

LESSON 1

THE GREEK ALPHABET & PRONUNCIATION

*In this lesson, we learn how to identify and pronounce the letters of the Greek alphabet. We also distinguish smooth and rough breathing marks and learn the sounds of Greek diphthongs. Finally, we practice reading a few Greek words, such as *Ἀχαιός*, *ἴφθιμος*, and *προϊάπτω*.*

The classical Greek alphabet has 24 letters (plus two archaic letters that help explain older forms of Greek).

Greek Letter	Latin Equivalents	Sound	Greek Name	Latin Transcription
A, α	A, a	<i>a</i> as in <i>father</i> (when short, as in <i>aha</i>)	ἄλφα	alpha
B, β	B, b	<i>b</i> as in <i>bite</i>	βῆτα	beta
Γ, γ	G, g	always <i>g</i> as in <i>get</i> (never soft, as in <i>gym</i>)	γάμμα	gamma
Δ, δ	D, d	<i>d</i> as in <i>deal</i>	δέλτα	delta
E, ε	E, e	<i>e</i> as in <i>red</i>	ἕ ψιλόν	epsilon
Z, ζ	Z, z	<i>zd</i> as in <i>Mazda</i> (many also pronounce this <i>dz</i> or simply <i>z</i> , because these are simpler to pronounce for native English speakers)	ζῆτα	zeta
H, η	E, e	long <i>a</i> as in <i>gate</i> or as in (French) <i>fête</i>	ἦτα	eta
Θ, θ	th	<i>th</i> as in <i>thick</i>	θῆτα	theta
I, ι	I, i	long <i>e</i> as in <i>feet</i> and <i>police</i> or short <i>i</i> as in <i>hit</i>	ιώτα	iota

Κ, κ	K, k <i>or</i> C, c	<i>k</i> as in <i>kill</i>	κάππα	kappa
Λ, λ	L, l	<i>l</i> as in <i>language</i>	λάμβδα	lambda
Μ, μ	M, m	<i>m</i> as in <i>man</i>	μῦ	mu
Ν, ν	N, n	<i>n</i> as in <i>never</i>	νῦ	nu
Ξ, ξ	X, x	<i>x</i> as in <i>box</i>	ξῖ	xi
Ο, ο	O, o	<i>o</i> as in <i>ought</i> , but shorter (that is, a “closed” <i>o</i>), or as in the British pronunciation of <i>pot</i>	ὀ μικρόν	omicron
Π, π	P, p	<i>p</i> as in <i>pie</i>	πῖ	pi
Ρ, ρ	R, r	a trilled <i>r</i> (as in continental European languages)	ῥῶ	rho
Σ, σ, ς	S, s	<i>s</i> as in <i>sing</i>	σίγμα	sigma
Τ, τ	T, t	<i>t</i> as in <i>tip</i>	ταῦ	tau
Υ, υ	U, u <i>or</i> Y, y	<i>u</i> as in (French) <i>tu</i> or (German) <i>Müller</i> , but the <i>u</i> in English <i>prune</i> may serve as a close approximation	ῥῖ ψιλόν	upsilon
Φ, φ	ph	<i>f</i> as in <i>face</i> or <i>ph</i> as in <i>philosophy</i>	φῖ	phi
Χ, χ	kh <i>or</i> ch	<i>ch</i> as in (German) <i>doch</i> or (Scottish) <i>Loch Ness</i> ; a simple <i>k</i> sound is also acceptable	χῖ	chi
Ψ, ψ	ps	<i>ps</i> as in <i>lips</i>	ψῖ	psi
Ω, ω	O, o	long <i>o</i> as in <i>open</i>	ῶ μέγα	omega

Archaic Letters

Ε, ε	W, w	<i>w</i> as in <i>wine</i>	δίγαμμα	digamma
Ϟ, ϟ	Q, q	<i>k</i> as in <i>kale</i>	κόππα	koppa

Diphthongs

αι	ai <i>or</i> ae	<i>ai</i> as in <i>aisle</i>
αυ	au	<i>ou</i> as in <i>house</i>

ει	ei or e	ei as in freight
ευ/ηυ	eu	like the <i>eu</i> in (French) <i>fleur</i> or the <i>ö</i> in (German) <i>schön</i> ; equivalent to <i>eh</i> + <i>oo</i> fused into one syllable
οι	oi or oe	oi as in foil
ου/ωυ	ou or u	ou as in soup
υι	ui	pronounced like the English word <i>we</i> or (French) <i>oui</i>

Breathing Marks

´	n/a	When placed above a vowel (or before a capital vowel), this mark indicates <i>smooth breathing</i> —i.e., “no sound” (e.g., $\acute{\alpha}$ = <i>ah</i>).
·	H, h	When placed above a vowel (or before a capital vowel), this mark indicates <i>rough breathing</i> —i.e., an <i>h</i> sound (e.g., $\acute{\alpha}$ = <i>ha</i>).

Diaeresis

¨		When placed above the second of two vowels, this mark indicates that the two vowels should be pronounced separately rather than as a single diphthong (e.g., $\text{οι} = \text{oi}$, but $\text{οϊ} = \text{o-ee}$).
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Iota Subscript

ι		When placed below a vowel, this iota does not change the pronunciation but is important for determining meaning ($\alpha = \text{ah}$; $\omega = \text{oh}$).
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Accents

´		<i>acute</i> ; treat as a stress accent (e.g., καλός).
`		<i>grave</i> ; treat as a stress accent (e.g., καὶ καλός).
˘		<i>circumflex</i> ; treat as a stress accent (e.g., βῆτα).

Punctuation

, / . / “ ”	, / . / “ ”	Commas, periods, and quotation marks are used in Greek as in English.
;	?	What looks like a semicolon at the end of a sentence is a question mark in Greek.
·	:	One dot above the line is a colon in Greek.

1.1 EXERCISES

- 1 Practice drawing the Greek letters.
- 2 Write out the Greek alphabet from memory, and supply the corresponding Latin equivalent (e.g., Α, α = A, a).
- 3 Transcribe the following words with their corresponding Latin letters, and pronounce each word aloud (you'll find a phonetic spelling indicating pronunciation in the Lesson 1 Key, which is supplied at the end of the workbook).

NOTES

- ♦ Transcribe rough breathing [῀] as “h.”
- ♦ Smooth breathing [῁] and accents [᾿, ᾿̂, and ᾿̃] should *not* be transcribed.
- ♦ Transliterate upsilon (Υ, υ) as “U, u” and chi (Χ, χ) as “KH, kh.”

Greek Word	English Meaning	Latin Transcription
Ἀχιλλεύς	Achilles	
οὐλόμενος	accursed, destructive	
ὅς	who, which, that	
μυρίος	countless, innumerable	
Ἀχαιός	Achaean, Greek	
ἄλγος	grief, pain, woe, trouble	
τίθημι	put, place, cause	
πολλός	much, many, numerous	
δέ	but, and, for, so	
ἴφθιμος	valiant, mighty	

ψυχή	soul, spirit, breath, life	
Ἅϊς	Hades, <i>god of the underworld</i>	
προϊάπτω	hurl forward, send forth	
ἥρωσ	hero, mighty warrior, protector, savior	
αὐτός	self, same	
ἐλώριον	booty, prey, spoils	
τεύχω	make, fashion, cause	
κύων	dog	
οἰωνός	bird (of prey), vulture, omen	
τέ	and, also	
δαίς	portion, feast, banquet	
Ζεὺς	<i>Zeus, father and king of the gods and men</i>	
τελείω	accomplish, fulfill	
βουλή	will, wish, plan, purpose, counsel, council	
λόγος	word, story, reason, cause	