The Greek Alphabet

Greek Character	Name	English equivalent	Pronunciation
A α	alpha	a	short as in b**a**t / long as in f**a**ther
B β	beta	b	b
Γ γ	gamma	g	hard, as in gone
Δ δ	delta	d	d
E ε	epsilon	e	short, as in g**e**t
Z ζ	zeta	z, sd	sd, as in wi**sd**om
H η	eta	ē	long, as in h**ai**r
Θ θ	theta	th	t with a breath, as in an**t-h**ill*
I ι	iota	i	short as in b**i**t / long as in pol**i**ce
K κ	kappa	k	k
Λ λ	lambda	l	l
M μ	mu	m	m
N ν	nu	n	n
Ξ ξ	xi	x	ks
O o	omicron	o	as in g**o**t
Π π	pi	p	p
P ρ	rho	r / rh (at start of word)	rolled r
Σ σ / ς	sigma	s	s
T τ	tau	t	t
Y υ	upsilon	u	Short as French t**u**, long as in French s**ur**
Φ φ	phi	ph	p with a breath, as in u**ph**old
X χ	chi	ch	k with a breath, as in pa**ck-h**orse
Ψ ψ	psi	ps	As in la**ps**e
Ω ω	omega	ō	as in s**aw**

Vowels

There are seven vowels (α ε η ι ο υ ω) rather than the five in English, because Greek uses different symbols for short and long e (epsilon and eta) and for long and short o (omicron and omega). The other vowels can be short or long. Macrons (ᾱ, ῑ, ῡ) are sometimes printed in texts used to help you learn the pronunciation of words; they indicate that the vowel they are written on is long, and are different from accents (ά, ὰ, ᾶ), for which see below.

Breathings

A rough breathing - ‘ - indicates an English 'h'. A smooth breathing - ’ - means there is no 'h' sound. All vowels have a breathing written over them if they start a word; upsilon always has a rough breathing. The consonant rho has a rough breathing at the start of a word. Breathings are written above lower case letters, and before upper case letters (e.g. ἀ, ἁ, Ἀ, Ἁ). You should always pronounce the breathing, and always put it on a word when writing Greek.

Combinations of sounds

αι = h**igh**; αυ = h**ow**; ει = w**eigh**; οι = b**oy**; ου = b**oo**; in the combination ευ, pronounce each separately. Breathings are put over the second letter in a combination of two vowels at the start of a word.

If iota is combined with a long α or a η or ω, it is often written underneath (iota subscript): ᾳ ῃ ῳ. It is helpful to sound it slightly to differentiate it from both a long vowel without an iota subscript and a diphthong with iota. You should always write this iota, whether subscript or, as some texts do, next to the long vowel (iota adscript: αι, ηι, ωι): it is part of how the word is spelled.

Double gamma – γγ – is sounded as ng. In the consonant pairs γκ, γμ, γξ and γχ the gamma is sounded similarly as closer to a 'n' sound.

Writing the Greek alphabet

Each letter is written separately; they are not joined in a cursive script. If you want to type Greek, it is better not to put it into italics.

When practising writing Greek, take some time to differentiate between letters that can be easily confused: e.g. zeta and xi, nu and upsilon. Be aware, as well, of letters that look like English letters but are pronounced differently from the English letters they resemble: e.g. gamma, eta, nu, rho and omega.

Capital letters are used only for proper names, and not to begin a sentence. Punctuation is printed in Greek texts in a manner mostly similar to printed English punctuation, with a couple of notable differences: the symbol that is used as a semicolon in English and other languages is used in Greek texts as a question mark (ἆρα βαίνεις; 'Are you coming?'). A single dot level with the top of a letter is used as a semicolon (e.g. ναί· ὁρῶ ἐγώ. 'Yes; I see.').

Accents

Ancient Greek is written with accents (´,`,˜). Accents can be placed only on vowels, and generally a word will have only one accent. Rules govern which type of accent goes where on a word, and the accent on a word can change type or position (e.g. when the word's shape changes as it is conjugated or declined). Get in the habit of writing accents on Greek words as soon as possible (e.g. in your vocabulary lists), and try to emphasise the syllable with the accent when reading Greek aloud.