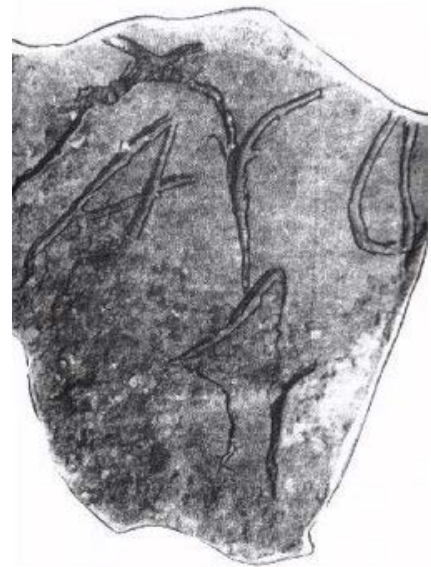
θλιψις, γραψω, βλεψω, λυψις

[Listen](#)

αψις, ψωχω, ψαλμω, Ψυχης

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 sources for 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. 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. Herodotus, a 5th century BC Greek historian, 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 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").

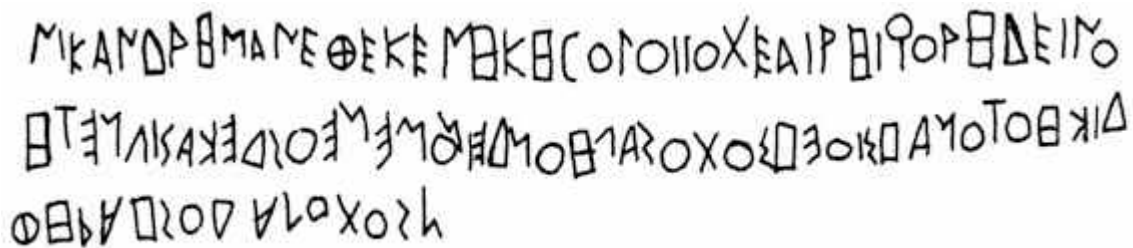
During its evolution, the Greek alphabet also developed three new aspirate consonants that were appended to the end of the alphabet. These consonants were *phī*, *chī*, and *psī*. These consonants were mainly to make up for the lack of aspirates in the Phoenician alphabet. Other consonants were used,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

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 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.

At one time, the alphabet in Greece consisted of twenty-seven letters. Three of these letters, *koppa*, *stigma*, and *sampī*, 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.

Greek letters were written right-to-left horizontally at one time. This was natural since their 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.



This is a very early Greek *boustrophedon* inscription, dating around 650 BC. The text runs from left-to-right, then doubling back to run from right-to-left, making the orientation of the letter dependent on the direction of writing. The asymmetrical characters are flipped (mirrored), and the in-between letters written either way. This style of writing altered the form of many of the letters: written from left-to-right they reproduce the original form as seen in a mirror.

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	Ϟ	Ϟ	Ϟ	Ϟ	Ϟ	
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

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 κοινὴ 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:

α´ = 1	η´ = 8	ξ´ = 60	υ´ = 400
β´ = 2	θ´ = 9	ο´ = 70	φ´ = 500
γ´ = 3	ι´ = 10	π´ = 80	χ´ = 600
δ´ = 4	κ´ = 20	ρ´ = 90	ψ´ = 700
ε´ = 5	λ´ = 30	σ´ = 100	ω´ = 800
Ϝ´ or Ϛ´ = 6	μ´ = 40	ς´ = 200	Ϟ´ = 900
ζ´ = 7	ν´ = 50	τ´ = 300	Ϡ´ = 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, 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

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 drawn from the lesson. Say their names aloud several times while writing the Greek letters.

[Listen](#)

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

[Listen](#)

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

[Listen](#)

13. γιβ _____

14. δη _____

15. δικη _____

16. βαν _____

17. την _____

18. γεν _____

19. καρτ _____

20. καλα _____

[Listen](#)

21. χαρ _____

22. εχω _____

23. ζη _____

24. τιζα _____

25. γαζα _____

26. θεος _____

27. εθνος _____

28. λογος _____

29. αλλα _____

[Listen](#)

30. μυ _____
31. εθεμ _____
32. δοξ _____
33. δοξα _____
34. νυξ _____
35. πα _____
36. απο _____
37. Πυρ _____

[Listen](#)

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.



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. Ten Greek letters appear very close to their English counterparts.

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” on its side and opened at 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 English letters. These letters will prove difficult unless learned well.

γ η ν Ρ ρ Χ χ ω

- Which letter are vowels? _____ and _____.
- Which letter sounds like the English “r”? _____.
- Which letter sounds like the English “g”? _____.
- Which letter sounds like the English “n”? _____.
- Which letter sounds like “ō”? _____.
- Which small letter has a capital that looks like a horseshoe? _____.
- Which letter sounds like “ē”? _____.
- Which small letter has as its capital N? _____.
- Which small letter has as its capital Γ? _____.
- Which small letter has as its capital H? _____
- Gamma* is pronounced as the hard “g” as in “go”, and never as the soft “g” as in _____.
- Which letter sounds like something you use to unlock your door? _____.
- Which letter sounds like something you do to a boat? _____.
- Which letter sounds like the English word “new”? _____.
- 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.

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.

TAXIN _____

ΚΟΣΜΟΝ _____

ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ _____

ΛΙΤΡΑ _____

ΝΥΞ _____

ΚΑΛΩΝ _____

ΑΓΑΠΩΣΙΝ _____

ΨΥΧΗ _____

ΘΕΟΣ _____

ΑΜΠΕΛΟΣ _____

ΦΥΛΑΚΗ _____

ΧΑΡΙΣΜΑ _____

ΤΟΙΣ _____

ΗΜΕΡΑΣ _____

ΕΧΘΡΟΝ _____

ΗΜΩΝ _____

ΥΜΙΝ _____

ΤΟΥΤΟΝ _____

Exercise Four: True and False Questions

1. The Greek alphabet derives from an earlier Semitic script is uncontested.
True False
2. 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 exist. 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. Athens adopted the Ionic alphabet of Miletus in 403 BC as its official alphabet. True False
13. The capital letter for ς is Σ . True False
14. The Greek capital letter transliterated in English as “g” is “N.” True False
15. The Greek capital letter transliterated in English as “v” is “V.” 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 *sampī*
 - d. *omīkron* 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 | c. Ionic |
| b. Argos | d. Corinth |
8. $Xs\bar{\iota}$ is pronounced like the “x” as in what following word?
- | | |
|--------------|----------|
| a. xylophone | c. axe |
| b. Xenophon | d. xysts |
9. While writing Greek lower case letters, which letter may be confused with u?
- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| a. $\bar{\Omega}$ mega | c. Gamma |
| b. $N\bar{u}$ | d. \bar{E} ta |
10. $\bar{\Omega}$ mega’s corresponding short vowel is which letter?
- | | |
|-----------|---------------|
| a. u | c. o |
| b. ψ | d. ϵ |

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 it is to be expected for a little while longer. The primary cause for this 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 the Greek alphabet very well.

If this Greek lesson has been helpful and you wish to contribute toward further resources concerning the same subject material, your [donation](#) of any amount will be helpful.

