

Athenaze Introduction

Learning Objectives:

- the Greek alphabet: names and pronunciation of the letters
- transliteration of Greek into English
- writing the Greek letters
- reading continuous Greek prose aloud

Grammatical Terms and Items of Particular Importance for You to Learn

- long vs. short vs. doubtful vowels: η, ω vs. ϵ, o vs. α, ι, υ — macron (¯)
- breathings — smooth (¨), rough (´); aspiration
- diphthongs and digraphs ($αι, αυ, ευ, ηυ, οι, υι; ει, ου$)
- iota subscript ($α̣, η̣, ω̣$)
- iota adscript ($ΑΙ, Αι, ΗΙ, Ηι, ΩΙ, Ωι$)
- liquids and nasals ($\lambda, \rho; \mu, \nu$)
- stops: voiceless, voiced, aspirated; labial, dental, velar (palatal)
- double consonants (ζ, ξ, ψ)
- punctuation: Greek colon/semicolon (∙); Greek question mark (∴)

Notes

- the letters α to τ are derived from Phoenician and have Semitic names. The letters υ to ω were invented by the Greeks.
- some of the names that we currently employ for the letters of the Greek alphabet date to as late as the Middle Ages (e.g., epsilon and upsilon, which were employed to distinguish ϵ from the similarly pronounced $αι$, and υ from $οι$).
- only the capital letters would have been employed in the classical period. The lower-case letters that we now use date to the 9th century AD.
- in modern editions of ancient texts, capital letters are employed in the case of proper nouns but they are not commonly used at the beginning of the typical sentence. Many editors do employ them at the start of a new chapter or paragraph.
- the system of accentuation that we employ was invented around 200 BC by Aristophanes of Byzantium to assist non-native speakers of Greek. We will deal with it in detail in unit 1β.
- the alphabet set out in our book is the Ionic alphabet, officially adopted by the Athenians in 403 BC. Prior to that time the Athenians did not regularly employ separate signs to indicate \bar{o} (ω), $\bar{\epsilon}$ (η), $\chi\varsigma$ (ξ), or $\phi\psi$ (ψ). In cases where we today indicate contraction, the Athenians prior to 403 employed ϵ for $ει$ and o for $ου$.
- the iota in what is now known as the iota subscript ($α̣, η̣, ω̣$) was originally written on the same line as the vowel with which it is joined and pronounced independently (an offglide, resulting in what is known as a “long diphthong”). In the case of these particular combinations, sometime around the first century BC this iota stopped being pronounced and often stopped being written altogether. It was restored by scholars of the Byzantine period (sometime around the 12th century AD) but was still not pronounced: hence the use of the subscript, as a reminder of a letter that had once belonged there but was no longer pronounced. (Contrast, e.g., the regular [“short”] diphthong $αι$.)
- the rough breathing originally was denoted by the letter (H); no mark was employed to indicate the lack of an aspirate. When (H) came to be used for the long open “e” sound (η), a truncated form of it (Ϝ) came to be

used for the rough breathing. Eventually, this was divided again, becoming (´), while the inverse form (`) came to be used for the smooth breathing.

- some letters not in common use in classical Athens were still employed in the Athenian numerical system (the Athenian equivalent of Roman numerals): vau or digamma (Ϝ), koppa (ϙ), and sampi (Ϡ). A lost digamma (in the form Ϝ — pronounced like the English “w”) often explains the genesis of later forms, and accounts for a number of apparent irregularities in the meter of early Greek poetry.
- initial ρ and initial ν are always aspirated in Attic Greek
- the only consonants that can end a word in Attic Greek are ν, ρ, and σ. The only exceptions to this rule are the proclitics ἐκ and οὐκ (οὐχ). Final ξ and ψ are not exceptions, since these letters represent the combinations χσ and φσ.