

1. Letters and Sounds

The Greek Alphabet

The Greek Alphabet consists of 24 letters, 7 vowels and 17 consonants

| | | |
|----------|---------|----------------------------------------------------|
| A α | alpha | Long or Short a usually short |
| B β | beta | b |
| Γ γ | gamma | g |
| Δ δ | delta | d |
| E ζ | epsilon | Short e as in bet |
| Z ζ | zeta | z (= dz) |
| H η | eta | long e |
| Θ θ | theta | th |
| I ι | iota | short i |
| K κ | kappa | k |
| Λ λ | lambda | l |
| M μ | mu | m |
| N ν | nu | n |
| Ξ ξ | xi | x |
| O ο | omicron | Short o |
| Π π | pi | p |
| P ρ | rho | r (rolled, use rough breathing) |
| Σ σ or ς | sigma | s |
| T τ | tau | t |
| Υ υ | upsilon | Pronounced 'u' as in <i>tune</i> or y e.g λυξ Lynx |
| Φ φ | phi | ph, f |
| X χ | chi | ch or hard c |
| Ψ ψ | psi | ps (as in <i>lipstick</i> , <i>psychology</i>) |
| Ω ω | omega | Long o |

Notes:

- Sigma has two forms, **σ** is used at the begin inning or middle of a word, and **ς** at the end of a word, as in **σοπης** - a wise man
- When the letter **γ** comes before **γ**, **κ**, **χ** or **ξ**, it is pronounced as **v** or 'ng'. e.g. **αγγελος**, a messenger or angel, **συγκοπη** syncope, **Αγχισης** Anchises, **Σφιγξ** Sphinx
- initial **ρ** and **υ** always have a rough breathing. (see below). If **ρρ** occurs in the middle of the word, the first must have a rough breathing **ρ'ρ**.

Breathings

When a word begins with a vowel it is either given a soft breathing (Spiritus Lentis) (**ˊ**) or a hard breathing (Spiritus Asper) (**ˋ**). The former is ignored, the latter is like our 'h'. This breathing is placed over the vowel, or in the case of a diphthong, over the second vowel.
Because of the nature of the font we use, we can only do this with difficulty, so we will place it before

e.g.

ε'ις pronounced 'ice'
'εν pronounced 'hen'

Note that initial rho ρ and initial epsilon υ always take a rough breathing.

Double rho in the middle of a word takes a smooth breathing on the first rho, and a rough breathing on the second rho i.e. ρ'ρ

The Vowels

There are 7 vowels

- ε and ο are always short. *Get, bet, men. On, pop.*
- α, ι, and υ can be either short or long. *Cat or case, bit or mice, lunch or puce, neuter.* The short α and ι sound occurs much more frequently than the long, and the long υ sound more frequently than the short.
- η and ω are always long, *Teen, tone*

Consonants

Consonants can be classified according to their nature

- Liquids -(l, m, n, r)
- Gutturals – (γ, κ, χ) formed in the throat
- Labials – (β, π, φ) formed by the lips
- Dentals- (δ, τ, θ) formed with the the teeth
- f. Sibilant (σ or ς)
- g. double letters (ξ, ψ, ζ) a combination of a guttural, labial, and dental with a sibilant.
γς, κς, or χς =ξ; βς, πς, or φς =ψ; δς, τς, or θς = ζ.

Table of Mutes

The gutturals, Labials and Dentals are also called the mutes, and can be classified as follows

| | Labials | Gutturals | Dentals |
|-----------------|---------|-----------|---------|
| Smooth or sharp | Π, π | Κ, κ | Τ, τ |
| Middle or Flat | Β, β | Γ, γ | Δ, δ |
| Aspirate | Φ, φ | Χ, χ | Θ, θ |

The importance of this table is that if two mutes occur in a syllable they must be of the same kind. Hence γθ is impossible, it must be χθ as both are aspirates or βδ as both are flats.

Diphthongs

| | |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| αι | ai as in <i>aisle</i> |
| αυ | au as in <i>naught</i> |
| ει | ei as in <i>height</i> |
| οι | oi as in <i>oil</i> |
| ου | ou as in <i>through</i> |
| ευ, ηυ | eu as in <i>neuter</i> |
| υι | we as in <i>between</i> |
| γγ | double gamma in the middle of a word is pronounced -ng- |

iota subscriptum

When, often at the end of a word, a long vowel (α, η, ω) will form a diphthong with an iota, ι, but the pronunciation of the diphthong is suppressed. In this case the 'ι' is written under the lower case character, but beside the uppercase character. I.e αι, ηι, ωι or Αι, Ει, Ωι

The long vowel is then pronounced as if the ι was not there. i.e.

| | |
|----|-----------------------|
| τη | pronounced <i>tee</i> |
| τω | pronounced <i>tow</i> |

Punctuation

Greek has 4 punctuation marks

- The comma (,) the use of which is rather like our comma
- The period or full stop (.) again like ours
- The interrogation mark (;), like our ? mark
- The colon or semi colon (·) , a full stop in line with the upper letter

Accents

Read what is said on accents in the forward. Beginning students need not concern themselves greatly with accents, indeed there is no surer way to turn a new student off the subject than to harp on the niceties of accents! However they are often useful in distinguishing between words of similar spelling. Although the New Testament is full of accented words, it should be remembered that accentuation was a recently modern (in NT times) innovation, having been introduced beginning about 200BC. Originally they were used to assist the reader in separating words and syllables. Early Greek, and NT

Greek, was written in all uppercase lettering (as was Latin, miniscules and punctuation were an invention of the middle ages) without spacing or punctuation. Consider the beginning of John 1 as we read it today:

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος

or with accentuation:

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος

This is how it would have appeared to NT times readers:

ΕΝΑΡΧΗΗΝΟΛΟΓΟΣ

Just note that there is an acute(´), a grave(`), and a circumflex(ˆ) accent. The various rules of placement, and their meaning need not bother the beginner.

Diacritical marks

The apostrophe:(´)Used in the same way as the English apostrophe. If a word, generally a preposition ends in a vowel, and the next word begins with a vowel, it is common to drop the terminal vowel. e.g. δια ὦν becomes δι´ ὦν . However if this leaves a sharp mute before a rough breathing, the sharp mute is changed into the corresponding aspirate. e.g. ἄντι ὦν becomes ἄντ´ ὦν becomes ἄνθ´ ὦν. (See table of mutes above)

The diaeresis:(¨)When placed over the second letter of an apparent diphthong, indicates that both vowels are pronounced separately. e.g. Ἡσαΐας, πρῶϊ

The coronis:(´) Similar to a smooth breathing, an indication that **crasis** has taken place. Crasis is when two words have been contracted into one e.g. κ´αγω (and I) = καὶ ἔγω. Distinguish from elision where a vowel ending the word is dropped before a second vowel.

Again the beginner should not overly concern themselves about these niceties.