

Introduction 0.2.2: Classification of sounds

What follows here is a simplified classification of the sounds of Greek vowels and consonants. As we learn the grammar, we will be applying this classification. At this time you want to understand it (pronounce the letters aloud). Later the terminology will become familiar. I put English words in square brackets to illustrate the sounds, with the qualification that some are less than perfect parallels.

A) VOWELS

Three have the same spelling whether they are short or long:

α [father]	ι [clean or pin]	υ [French tu, German Tür]

The following two vowels have a different spelling for short and long:

ε [short as in bet]	η [long as in French <i>tête</i> ; Eng. <u>care</u>]
ο [short, but not open; Spanish, Italian o]	ω [long though open as in Eng. saw]

In our reading of ancient Greek prose we often do not distinguish very clearly the short and long: ε/η, ο/ω .

The combination ου did not represent a real diphthong but a long vowel [boot]

B) DIPHTHONGS

$\alpha \iota$ [aisle]

$\alpha \upsilon$ [house]

$\varepsilon \iota$ [sleigh]

$\varepsilon \upsilon$ [e + Eng. oo]

$\omicron \iota$ [coin]

$\upsilon \iota$ [compare New_York]

Sometimes the first vowel of the diphthongs with ι , namely $\alpha \iota$, $\varepsilon \iota$, $\omicron \iota$, was lengthened and they became $\alpha \iota$, $\eta \iota$, $\omega \iota$. This ι eventually ceased to be pronounced, and it became a “iota subscript,” spelled thus: $\alpha \iota$, $\eta \iota$, $\omega \iota$. In the soundfiles of this course iota subscript is not pronounced.

C) CONSONANTS

STOPS (also called mutes or occlusives)

	<i>unvoiced</i>	<i>voiced</i>	<i>aspirated</i>
<i>Labials</i>	π [p]	β [b]	ϕ [p + h]
<i>Dentals</i>	τ [t]	δ [d]	θ [t + h]
<i>Palatals</i>	κ [k]	γ [g in go]	χ [k + h]

CONTINUANTS

<i>Nasals</i>		
<i>Labials</i>	μ [m]	
<i>Dentals</i>	ν [n]	
<i>Palatals</i>	γ before another palatal : γκ, γγ, γχ [ankle, angle, sink-hole]	
<i>Liquids</i>	λ [l]	ρ [r]

SIBILANT

σ,ς [as in sound, not as in rose]

DOUBLE CONSONANTS

- Any labial stop + σ becomes ψ [eclipse]
- Any palatal stop + σ becomes ξ [excel]
- I pronounce the double consonant ζ as English zone; it would be more accurate to pronounce it as wisdom.