

Greek alphabet: sounds of the vowels

The second column gives the Roman alphabet equivalents commonly used to represent Greek text when a Greek font is not available or when readers are not expected to recognize the Greek alphabet. This is known as “transliteration.” In this course transliteration will not be necessary.

Vowels may be short or long. Only two vowels have a different spelling when they are long: **ε** (short) / **η** (long) and **ο** (short) / **ω** (long). Those who transliterate Greek sometimes indicate long vowels with a circumflex accent (**ê, ô**) or a “macron” (**ē, ō**) over it.

Most modern readers do not distinguish between short and long vowels unless they read Greek poetry, characterized by sequences of long and short syllables rather than by rhyme. It is also the case that short and long vowels had qualitative differences: we should pronounce a long **ē** (ēta) and a long **ō** (ōmega) as open, in contrast to the short close **e** (epsilon) and **o** (omicron), but, alas, most students and teachers of ancient or *koinê* Greek ignore this contrast, and so do I. **:-(In this soundfile I will pronounce short and long e and o differently, yet when I read complete words I will not.**

Do not be surprised if **ou** is listed as a vowel sound, because that is what it represented. It is a diphthong only in appearance.

<i>Greek vowels</i>	<i>Roman alphabet equivalents</i>	<i>Names of the letters</i>
α	a	alpha
ϵ	e	epsilon
η	\bar{e} or \hat{e}	eta
ι	i	iota
\omicron	o	omicron
ω	\bar{o}	omega
υ	y,u	upsilon
$\omicron\upsilon$	ou	omicron + upsilon