

The Ancient Greek Alphabet and Pronunciation

Letter	Name	Sounds Like
A	α	alpha (long) father, (short) drama
B	β	beta bit
Γ	γ	gamma get
Δ	δ	delta den
E	ε	epsilon (short) get
Z	ζ	zeta adds, gadzooks
H	η	eta (long) wait
Θ	θ	theta thought
I	ι	iota (long) meet, (short) bit
K	κ	kappa kit
Λ	λ	lambda lit
M	μ	mu meet
N	ν	nu neat
Ξ	ξ	xi coax, taxi
O	ο	omicron (short) thought
Π	π	pi pen
P	ρ	rho drama
Σ	σ, ς	sigma set
T	τ	tau ten
Υ	υ	upsilon (long) boot, (short) put
Φ	φ	phi fit
X	χ	chi German ich
Ψ	ψ	psi upset
Ω	ω	omega (long) total

-There is also an h-sound in Greek and it only occurs at the beginning of words. It is indicated by a **rough breathing** mark placed above the first vowel of the word (or second vowel if a diphthong starts the word). e.g. ἑξάγωνον – hexagon and Ἑλένη – Helen

-Words that begin with vowels and don't have an h-sound get **smooth breathing** marks.
e.g. ὀλιγαρχία – oligarchy and Ἠλέκτρα – Electra

-Rho always gets a rough breathing when it begins a word. e.g. ῥητορική – rhetoric

Diphthong	Sounds Like	Example
αι	defy	αἰθήρ
ει	wait	εἰρήνη
οι	boy	οἶνος
υι	queen	Εἰλειθια
αυ	plow	αὐτόνομος
ευ	(ε + υ)	Ὀδυσσευς
ηυ	(η + υ)	ἠῦρηκα
ου	boot	Οὐρανός

-Gamma changes how it sounds when combined with certain consonants (κ, γ, χ, or ξ). It takes on more of an ng-sound, like **anger** (γγ), **banker** (γκ), **Sphinx** (γξ), and **ankh** (γχ).

-A Greek word has as many syllables as it does vowels or diphthongs.

Accents

-Greek was a tonal language, meaning words had a designated change in the pitch of the speaker's voice on certain syllables. These tonal accents distinguished words from each other and their inflections. There are three accents in Greek:

- ' Acute – marked a raising of pitch
- ` Grave – marked a lowering of pitch
- ~ Circumflex – marked raising and lowering

The tonal pronunciation of Greek has largely disappeared and instead it is customary to stress accented syllables as in English.

Accents are extremely important in Greek, they are an integral part of each word, and there are many rules as to how they change as a word is inflected. For this class, however, we do not expect you to know these rules, we merely want you to be aware of accents and how they impact modern pronunciation.

-This is the basic idea of how to write Greek letters.
(Source: <http://www.ibiblio.org/koine/greek/lessons/alphabet.html>)

