

Greek 10 The Ancient Greek Alphabet

Actually, the uppercase letter forms are the late 5th Century BCE Attic Greek alphabet; there are numerous local variations in the letters and their pronunciation throughout Ancient Greece. The lowercase letter forms are medieval (uncials, more or less). In this, the standard form of the alphabet, 24 upper- and lowercase letters are each followed by the letter's name and its pronunciation.

Α α alpha. a) Short alpha: like the vowel in "cup." b) Long alpha: like the a in "father."

Β β beta. Just like English 'b.'

Γ γ gamma. a) Like English hard 'g,' as in "get." b) before γ or κ or μ or ξ or χ, like the 'n' in English "ink" or "song."

Δ δ delta. Like English 'd.'

Ε ε epsilon. Like the 'e' in English "pet."

Ζ ζ zeta. Like the combination 'dz' in English "adze."

Η η eta. Like the vowel in French "tête."

Θ θ theta. Like 'th' in English "this," though this is a false pronunciation (the true pronunciation is like the 't' in English "top").

Ι ι iota. a) Short iota, like the 'i' in English "bit." b) Long iota, like the vowel in English "bead."

Κ κ kappa. Like the 'k' in "book" (but not in "keep").

Λ λ lambda. Like the 'l' in "look."

Μμ mu. Like English 'm.'

Νν nu. Like English 'n.'

Ξξ xi. Like the 'x' in "box," a way to write κ+ σ, which occur often together.

Οο omicron. Like the 'o' in "pot."

Ππ pi. Like the 'p' in "stop" (not the one in "pot").

Ρρ rho. Like a Scottish rolled 'r.'

Σσ, ς, Ϸ sigma. a) Like the 's' in "sing." b) Before β or γ or δ or μ (but nowhere else) like English 'z.'

Ττ tau. Like 't' in "spot" (but not in "top").

Υυ upsilon. a) Long upsilon, like French "lune." b) Short upsilon, like French "ruse."

Φφ phi. Like 'f' in English "foot," though this is false (see theta pronunciation: the true sound is the 'p' in English "pot").

Χχ khi. Like the 'ch' in Scottish "loch"

Ψψ psi. Like 'ps' in "lapse."

Ωω omega. Like the vowel in "saw."

Alphabetical order

Just to make the order more clear, here are all the lower case letters in correct alphabetical order, followed by their names. The convention is to use lower case letters everywhere except for proper nouns (like placenames or personal names, etc.).

α β γ δ ε ζ η θ ι κ λ μ ν ξ ο
π ρ σ τ υ φ χ ψ ω

alpha, beta, gamma, delta, epsilon, zeta, eta, theta, iota, kappa, lambda, mu, nu, xi, omicron, pi, rho, sigma, tau, upsilon, phi, khi, psi, omega

Doubled Consonants

Unlike English, doubled consonants in Greek, like σσ or λλ, are actually pronounced like two consonants (in English there is no difference between the sound of 's' in 'song' and 'ss' in 'less').

Diphthongs

Diphthongs are two adjacent vowels that form a single syllable, not two. Greek has the following diphthongs only (any other adjacent vowels, such as αε, form two separate syllables), as follows:

αῖ

alpha-iota subscript. Like long alpha, because iota subscripts are by convention no longer pronounced -- but they are real letters!

αἰ

alpha-iota. Like "high."

αυ

alpha-upsilon. Like "how."

εἰ

epsilon-iota. Like German "Beet" (in Beethoven).

ευ, ηυ

epsilon-upsilon, eta-upsilon. Sounds like the sounds of the two letters pronounced rapidly together.

ἦ

eta-iota subscript. Like eta.

οι omicron-iota. Like "boy."

ου omicron-upsilon. Like "pool."

υι upsilon-iota. Like 'wi' in "window."

ωι omega-iota subscript. Like omega.