

# Omniglot *a guide to written language*

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## Greek alphabet ( ε λ λ η ν ι κ ρ ζ μ μ α τ α )

### Origin

The Greek alphabet has been in continuous use for the past 2,750 years or so since about 750 BC. It was developed from the [Canaanite/Phoenician alphabet](#) and the order and names of the letters are derived from Phoenician. The original Canaanite meanings of the letter names was lost when the alphabet was adapted for Greek. For example, *alpha* comes for the Canaanite *aleph* (ox) and *beta* from *beth* (house).

At first, there were a number of different versions of the alphabet used in various different Greek cities. These local alphabets, known as *epichoric*, can be divided into three groups: green, blue and red. The blue group developed into the modern Greek alphabet, while the red group developed into the [Etruscan](#) alphabet, other [alphabets of ancient Italy](#) and eventually the [Latin](#) alphabet.

By the early 4th century BC, the *epichoric* alphabets were replaced by the eastern Ionic alphabet. The capital letters of the modern Greek alphabet are almost identical to those of the Ionic alphabet. The minuscule or lower case letters first appeared sometime after 800 AD and developed from the Byzantine minuscule script, which developed from cursive writing.

### Notable features

- Originally written horizontal lines either from right to left or alternating from right to left and left to right (boustrophedon). Around 500 BC the direction of writing changed to horizontal lines running from left to right.
- Diacritics to represent stress and breathings were added to the alphabet in around 200 BC. In 1982 the diacritics representing breathings, which were not widely used after 1976, were officially abolished by presidential decree.
- The letter sigma has a special form which is used when it appears at the end of a word.

### Used to write

**Greek ( Ε λ λ η ν ι κ ρ ζ )**, an Indo-European language spoken by about 12 million people in Greece, Cyprus and many other countries, including Albania, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Bulgaria, Canada, Djibouti, Egypt, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Jordan and Kazakhstan.

### Greek alphabet - Classical Attic pronunciation

Α α Β β Γ γ Δ δ Ε ε Ζ ζ Η η Θ θ Ι ι Κ κ Λ λ Μ μ

ἄλφα	βῆτα	γάμμα	δέλτα	ἔψιλόν	ζῆτα	ἦτα	θῆτα	ἰῶτα	κάππα	λάμβδα	μῦ
alpha	beta	gamma	delta	epsilon	zeta	eta	theta	iota	kappa	lambda	mu
a	b	g	d	e	z	ē	th	i	k	l	m
[a, aː]	[b]	[g]	[ð]	[e]	[zd/z]	[eː]	[tʰ]	[i, iː]	[k]	[l]	[m]

Ν ν Ξ ξ Ο ο Π π Ρ ρ Σ σ ς Τ τ Υ υ Φ φ Χ χ Ψ ψ Ω ω

νῦ	ξεί	ὄμικρόν	πεῖ	ῥῶ	σίγμα	ταῦ	ὑψιλόν	φεῖ	χεῖ	ψεῖ	ὤμέγα
nu	xi	omikron	pi	rho	sigma	tau	upsilon	phi	chi	psi	omega
n	ks, x	o	p	r, rh	s	t	u, y	ph	kh, ch	ps	ō
[n]	[ks]	[o]	[p]	[r]	[s, z]	[t]	[y, yː]	[pʰ]	[kʰ]	[ps]	[ɔː]

### Greek alphabet - Modern pronunciation

Α α Β β Γ γ Δ δ Ε ε Ζ ζ Η η Θ θ Ι ι Κ κ Λ λ Μ μ

άλφα	βῆτα	γάμα	θέλτα	έψιλόν	ζήτα	ήτα	θήτα	γιῶτα	κάπα	λάμδα	μι
alfa	vita	gama	thelta	epsilon	zita	ita	thita	yiota	kapa	lamtha	mi
a	b	g	d	ē	z	ē	th	i	k	l	m
[a]	[v]	[ɣ]	[ð]	[e]	[z]	[i]	[θ]	[i]	[k]	[l]	[m]

Ν ν Ξ ξ Ο ο Π π Ρ ρ Σ σ ς Τ τ Υ υ Φ φ Χ χ Ψ ψ Ω ω

νι	ξι	όμικρον	πι	ρο	σίγμα	ταυ	ύψιλόν	φι	χι	ψι	ωμέγα
ni	xi	omikron	pi	ro	sigma	taf	ipsilon	fi	hi	psi	omega
n	ks, x	o	p	r, rh	s	t	u, y	ph	kh, ch	ps	ō
[n]	[ks]	[o]	[p]	[r]	[s, z]	[t]	[i]	[f]	[χ]	[ps]	[o]

### Diphthongs

αι	α/αι	ει	η/ηι	οι	ω/ωι	υι	αυ	ευ	ηυ	ου
ai	ai	ei	ēi	oi	ōi	ui/yi	au	eu	ēu	ou
[aːi]	[aj]	[eː]	[eːi]	[oi]	[ɔːi]	[y]	[aw/aːw]	[ew]	[eːw]	[oː/uː]

**Note:** Diphthongs in blue were used only in Classical Attic

### Consonant combinations

μπ	γκ	τσ	ντ
mp	gk	ts	nt
[b]	[g]	[ts]	[d]

### Sample text in Greek

Ἅλλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι γεννιοῦνται ἐλεύθεροι καὶ ἴσοι στὴν ἀξιοπρέπεια καὶ τὰ δικαιώματα. Εἶναι πρoικισμένοι με λογικὴ καὶ συνείδηση, καὶ σφείλουν νὰ συμπεριφέρονται μεταξύ τους με πνεῦμα ἀδελφoσύνης.

### Transliteration

Óloi oi ánthrōpoi gennioúntai eleútheroi kai ísoi stēn axioprépeia kai ta dikai?mata. Eínai proikisménoi me logik? kai syneídēsē, kai ofeíloun na symperiférontai metaxý tous me pneúma adelfosýnēs.

### Translation

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.  
(Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

Longer sample texts (Tower of Babel) in: [Ancient Greek](#) and [Modern Greek](#)



Books on the [Greek alphabet](#) and the [Greek language](#)

### Links

Free Greek fonts

<http://www.phantis.com/customer.service/greek.fonts.html>

<http://www.ntgateway.com/greek/fonts.htm>

<http://www.hellenic.net/fonts>

<http://www.biblicalgreek.org/links/fonts.html>

Online Greek lessons

<http://www.ilearngreek.com> (Modern) <http://www.greece.org/gr-lessons/> (Modern)

<http://kypros.org/Greek/> (Modern)

<http://www.ibiblio.org/koine/greek/lessons/> (New Testament)

<http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~ancgreek/> (Ancient)

<http://www.textkit.com> (Ancient)

Online Greek-English dictionary

<http://www.kypros.org/cgi-bin/lexicon/>

Greek Electronic talking dictionaries

<http://www.ectaco.com>

Greek Language and Linguistics

<http://greek-language.com>

Online Greek Radio

<http://www.hotstation.gr>

<http://www.patinorama.com/>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/greek/>

<http://www.cocktail-radio.gr>

<http://www.ouzo.fm>

<http://www.greece-radio.gr>

**ALPHABETUM** - a Unicode font for ancient languages by Juan-José Marcos, Professor of Classics, Plasencia, Spain.

Includes: Old Italic (Etruscan, Oscan, Umbrian, Picene, Messapic) Classical & Medieval Latin, **Ancient Greek**, Coptic, Linear B, Hebrew, Sanskrit, Gothic, Runic, Ogham, Cypriot, Phoenician, Iberic, Celtiberic, Old & Middle English, Cuneiform Scripts (Ugaritic and Old Persian) and Medieval Nordic (Old Norse and Old Icelandic). Also Includes Characters For Latin-Based European Languages, Cyrillic-Based Languages,

Devanagari, Bengali, Hiragana, Katakana and Bopomofo)

### Other alphabets

Armenian, Avestan, Bassa (Vah), Beitha Kukju, Coptic, Cyrillic, Elbsan, Etruscan, Fraser, Georgian (Asomtavruli & Nuskhakhucuri), Georgian (Mkhedruli), Glagolitic, Gothic, Greek, Hungarian Runes, International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), Irish, Korean, Latin, Manchu, Mongolian, N'Ko, Old Church Slavonic, Ogham, Old Italic, Old Permic, Orkhon, Pollard Miao, Runic, Santali, Somali, Sutton SignWriting, Tai Lue, Thaana

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