

## Classics 143 Greek Alphabet Fun!

What you need to know:

- How to *transliterate* each of the 24 letters (including the special cases of gamma), including words that start with a capital letter
- How to deal with *breathing marks* on words that start with vowels or rho (see p. 2)

What you don't need to know:

- The names of the letters
- How to write the letters (though writing them is a good way to learn to recognize them!)
- Exact pronunciation (if we had time, this would be an oral quiz; the information here is meant to be a good enough pronunciation guide, and reading words out loud is the best practice; I'm happy to answer any pronunciation questions)
- How Greek words get adapted into English (for example, you are asked to transliterate Ἑκτώρ as Hektōr, *not* to convert it into the more familiar Hector)

### Alphabet, first half:

	<u>Greek</u>	<u>Transliterate</u>	<i>notes</i>
<i>alpha</i>	A α	a	
<i>beta</i>	B β	b	
<i>gamma</i>	Γ γ	g*	(* <b>Transliterated n in these cases:</b> γγ=ng, γκ=nk, γχ=nch or nkh)
<i>delta</i>	Δ δ	d	
<i>epsilon</i>	E ε	e	
<i>zeta</i>	Z ζ	z	(classical pronunciation = zd or maybe dz)
<i>eta</i>	H η	ē	(note the long mark!)
<i>theta</i>	Θ θ	th	
<i>iota</i>	I ι	i	
<i>kappa</i>	K κ	k	
<i>lambda</i>	Λ λ	l	
<i>mu</i>	M μ	m	

### Alphabet, second half:

<i>nu</i>	N ν	n	(distinguish from v)
<i>xi</i>	Ξ ξ	x	(always pronounced ks; distinguish from ζ)
<i>omicron</i>	O ο	o	
<i>pi</i>	Π π	p	
<i>rho</i>	P ρ	r	(ῥ=rh, at the beginning of a word)
<i>sigma</i>	Σ σ,ς	s	(ς only at the end of a word)
<i>tau</i>	T τ	t	
<i>upsilon</i>	Υ υ	u	(pronounced like French u or German ü—pucker to whistle and say “Eeeee!”)
<i>phi</i>	Φ φ	ph	
<i>chi</i>	Χ χ	ch or kh	(pronounced as in <i>Christmas</i> , never as in <i>child</i> ! distinguish from κ)
<i>psi</i>	Ψ ψ	ps	(the p is not silent—Greek is always pronounced as spelled!)
<i>omega</i>	Ω ω	ō	(note the long mark!)

### Extra Stuff You Must Know: Breathing Marks

You'll notice that there is no Greek letter transliterated *h*. But Greek has lots of words that start with *h*. To indicate this, every Greek word beginning with a vowel is accompanied by a mark to indicate “add *h*” (*rough breathing*) or “no *h*” (*smooth breathing*). The rough breathing looks like a tiny *c*, and the smooth breathing looks like a backwards *c*. There are other funny marks that show up over Greek letters (these are *accents*), but you have to notice the breathing marks and ignore the accents.

Examples of breathing marks:

#### *smooth breathing*

ἄνθρωπος	<i>anthrōpos</i> (“human being”)
ἄγγελος	<i>angelos</i> (“messenger”)
εὐφωνία	<i>euphōnia</i> (“euphony”)
ὀξύμωρος	<i>oxymōros</i> (“pointedly foolish, paradoxical”)
Ἄφροδίτη	<i>Aphroditē</i> (Aphrodite, the goddess of erotic love who speaks the prologue in <i>Hippolytus</i> )
Ὀδυσσεύς	<i>Odusseus</i> (the hero of the <i>Odyssey</i> ; note that breathing marks come in front of a capital letter)
Ὠκεανός	<i>Ōkeanos</i> (Ocean, the god/waters surrounding the world)

#### *rough breathing*

ἁρμονία	<i>harmonia</i> (“tuning, harmony”)
ἁμαρτία	<i>hamartia</i> (“error”)
ἡμισφαίριον	<i>hēmispairion</i> (“hemisphere”)
ὑπέρ	<i>hyper</i> (“above”; cf. English “hyper-”)
Ἡράκλειτος	<i>Hērakleitos</i> (Heraclitus, the cryptic but brilliant early Greek philosopher; note <i>H</i> = <i>ē</i> , not <i>h</i> !)
Ἱππόλυτος	<i>Hippolutos</i> (Hippolytus, after whom our first reading is named)
Ἔραι	<i>Hōrai</i> (the Seasons)

ALL GREEK WORDS BEGINNING WITH **R** HAVE ROUGH BREATHING AND ARE transliterated **RH**-:

ῥόμβος	<i>rhombos</i> (one meaning is “rhombus”)
Ῥαδάμανθους	<i>Rhadamanthus</i> (Rhadamanthys, one of the judges in Hades)

### Extra Stuff You May Want to Know

- Long vowels are closer to Italian or Spanish; short vowels are more often like English (α always as in *father*, short ι as in *it*, long ι as in *machine*, ε as in *met*, η as a lengthened version of *met*, ο as in British *hot*, ω as in British *lawn*).
- ου, *ou*, is the sound in English *chute*: μουσα, Μοῦσα, *mousa*, “Muse”
- αι, *ai* = *aisle*; αυ, *au* = *sauerkraut*; ευ, *eu* = ε + ου; οι, *oi* = *noise*
- In the Classical period, θ as in *hothead*, φ as in *hiphop* (or *pea*), χ as in *backhand* (or *cat*); in later Greek the sounds changed to *theory*, *phone*, and *loch* (or *Chanukah*).

**Example Passage Using All Letters, Plus Transliteration**

οἱ δ' αἶψ' εἴσβαινον καὶ ἐπὶ κληῖσι καθίζον,  
ἐξῆς δ' ἐζόμενοι πολιὴν ἄλα τύπτον ἐρετμοῖς.  
ἄλλ' ὅτε δὴ τὸν χῶρον ἀφίκομεθ' ἐγγὺς ἐόντα

hoi d' aips' eisbainon kai epi klēisi kathizon,  
hexēs d' hezomenoi poliēn hala tupton eretmois.  
all' hote dē ton chōron [or khōron] aphikometh' engus eonta

*(The apostrophes show that a vowel has been elided in front of a word that starts with a vowel.)*

**Additional Practice Words Using Only First Half of Alphabet**

1. ἀγκαλίζει “you embrace”
2. Ἥβη the goddess of Youth
3. δελεάζει “he baits (*a hook*); he catches (*an animal*) with bait”
4. θέμα “deposit; case proposed for discussion”
5. θέλημα “will” (the noun)
6. Εὐκλείδη This is the form of a famous geometer’s name you’d use when hailing him in the street.

**Additional Practice Words: Answer Key (no peeking!)**

1. ankalizei
2. Hēbē
3. deleazei
4. thema
5. thelēma
6. Eukleidē