**It’s all Greek to me**

The first thing to get over to learn Greek, is that it is in Greek. No really, those letters!

**About those letters**

In my neighborhood you can walk around the frat neighborhood and quiz yourself on the upper case. Doesn’t help with the lower case though. And to make matters worse, Greek isn’t big on the upper case. Well presumably they really did use it for inscriptions and such, but somewhere along the line they decided that it would not do, so they <strong>only</strong> capitalize the first letter of a section, or a proper name. I’m sure if it’s the actual ancients that did that, or the medieval monks, or modern editors. But knowing your caps doesn’t get you too far.

There are no two ways about it, you simply have to drill these. I like this Quizlet (<https://quizlet.com/230542844/greek-letters-flash-cards/>) because it gives both the upper and lower letters. This is your first assignment.

It is also super helpful to remember the order of the alphabet. For me I find it super confusing that γ comes before δ, and where does θ even happen? Putting some time into memorizing this will save you time down the road reading the entire glossary trying to figure out where the words starting with ζ are (hint: not at the end).

Αα Ββ Γγ Δδ Εε Ζζ Ηη Θθ Ιι Κκ Λλ Μμ Νν Ξξ Οο Ππ Ρρ Σσ(ς) Ττ Υυ Φφ Χχ Ψψ Ωω

**Vowels and Dipthongs**

In middle school my friend’s older brother got in trouble for walking down the hall yelling “Paul is a Dipthong!” I mean, he was not wrong, grammatically. And Paul (a teacher) was, by all reports, messing with some of the female students, so probably not wrong in sentiment either. None the less it was not his finest moment.

In any case Greek loves its dipthongs. Pretty much any vowel can be turned into a dipthong with the addition of either a υ or an ι. These dipthongs function pretty effectively as first-class letter in Greek so get used to them. Its also important to note that for α, η, ω the ι has a mixed history of being pronounced, and as a result the byzantine monks started tucking it under (ᾳ, ῃ, ῳ). Some classicists pronounce it differently and some don’t, you can make your own decision. But you have to include it in spelling things, because legit it makes a difference.

**Accents and breathing marks**

You’ll want to read up on breathing marks vs accents in your text. Its important to remember breathing marks represent a missing letter (which we know as H), so you <strong>have</strong> to include it. The crescent opening to the right (e.g. ὁ or ῥ) is a rough breathing mark and represent an “h” sound. As in the H in Hades, or with a ῥ the h as in rhyme. You need to learn these like you do spelling. The crescent opening to the left (e.g. ὀ) is the smooth breathing and isn’t pronounced. The only reason we have the smooth breathing mark is really to let the reader know that we didn’t forget the rough breathing mark. You should always see one or the other if a word begins with a vowel, dipthong or ρ.

Accent marks are channeling pitch, and except in the cases where they differentiate between similar words/meanings are not really a top priority. There are all kinds of rules about where they go and which ones, and how they move as the word changes, but for your first pass, you can skip this. There are bigger fish to fry.

**Pronounce the things**

Ok the nice thing about studying dead languages is you don’t have to worry about saying them wrong, right? Wrong, very clever and diligent folks have put in hard hours in working out how things were pronounced. There is a bit of fudging going on, since over the huge span pronunciation drifted a bit. But you can’t just make up something and call it good. There are, however, a couple resources:

* The Attic Greek Website [http://atticgreek.org/pronunc/pronunc\_guide.html] has a great pronunciation guide. This includes the dipthongs, and really spend some time here. My first planned tool will be a way to drill these by sound, since I never really got them down.
* Dr Stanly Lombardo (U Kansas, emeritus) has a number of recordings of him reading the Iliad in ancient Greek. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blRs0_gFG4Q> is an example.

**Type the things**

Ok, so one of the big gaping holes I found in my Greek education is how to integrate it with the technical world. Between the goofy characters, breathing marks, and all the different accent marks, you <strong>have</strong> to find a proper keyboard to use them.

I tested several keyboards on Android, but the one that worked the best was the Hoplite keyboard. The accents/iotas/breathing marks are a breeze. Available on: Android [https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.philolog.hoplitekeyboard&hl=en\_US] iOS [https://apps.apple.com/us/app/hoplite-greek-keyboard/id1200319047]

For windows 10 you want to install the Polytonic Greek keyboard (I found instructions here [https://www.ellopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/greek-fonts.asp?pg=3]). This is functional, but not super great, e.g. if you have an accent and a subscripted iota it just doesn’t work. If someone knows of a better way. Please let me know.

I’m not a Mac user, but this (<https://biblicalgreek.org/grammar/keyboard/>) implies that the ploytonic keyboard is available as a selected keyboard. Again let me know if there are words of wisdom here.

Touch typing Greek is pretty easy and fun, I’m going to tell you right now the problem spots:

* π/ρ: π (pi) makes the “pee” sound , but ρ (rho) looks like p, even though its r
* ν/ω: ν (nu) is the lowercase of Ν, and it’s on the “n” key. Omega (ω) is on the v key on the keyboard.
* ω/ς: Similarly ς (lower case sigma, when at end of word) is on the w key. The other sigmas are on s, and omega (ω) is on v, so you will absolutely swap these.
* θ/υ: So the root of the problem is that υ (lower case upsilon) is on the Y key because the uppercase makes sense there (Υ). Which frees up the U key, so they put the theta there. Unfortunately, both are super common, so if you type stuff and it makes no sense, double check these.
* φ/ψ: legit this are confusing to those with the Latin letters. Φ (phi, as in Philadelphia) is quite common, and has the F key, which is cool. Ψ (Psy) is less common, and on C mysteriously. I’ve tried to come up with a pneumonic that has psychologists using tridents, but not quite there yet.
* ξ/ζ: ξ (eta) and ζ (zeta) both look like squiggles. The big thing is to work on your handwriting such that you can tell them apart. Eta is sort of a backwards 3 with a tail, or maybe a messy curly brace? Zeta is somewhere between an upside down 2 and a 7 with a tail. Or maybe in other fonts it looks like a large C with frills on its edges? In any case as long as you can tell your two squiggles apart, you’re likely ok.

**Resources**

* Quizlet

References:

* Montenare: Chapter 1