

## *Read Greek, a: vowels*

You will learn the sounds of Greek best by practicing the reading of entire words. The English words listed to illustrate the meaning of the Greek words are often derivatives. Of course they are not intended to offer a guide to the pronunciation of the Greek.

At this time I do not include theory of accents. An introduction is presented at [7.3](#). The ancients had a pitch accent which gradually evolved into a stress accent. We use a stress accent.

### **Vowels**

When vowels are written at the beginning of a word, they must carry either the *smooth breathing* or the *rough breathing*. The rough breathing indicates that the vowel is preceded by an aspirate (like our h at the beginning of a word, e.g. in *hot*); the smooth breathing indicates that there is no rough breathing. Early on the speakers of the language knew when to make their initial vowels aspirated. Later, the Alexandrian scholars (third century BCE) who invented punctuation complicated the life of Greek students for all posterity... Or maybe they helped us. 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.

Vowels, as you now know, may be short or long. Modern readers do not make this distinction 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 e (eta) and a long o (omega) 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. :-)

Click [here](#) to listen and repeat the words on the next page.

Words beginning with smooth breathing	Transliteration	Meanings and English derivatives	Words beginning with rough breathing	Transliteration	meanings and English derivatives
1. ἀδικία	adikia	<i>injustice</i>	8. ἅλς (classical) or ἅλα ( <i>koinē</i> )	hals, hala	<i>salt</i>
2. ἐκκλησία	ekklēsia	<i>assembly / church</i>	9. ἕξ	hex	<i>six; cf hexagonal</i>
3. ἦχώ	ēkhō	<i>echo</i>	10. ἡμέρα	hēmera	<i>day</i>
4. ἰατρός	iatros	<i>doctor; cf psychiatrist</i>	11. ἱερόν	hieron	<i>temple</i>
5. Ὀλύμπια <sup>1</sup>	Olympia or Olympia	<i>Olympia, site of the games</i>	12. ὅλος	holos	<i>whole, entire; cf holocaust</i>
Initial υ <sup>2</sup> is almost always aspirated			13. ὕπνος	hupnos or hypnos	<i>sleep; cf hypnosis</i>
6. ὠκεανός	ōkeanos	<i>Okeanos, a mythic stream</i>	14. ὥρα	hōra	<i>season, time; cf horoscope</i>
7. οὐρανός	ouranos	<i>sky, heaven; cf Uranos</i>	15. οὕτως	houtōs	<i>thus</i>

Note 1: Breathings, accents, or their combinations, that pertain to a capital letter are placed before that letter: Ἐ, Ὠ, etc.

Note 2: To pronounce the vowel υ, if you know French or German, use the sound of the vowel in *tu* or *üben*. If that doesn't ring a bell, frame your lips as if you intended to say "u" as it English "tooth" but pronounce instead "ee" as in "deed."