

Introduction

Pronunciation and Orthography

a. The Greek Alphabet. The Greek Alphabet is made up of twenty-four letters. Many of them are like their English and Latin counterparts, both in form and sound. Those which are not may be easily learned with practice. The following material aims at approaching the problem of learning the alphabet though what the average person already knows of words derived from Greek. As nearly as possible, English derivatives with the same pronunciation as their Greek originals have been selected to illustrate the sounds.

There are two types of Greek letters: capitals, called Uncials, and small letters, called Cursives:

Cursives: α β γ δ ε ζ η θ ι κ λ μ ν ξ ο π ρ σ (ς) τ υ φ χ ψ ω
 Uncials: Α Β Γ Δ Ε Ζ Η Θ Ι Κ Λ Μ Ν Ξ Ο Π Ρ Σ Τ Υ Φ Χ Ψ Ω
 English: a b g d e z ē th i k l m n x o p r s s t u ph ch ps ō

Most Greek texts and lexicons use the small letters, except for beginning proper names. The student should learn the cursives only at first.

B. Pronunciation. The following paragraphs are to aid the student in learning the proper pronunciation. A few preliminary things must be given which will be given in greater detail later: Accents: There are three accents—acute (´), grave (`), and circumflex (˘). There is no difference among them. Like our English accents in a dictionary, they merely indicate the stress syllable. Breathings: All vowels or diphthongs which begin a Greek word must have either a smooth (´) or rough (´) breathing. The smooth breathing does not affect pronunciation; the rough gives the word an h-sound at the beginning. Division of Syllables: There are as many syllables in a Greek word as there are separate vowels or diphthongs. A single consonant between two vowels is pronounced with the second vowel; e. g., ἄ-νά. A consonant-group which may not begin a word (Consult the Vocabulary) is divided, e. g., ἔρ-χομαι. Double consonants are divided; e. g. τάσ-σω. Consonants which can begin a word are pronounced with the following vowel; e. g. κύ-κλος. Compound words are divided where they join; e. g. ἐκ-βάλλω.

b. The Alphabet. Learn the following, practice diligently:

α ἄλφα alpha (āl fā) - **a** as in **father**

ἀπόστολος (apostle)	σκάνδαλον (scandal)	δέκα (deca-)
ἄνθρωπος (anthropos)	ἀνάλυσις (analysis)	ἐκκλησία (ecclesia)
δόγμα (dogma)	σάββατον (sabbath)	ψάλλω (Psallo)

Try: κατά ἀλλά ἀνά παρά ἀγαπάω ἀγάπη ἄγαμος ἀλαλάζω

β βῆτα beta (bā tā) **b** as in **ball** (voiced bilabial stop)

βάπτισμα (baptism)	βάρβαρος (barbarous)	Βαριησοῦς (Bar-Jesus)
βαπτιστής (Baptist)	βίβλος (Bible)	φοβία (phobia)
βαπτίζω (baptize)	βλασφημία (blasphemy)	πρεσβύτερος (presbyter)

Try: βαρσαββᾶς βασιλεία βοάω βρέφος βρῶμα βελτίων

γ γάμμα gamma (gä mä) - **g** as in **go** (voiced back velar stop)

συναγωγή	(synagogue)	γνώσις	(gnosis)
γενεαλογία	(genealogy)	δόγμα	(dogma)
γλῶσσα	(glossary)	ἀγορά	(agora, “market place”)
πραγματία	(pragmatic)	λόγος	(logos)
γένεσις	(genesis)	μάγος	(magi, “wise men”)

Try: γῆ γε γάρ γαμέω γυμνάζω Γώγ γυνή γίγνομαι

δ δέλτα delta (dél tä) - **d** as in **do** (voiced dental stop)

δέλτα	(delta)	δένδρον	(dendron, “tree”)
δόγμα	(dogma)	καρδία	(cardia, “heart”; cf. cardiac)
δέκα	(deca-; decalogue)	ἔξοδος	(exodus)
δεσπότης	(despot)	δόξα	(doxology, “praise”)
δέρμα	(derma; epidermi)	δύναμις	(dynamic)

Try: διάδημα δέ δεῖ δέρω δέω δή διά δίς δῶρον

ε ἒψιλόν epsilon (ép si lon) - **e** as in **met**

ἐπίσκοπος	(episkopos, “bishop”)	ἔθνος	(ethnos, “nation” cf. Ethnology)
ἐπιστολή	(epistle)	ἔθος	(ethics)
ἕτερος	(“other” cf. heterodoxy)	θεός	(theos, “God”)
ἐγώ	(ego)	πέτρος	(Peter)
ἐκκλησία	(ecclesia)	περί	(peri-, around)

Try: ἐλεέω ἐλπίζω ἐμός ἐμά ἐμόν δέησις ἐθέλω

ζ ζῆτα zeta (zā tä) **z** as in **zebra** (voiced tip dental affricate /dz/ became voiced alveolar fricative /z/)

βαπτίζω	(baptize)	ζεύς	(Zeus)
ῥαντίζω	(<u>rantize</u> , “sprinkle”)	ζώνη	(zone “girdle”)
ζηλωτής	(zealot)	ζεῦγμα	(“a yoke” cf. zeugma)

Try: ζητέω ζάω ζεβεδαιός ζῆλος ζωγρέω Ζοροβάβελ

η ἦτα eta (ā tä) - **e** as in **they, prey, whey**

ἀκμή	(acme)	ἀμήν	(amen)
ἀθλητής	(athlete)	δηνάριον	(denarius)
ζωή	(zoo)		

Try: δή διαθήκη ἦ ἡγέομαι ἡγεμονία ἡμέρα ἦπερ ἔτη ἦν

θ θῆτα theta (thä tä) - **th** as in **thin** (voiceless dental fricative)

ἀριθμός	(cf. arithmetic, “number”)	θεός	(theos)
θεάτρον	(theater)	θρόνος	(throne)
θάνατος	(“death” cf. Thanatopsis)	θέσις	(thesis)
ἔθος	(ethics)	ἄνθρωπος	(anthropos)
ἔθνος	(ethnos, ethnology)	πάθος	(pathos, “feeling”)

Try: θεά θεάομαι θέλημα θέλω θώραξ θυμός θεραπεύω

ι ἰῶτα iota (i õ tä) - **i** as in **police**

ἱστορία	(history)	ἱερεύς	(“priest” cf. hierarchy)
ἰδιωτής	(idiot)	παράλυσις	(paralysis)
διδασκός	(didactic)	ἐπίσκοπος	(episkopos)
ἰδίωμα	(idiom)	βαπτίζω	(baptize)
ἀντί	(anti-)	πόλις	(“city” cf. police)

Try: ἴδιος ἴασις ἴασπις ἴδε ἰδεῖν ἰδού ἰμάτιον

κ κάππα kappa (kär pä) - **k** as in **skip** (voiceless back velar stop - unaspirated)

κόσμος	(cosmos)	κλέπτης	(“thief” cf. kleptomania)
ἐκκλησία	(ecclesia)	καρδία	(“heart” cf. cardiac)
ἀποκάλυψις	(apocalypse)	ἀκμή	(acme)
καταστροφή	(catastrophe)	σκόπος	(“watchman,” scope)
κοινή	(koiné)	κανών	(canon)

Try: κατά κακώω κήρυγμα καρπός καταβαίνω καταβάλλω

λ λάμβδα lambda (lamb dä) - **l** as in **let** (voiced tip alveolar lateral [high-back])

ψάλλω	(psallo)	λέων	(leo, “lion”)
ἀπόστολος	(apostle)	ἀνάλυσις	(analysis)
βίβλος	(Bible)	φιλοσοφία	(philosophy)
δέλτα	(delta)	βλασφημία	(blasphemy)
γλῶσσα	(glossa)	χιλιάς	(<u>chiliasm</u>)

Try: λαλέω λαμβάνω λέγω λίαν λίθος λογία λογίζομαι

μ μῦ mu (mü) - **m** as in **man** (voiced bilabial nasal)

μυστήριον	(mystery)	μικρός	(micro-, “small”)
μετάθεσις	(metathesis)	μέτρον	(meter)
μωρός	(moron)	βάπτισμα	(baptism)
μάγος	(magi, “wise men”)	Μεσοποταμία	(Mesopotamia)
μάρτυς	(martyr, “witness”)	μεταμόρφωσις	(Metamorphosis)

v νῦ nu (nū) - **n** as in **now** (voiced tip alveolar nasal)

πέντα	(penta- “five”)	κοινή	(koiné)
πνευματικός	(pneumatic)	γνώσις	(gnosis)
νυμφών	(nymph)	θρόνος	(throne)
νέος	(“new” cf. <u>neophyte</u>)	σάββατον	(Sabbath)
κανών	(canon)	δένδρον	(dendron, “tree”)

Try: νῦν ναί νεφέλη νομοθεσία νεανίας Ναθαναήλ Ναίν

ξ ξῖ (ksi) - **ks** as in the sound of **box** (voiced back velar affricate)

ἔξοδος	(exodus)	σάρξ	(“flesh” cf. sarcasm)
δόξα	(“praise” doxology)	ὄξύς	(“sharp,” oxygen)
κλίμαξ	(“ladder,” climax)	πραῖξις	(“deed” cf. practice)

Try: ἐξῆλθον ξένος νύξ ξυρέω

ο ὄ μικρόν omicron (ōm i kron) - **aw** as in **law** (**ou** as in **bought**)

ἀπόστολος	(apostle)	καθολικός	(catholic)
ὀκτώ	(octo-, “eight”)	προφήτης	(prophet)
ὀρθώς	(“rightly”, cf. orthodoxy)	λόγος	(logos, “word”)
	(orthography)	νόμος	(“law” <u>Deuteronomy</u>)
ὀλοκαυστός	(holocaust)	σκοπός	(scope)

Try: ὄδε ἦδε τόδε ὁδός οἰκοδομέω ὁμολογέω ὄνομα ὄχλος

π πῖ pi (pē) - **p** as in **spike** (voiceless bilabial stop – unaspirated)

πέτρος	(<u>petros</u> , “a rock” Peter)	πανοπλία	(panoply, “full armor”)
πέτρα	(petra, “rock”)	περιπατέω	(“walk around” peripatics)
πρεσβύτερος	(Presbyter)	ἵπποπάταμος	(“horse” + “river,” hippotamus)
ἐπίσκοπος	(episcopal)	πῦρ, πυρός	(“fire,” pyre)
παράκλητος	(paraclete)		

Try: ἐπί παρά πῶς πρό περί πρός προσήλυτος προσαγωγή ποδός

ρ ῥῶ rho (rhō) - **r** as in **run** (voiced tip alveolar trill)

ῥόδη	(rodah “rose”)	θρόνος	(throne)
παράδεισος	(paradise)	κριτής	(critic)
πέτρος	(<u>petros</u>)	Ῥώμη	(Rome)

Try: ῥίζα ῥαντίζω ῥῆμα ῥέω σκληρός σπέρμα στρατηγός

σ ς (final) σίγμα (síg mā) - s as in sit (voiceless tip alveolar fricative)

σοφιστής	(sophist)	σεισμός	(seismograph)
ἀποστασία	(apostasy)	Σατανᾶς	(Satan)
κρίσις	(crisis)	φιλοσοφία	(philosophy)
σκάνδαλον	(scandal)	στέφανος	(Stephen, “crown”)

Try: σός σκηνή σύν σύν-ειμι σῶζω σωτηρία τομός

τ ταῦ (tau) t as in stop (voiceless tip dental stop - unaspirated)

πεντηκοστής	(Pentecost)	βαπτίζω	(baptize)
τόπος	(place” <u>topology</u>)	ἕτερος	(<u>heteros</u>)
τάλαντον	(talent, a sum of money)	δέλτα	(delta)
τεχνίτης	(technician)	δεσπότης	(despot)

Try: τε τάσσω τέκνον τέλος τίθημι τηρέω τις τότε

υ ὕψιλον (úpsi lon) - somewhat like the u in virtue (French tu)

πρεσβύτερος	(presbyter)	ὑγιής	(hygiene)
συναγωγή	(synagogue)	ὕμνος	(hymn)
ὑποκριτής	(hypocrite)	ὑακίνθος	(hyacinth)
τύπος	(type)		

Try: σύν νῦν ὑμέτερος ὑδροποτέω πολύς ἡδύς

φ φῖ phi (phē) - **ph** as in **phone** (voiceless labio-dental fricative)

φοβία	(phobia)	φωνή	(phone)
φιλοσοφία	(philosophy)	φαρμακία	(pharmacy)
βλασφημία	(blasphemy)	γράφω	(graphic)

Try: φάγομαι φέρω φαντασία φημί φιλανθρωπία φίλανδρος

χ χί (chē) - **ch** as in **Christ** or **lock** (voiceless velar fricative)

χριστός	(Christ)	χέω	(cheo , “I pour)
χριστιανός	(Christian)	χιτών	(chiton, a garment)
χρόνος	(chronology)	χιλιάς	(chiliasm “1000”)
χαρακτήρ	(character “stamp”)		

Try: χάρις χήρα χρεία τέχνη τάχα ταχέως τεῖχος

ψ ψī (psē) - **ps** as in **lips** (voiceless bilabial affricate)

ψάλλω	(psallo)	ψυχή	(psyche)
ψεῦδος	(pseudo-, “false”)	ψαλμός	(psalm)
ψευδό-χριστος	(false Christ)		

Try: ψευδο-διδάσκαλος ψῆφος ψευδο-απόστολος

ω ὦ μέγα omega (ō mēg ä) - **o** as in **note**

ὠδή	(ode)	βαπτίζω	(<u>baptize</u> , this final ω is the 1 st person ending of the verb)
ὠσαννά	(hosanna)		
γλῶσσα	(glossary)		
ἀγωνίζομαι	(agonize: agon, a contest)		

Try: ὧδε ὡςπερ ὡς ζωή ὡστε γράφω λέγω

Diphthongs

αι **ai** - **ai** as in **AH-ee** γυναικεῖος (gynecologist, “female”); αίρεσις (heresy; sect)
Try: καί καινός αἰνέω

ει **ei** - **ei** as in **reign, rein** πειθός (pathos) Try: δεῖ εἰς εἷς εἰμί

οι **oi** - **oi** as in **oil** κοινή (koine) Try: οἶδα οἰκία οἶκος

αυ **au** - **au** as in **sauerkraut** (AH-oo) ταυτό (“the same”; tautology)
Try: παύω αὐτός αὐτοῦ αὔριον

ευ **eu** - **eu** as in **EH-oo** Ζεύς (Zeus) εὐφωνή (euphony) Try: δεύτερος πλευρά εὖ εὐλογία

ου **ou** - **ou** as in **group** ἀκούω (acoustic) Try: οὗτος οὕτως οὗς οὖν

υι **ui** - (pronounce as “we”) Try: υἱός υἰοθεσία

γ before κ, γ, χ, or ξ is to be pronounced ng. e.g., ἄγγελος, angel

e. Punctuation. The punctuation marks used in Greek differ from English. A dot at the top of a line (·) is the semicolon in Greek. The sign of the English (;) in Greek is the question mark.

f. Exercises.

(a) Write in cursive Greek script:

sophian de laloumen en tois teleiois; sophian de ou tou aiōnos toutou, oude tōn archontōn tou aiōnos toutou, tōn katargoumenōn· alla laloumen sophian theou en mustēriō, tēn apokekrummenēn, hēn proōrisen ho theos pro tōn aiōnōn eis doxan ēmōn, hen oudeis tōn archontōn tou aiōnos toutou egnōken· ei gar egnōsan ouk an tou kurion tēs doxēs estaurōsan· alla kathōs gegraptai, ha ophthalmos ouk eide, kai ous ouk ēkouse, kai epi kardian anthrōpou ouk anebē ha hētoimasen ho theos tois agarōsin auton· hēmin de ho theos apekalupse dia tou pneumatou autou.

I Corinthians 2:6-10a

(b) Write in English letters (transliterate) the following:

Πάντων δὲ τὸ τέλος ἤγγικεν. σωφρονήσατε οὖν καὶ νήψατε εἰς προσευχάς· πρὸ πάντων τὴν εἰς ἑαυτοὺς ἀγάπην ἐκτενῆ ἔχοντες, ὅτι ἀγάπη καλύπτει πλῆθος ἁμαρτιῶν· φιλόξενοι εἰς ἀλλήλους ἄνευ γογγυσμοῦ· ἕκαστος καθὼς ἔλαβεν χάρισμα, εἰς ἑαυτοὺς αὐτὸ διακονοῦντες ὡς καλοὶ οἰκονόμοι ποικίλης χάριτος θεοῦ· εἴ τις λαλεῖ, ὡς λογία θεοῦ· εἴ τις διακονεῖ, ὡς ἐξ ἰσχύος ἧς χορηγεῖ ὁ θεός· ἵνα ἐν πᾶσιν δοξάζεται ὁ θεὸς διὰ Ἰησοῦς Χριστοῦ, ᾧ ἐστὶν ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων· ἀμήν. I Peter 4:7-11

g. Accents. The accents of Greek word indicate the stress of voice in communications. Nearly all Greek words must be written with accents.

It is difficult but important to learn the accents. They serve to distinguish some words and are important in learning Greek.

The three accents : the acute (´), the grave (`), and the circumflex (~).

These were probably different in sound (probably musical designations), but any distinction in sound has been lost. They all merely indicate stress of voice. The accent stands over the vowel of the accented syllable, over the second vowel of an accented diphthong.

ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἔχει τὴν ἐξουσίαν.

There are a number of rules that determine which accent can stand at a given position on a Greek word. These rules are somewhat complicated, and the student must expect to become proficient in their use only by practice.

The most important of these concern the position, length, and special rules for verbs and nouns.

1. No accent may ever stand on any but the last three syllables of a Greek word.
2. An acute accent may stand only on the antepenult (the 3rd syllable from the end), the penult (2nd syllable from the end), or the ultima (the last syllable). Cf. ἄνθρωπος, καρδία, ἀδελθός (But *ἄσαενεια would violate the rule. ἀσθένεια is correct.)
3. A circumflex may stand on either the penult or the ultima, but not on the antepenult: e.g., ἐξῆλθον, τοῦ (But *ἐξῆλθομεν would violate this rule.)
4. A grave may stand only on the ultima. τὸ ἔργον (But never *ἔργον)
5. A syllable is long if it contains a long vowel (η and ω) or a diphthong (e.g., αυ, ου) However αι and οι are short when they are the final letters in a word. In ἄνθρωποι, οι is short; but in ἀνθρώποις, οι is long since a σ follows.
6. A grave or an acute accent may stand on either a long or short syllable. ἄνθρωπος, ἀνθρώπω, τὸν αὐτόν
7. A circumflex accent can stand only on a long syllable. τοῦ, τοῦτο
8. If the penult is long and is accented, the accent must be circumflex if the ultima is short, but the circumflex cannot stand on the penult if the ultima is long.

τοῦτο > τούτου	οὔτος > οὔτου
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9. An acute accent can not stand on the antepenult when the ultima is long. ἄνθρωποι > ἀνθρώπων
10. An acute accent on the ultima is changed to a grave when another word follows it in composition without an intervening mark of punctuation. τό > τὸ ἔργον
(A few words to be learned later form exception to this; e.g., with enclitics and the interrogative pronoun.)
11. A long ultima may have either a circumflex or acute accent.

(The general rules only fix the limits of accents; they do not tell where the accent will be on a given word. The following rules are necessary for this.)
12. The accent of verbs is recessive; that is, it is not fixed, but it tends to get as far away from the ultima as the rules allow. λαμβάνω, λαμβάνετε, ἦλθε, ἦλθομεν

This means that a verb will be accented on the antepenult when the ultima is short, but on the penult when the ultima is long. λαμβάνει > λαμβάνουσι
13. In nouns the accent is fixed by conventional pronunciation in the nominative case, which must be learned for each noun just as in English. Once the accent is learned, it is to be kept on the same syllable in the nominative, if the rules permit; e.g., ἀδελφός, ἄνθρωπος, καρδία, δῶρον, ποιμήν, ποιμένος.

Rules already given force changes in the genitive case; e.g. ἀνθρώπου (Rule 9) δώρου (Rule 8)
Yet in the accusative case ἄνθρωπον the accent goes back to the same position as in the nominative, for the ultima.

The chief thing to remember is that for **nouns** the accent is **not recessive** as in verbs.

14. 1st and 2nd Declension nouns accent a long ultima (if it is accented) with a circumflex in the genitive, ablative, dative, instrumental, and locative cases.
Θεός, θεοῦ, θεοῦ, θεῶ, θεῶ, θεῶ, θεόν.
15. In the 1st and 2nd Declension the genitive and ablative plurals of all nouns are circumflex. This is because the form ῶν is a contraction of an original ᾶων. ἡ ἐκκλησία τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν
16. Monosyllabic nouns of the 3rd Declension accent the genitive, ablative, dative, instrumental, and locative cases on the ultima. νύξ, νυκτός σάρξ, σαρκός.

The special rule for enclitics will be given later.

h. Contraction of Vowels. When two vowel sounds come together they are often contracted into one syllable. Such contraction is governed by four rules:

1. Two vowels which together would make one of the regular diphthongs unite to do so:
ἔθνεσι > ἔθνε-ι > ἔθνει
2. Two vowels which do not make one of the regular diphthongs unite. If the vowels are like (two o-sounds, two e-sounds, or two a-sounds, whether long or short) they form a common long vowel (ᾱ, η or ω). However ε ε gives ει, and ο ο gives ου
δολόω > δολῶ φιλέη > φιλήη ποιεετε > ποιείτε
3. If two vowels which cannot form a diphthong are unlike, one assimilates the other.
 - (a) an o-sound (ο/ω) takes the precedence over an a-sound (α) or an e-sound (ε/η) and becomes ω. But οε and εο give ου. Γεννάω > γεννῶ
 - (b) an a-sound or e-sound takes precedence over one another according to which comes first in the word and gives the corresponding long vowel.
γενναητε > γεννᾶτε ἐλάλαε > ἐλάλα
4. A vowel and a diphthong unite in the following way: if the vowel before a diphthong is the same as that with which the diphthong begins, it is absorbed and disappears; ε is absorbed before οι. In case the vowel is different from the first vowel of the diphthong, it combines with the first vowel of the diphthong like rule #3 and the iota is put as a subscript. μνάαι > μναῖ νεννάοι > γεννῶ

RULE OF ACCENT: If one of the contracting syllables had the accent, the contraction takes the circumflex accent, otherwise the regular rules apply. See former example.

1. Accent of Enclitics. Enclitics are words which are commonly pronounced with words preceding them, just as proclitics are words pronounced with those following them, e.g. ἐμοῦ, μου·
ὁ ἀδελθός μου.

Such enclitics usually lose their accents **except** in the following instances:

1. An enclitic or proclitic followed by an enclitic retains its accent: e.g.
οὗτοι οἱ ἀδελφοί μου εἶσι. οὐκ εἰμι.
2. An enclitic of two syllables retains its accent after a word accented with an acute accent on the penult, e. g., ὁ νόμος ἐστὶν ἀγαθός.
3. An enclitic of two syllables retains its accent after a sentence or when it is emphatic, e.g. ἐστίν is written ἔστιν at the beginning of a sentence, if it means he exists or it is possible and when it comes after ἀλλά, εἰ, καὶ, μή, οὐκ, ὅτι, τοῦτο, ὡς.

The noun preceding an enclitic receives an additional accent (acute), on the ultima if it is accented on the antepenult (e.g. ὁ ἄνθρωπός μου) or has a circumflex accent on the penult, (e.g. τό πλοῖόν μου.)

j. Movable Nu. Any verb and noun forms which end in a vowel insert a ν, called a “movable Nu” before another word which begins with a vowel. The letter serves merely to separate the words and has no meaning. Some words also originally had a movable sigma which has become attached as part of the spelling of the word.

For a modern linguistic approach to the mastering the pronunciation of New Testament Greek with mp3 audio files see Donald L. Potter’s “Simplified Guide to the Pronunciation of New Testament Greek” at <http://donpotter.net/GreekPronunciation.htm>

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