

Greek alphabet

The **Greek alphabet** has been used to write the Greek language since the late ninth or early eighth century BC. It is derived from the earlier Phoenician alphabet and was the first alphabetic script in history to have distinct letters for vowels as well as consonants.

In Archaic and early Classical times, the Greek alphabet existed in many local variants, but, by the end of the fourth century BC, the Euclidean alphabet, with twenty-four letters, ordered from alpha to omega, had become standard and it is this version that is still used to write Greek today.

Letter	Name
Α α	alpha, άλφα
Β β	beta, βήτα
Γ γ	gamma, γάμμα
Δ δ	delta, δέλτα
Ε ε	epsilon, έψιλov
Ζ ζ	zeta, ζήτα
Η η	eta, ήτα
Θ θ	theta, θήτα
Ι ι	iota, ιώτα
Κ κ	kappa, κάππα
Λ λ	la(m)bda, λά(μ)βδα ^[note 3]
Μ μ	mu, μυ
Ν ν	nu, νυ
Ξ ξ	xi, ξι
Ο ο	omicron, όμικρον
Π π	pi, πι
Ρ ρ	rho, ρώ
Σ σ/ς	sigma, σίγμα
Τ τ	tau, ταυ
Υ υ	upsilon, ύψιλov
Φ φ	phi, φι
Χ χ	chi, χι
Ψ ψ	psi, ψι
Ω ω	omega, ωμέγα

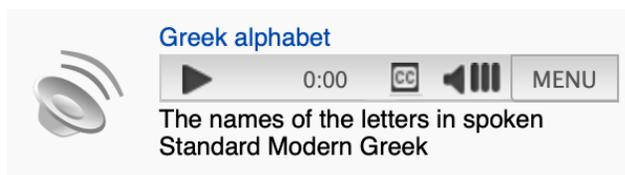
The Greek alphabet is the ancestor of the Latin and Cyrillic scripts. Like Latin and Cyrillic, Greek originally had only a single form of each letter; it developed the letter case distinction between uppercase and lowercase in parallel with Latin during the modern era.

Sound values and conventional transcriptions for some of the letters differ between Ancient and Modern Greek usage, because the pronunciation of Greek has changed significantly between the fifth century BC and today. Modern and Ancient Greek also use different diacritics.

Diacritics: the stressed vowel of each word carries one of three accent marks: either the acute accent (ά), the grave accent (ὰ), or the circumflex accent (ᾶ or ᾷ). These signs were originally designed to mark different forms of the phonological pitch accent in Ancient Greek.

By the time their use became conventional and obligatory in Greek writing, in late antiquity, pitch accent was evolving into a single stress accent, and thus the three signs have not corresponded to a phonological distinction in actual speech ever since.

In addition to the accent marks, every word-initial vowel must carry either of two so-called "breathing marks": the rough breathing (ά), marking an /h/ sound at the beginning of a word, or the smooth breathing (ᾶ), marking its absence. The letter rho (ρ), although not a vowel, also carries a rough breathing in word-initial position. If a rho was geminated within a word, the first ρ always had the smooth breathing and the second the rough breathing (ρρ) leading to the transliteration rrh.



Greek alphabet

The names of the letters in spoken Standard Modern Greek

[link to audio](#)

Letter	Traditional Latin transliteration
Α α	A a
Β β	B b
Γ γ	G g
Δ δ	D d
Ε ε	E e
Ζ ζ	Z z
Η η	Ē ē
Θ θ	Th th
Ι ι	I i
Κ κ	C c, K k
Λ λ	L l
Μ μ	M m
Ν ν	N n
Ξ ξ	X x
Ο ο	O o
Π π	P p
Ρ ρ	R r, Rh rh
Σ σ/ς	S s
Τ τ	T t
Υ υ	Y y, U u
Φ φ	Ph ph
Χ χ	Ch ch, Kh kh
Ψ ψ	Ps ps
Ω ω	Ō ō

During the Mycenaean period, from around the sixteenth century to the twelfth century BC, Linear B was used to write the earliest attested form of the Greek language, known as Mycenaean Greek. This writing system, unrelated to the Greek alphabet, last appeared in the thirteenth century BC. In the late ninth century BC or early eighth century BC, the Greek alphabet emerged. The period between the use of the two writing systems, during which no Greek texts are attested, is known as the Greek Dark Ages.

The Greeks adopted the alphabet from the earlier Phoenician alphabet, one of the closely related scripts used for the West Semitic languages, calling it **Φοινικία γράμματα** 'Phoenician letters'. However, the Phoenician alphabet is limited to consonants.

When it was adopted for writing Greek, certain consonants were adapted to express vowels. **The use of both vowels and consonants makes Greek the first alphabet** in the narrow sense, as distinguished from the abjads used in Semitic languages, which have letters only for consonants.