

Elementary Classical Greek I (GRK 101). Introduction to the Greek Alphabet

1. ALPHABET

A α	alpha	a (as in "bah")	N ν	nu	n
B β	beta	b	Ξ ξ	xi	x (= khs)
Γ γ	gamma	g (see below)	Ο ο	omicron	ō (boat)
Δ δ	delta	d	Π π	pi	p
Ε ε	epsilon	ě (met)	Ρ ρ	rho	r
Ζ ζ	zeta	zd	Σ σ ς	sigma	s (Use the ς form at end of word, σ form within words.)
Η η	eta	ē (ehh)	Τ τ	tau	t
Θ θ	theta	th ("T" sound + puff of air – "t" in "tough")	Υ υ	upsilon	u
Ι ι	iota	i	Φ φ	phi	ph ("P" sound + puff of air – "p" in "puff")
Κ κ	kappa	k	Χ χ	chi	kh ("K" sound + puff of air – "c" in "cuff")
Λ λ	lambda	l	Ψ ψ	psi	ps
Μ μ	mu	m	Ω ω	omega	ō

2. Aspirated ("breathy") consonants

β (beta) and π (pi) when aspirated become φ (phi), not an "f" sound but like a "p" with a heavy puff of air (like the "p" in "puff")

γ (gamma) and κ (kappa) when aspirated become χ (chi), like a "k" with a heavy puff of air (like the "c" in "cough")

τ (tau) when aspirated becomes θ (theta), not a "th" sound but like a "t" with a heavy puff of air (like the "t" in "tough")

3. DOUBLE CONSONANTS

β / π / φ (b/p/ph) PLUS σ (s) = ψ ("ps")

γ / κ / χ (g/k/kh) PLUS σ (s) = ξ ("x")

σ (s) PLUS δ (d) = ζ (zd) — Ἀθήνας + δέ = Ἀθήναςδε, *Athenasde* ("to Athens")

4. LOWER-CASE SIGMA

Lower-case sigma is σ, *except* when it's the last letter in a word. Then it is ς.

5. GAMMA (Γ)

gamma (Γ/γ) followed by gamma (γ), kappa (κ), or chi (χ) = an “ng” sound.

- ἄγγελος = ángelos (“messenger”)
- ἀγκύλος = ankúlos (“crooked, bent”)
- ἐγχειρίδιον = enkheirídion (“handbook”)

6. DIPHTHONGS (vowel combinations). Two vowels mixed, with a smooth transition from the one sound to the other

αι = English “aye,” “I”

ᾶ (alpha + iota subscript) = αι (above)

ει = ay (“hay”)

ευ = ě-oo

ηυ = ehh-oo

ῆ (eta + iota subscript) = ηι = “eh-ee”

ου = oh-oo, like the “ow” in “show”

οι = oy (“boy”)

υι = wee (“we”)

ω (omega + iota subscript) = ωι

7. VOWEL LENGTH

Long vowels take *twice the time of short vowels* to pronounce, i.e., 2 shorts = 1 long

ᾱ (“ahhh,” long alpha)

ῑ (“eee,” long iota)

ῠ (sort of sounds like “oo”)

ῆ (eta, “ehh”) is long epsilon, ε (“eh”)

ῶ (omega, pure “ohh”) is long omicron, ο (“oh”)

Diphthongs (vowel combinations) take the same time as long vowels

8. BREATHINGS (for vowels at beginning of words)

ὀ = “o” = “smooth breathing,” no “h” sound at the beginning of a word

ὁ = “ho” = “rough breathing,” “h” sounding

ρ (rho) always has rough breathing at beginning of word: πάντα ῥεῖ, *panta rhei*, “all is in flux”

Use breathings *only* for initial vowels/diphthongs or rho. Breathings over diphthongs go over the *second* vowel: αὐ, not ἄυ.

9. ACCENTS (over certain vowels)

In ancient Greek, all accents *intonational and marked*. (Not marked with accent, no accent)

´ (acute): voice goes ^{uP} in pitch

` (grave): voice *stays same*

˘ (circumflex): voice goes u^P then do_{wn} again.

ὁ ἄγγελος (ἄ = alpha acute) = ho ^{an}gelos “the messenger”

ἡ ψυχή = hē psukh^ē “the soul”

ἡ ψυχή (ἡ = eta grave) ἀθάνατός ἐστι = hē psukhē ath^anat^os esti “the soul is immortal”

τὸ δῶρον (circumflex omega) ἀγαθόν = to d-o^o-ron agath^{on} “the gift is good”

10. NEW PUNCTUATION

colon/semicolon = ·

question mark = ;

11. GUESS THE ANIMAL (actual ancient Greek animal sounds)

βαῦ βαῦ

βῆ βῆ

12. TEACH SOCRATES A SONG!

αἶμ ἀτ εἰ παρτι αἶ δοντ οὐαντ το βι ἀτ

ἦνδ αἶ δοντ ἰβεν κηρ

οὐονδεριν ἰφ αἶ κυδ σνικ ἀουτ δα βακ. . .

Δσαστιν Βιεβηρ, Αι δοντ κηρ