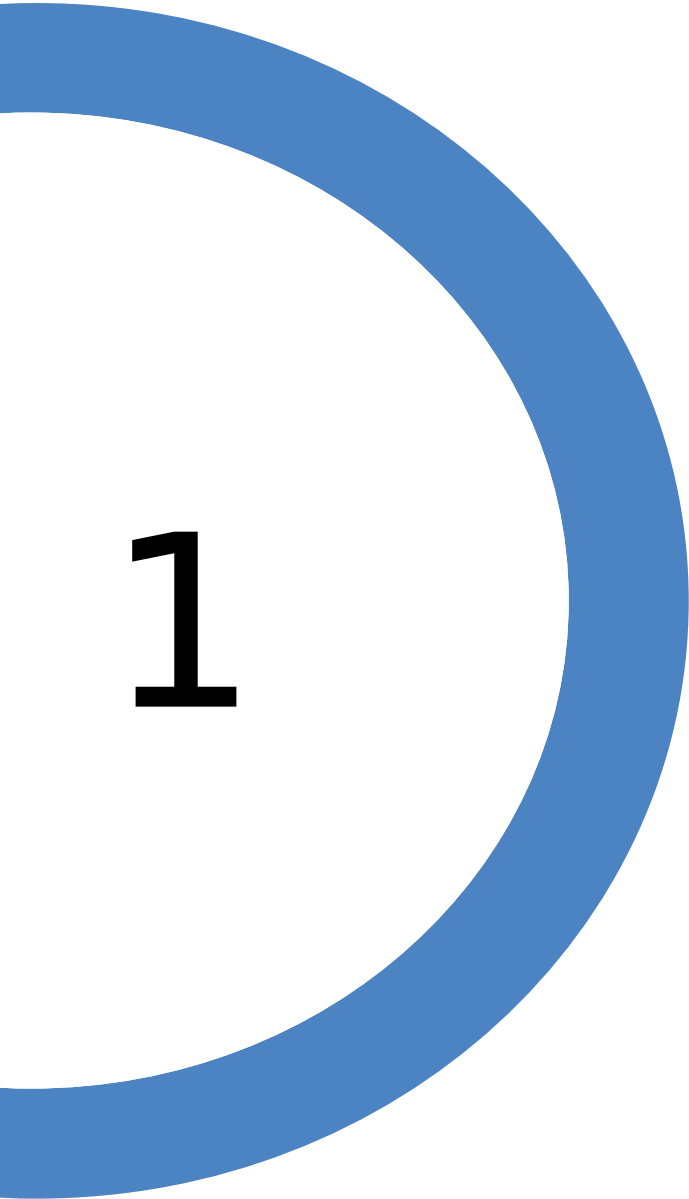


Pronunciation

Are You Practicing for an Opera or Learning Your Greek Vowels?



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Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson Is Learning How to Pronounce Greek Vowels.

Greek is one of the oldest living languages, and more than fifteen million Greek speakers speak it fluently today. Use it regularly so you start on the right foot, can understand others, and others will understand you. Learning the Greek sounds will help you to become sensitized to the language's different sounds and better master its pronunciation.

Be aware though, this pronunciation guide is for standard Greek—the one you'll hear on the radio or television. When traveling in Greece, you'll hear many different accents and vocabulary words used specifically in the region you are in.

The Greek alphabet consists of twenty-four letters and is one of the oldest active alphabets today. Among these letters, or sounds, there are three main categories:

1. Seven vowel sounds.
2. Seventeen consonant sounds.
3. Twelve diphthong sounds.

Today we will look at the seven vowel sounds in detail with many simple examples and pronunciation practice exercises. Many of the Greek sounds are similar to the English ones, as the Greek language has had great influence on many modern languages. So you may find some sounds easier to learn than others.

So let's jump right into the vowels. They are:

Greek Vowel		"English" Equivalent
Άλφα	Alfa	Pronounce like -a
Έψιλον	Épsilon	-e
Ήτα	Íta	-i
Γιώτα	Gióta	-i



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Ομικρον	Ómikron	-o
Υψιλον	Ýpsilon	-i
Ωμέγα	Oméga	-o

As you may have noticed, there are three -i's and two -o's. Greek has three vowels representing the sound [ee] and two representing the sound [o]. This is because in classical Greek, the different vowels did actually have different sounds. It's difficult to know the difference at first when you are not familiar with the language yet, but it will become easier and easier as you continue learning.

The first vowel, Α α, is the same sound as in "father." This sound is also the same as -a in Spanish and Italian. Phonetically it is an open, central, and unrounded sound.

We pronounce the second vowel, Ε ε, the same as in "pet," except that the -e in "pet"

(and other similar English words) is lax, whereas in Greek it is tense. To pronounce a tense -e, pull the edges of your lips to the sides a bit more than when you say "pet." We pull the edges of our lips to the sides when we smile. So good practice would be to smile while pronouncing *epsilon*.

Next up are Η η, Ι ι, and Υ υ. These are the three -i's in the Greek alphabet; they all have identical pronunciation when we pronounce them in words. The reason for this redundancy has to do with classical Greek, where they were not redundant. Η η is a sound we frequently use in English, so it should not pose any problem for you. This sound is similar to the sound in "meet," but shorter—not so long. Ι ι is exactly like ήτα. We pronounce the name of the letter γιώτα in Modern Greek. The reason for the γ-sound in front of the letter's name is due to phonetic transformation of [ιω] into [γιω]. Finally, we pronounce Υ υ, with the exact pronunciation as the latter (ύψιλον) [ee-psee-lon], not "yupsilon" as American English pronounces it) when we refer to it separately and not in a word.

Finally, we have the vowels Ο ο and Ω ω, which we also pronounce the same when we combine them in a word. The sound is similar to that in "hop," except that the -o in "hop" (and other similar English words) is lax, while in Greek it is tense, which means that you should *really* round your lips when you pronounce it. It's the same way we pronounce the -o in "got" in British English. It is a mid-close, back-rounded vowel.

Now that you have gotten the idea of the Greek vowel sounds, let's put them in some words and learn some vocabulary!

ΑΛΦΑ

Greek	Romanization	Pronunciation	"English"
αριθμός	<i>arithmós</i>	arithmós	"number"
άνθρωπος	<i>ánthropos</i>	ánthropos	"human," "man"

ΗΤΑ, ΓΙΩΤΑ, ΥΨΙΑΟΝ

Greek	Romanization	Pronunciation	"English"
Ήλιος	<i>ílios</i>	ílios	"sun"
ημερολόγιο	<i>imerológio</i>	imerológio	"calendar"
ιστορία	<i>istoría</i>	istoría	"history"
ιατρός	<i>iatrós</i>	iatrós	"doctor"
ύπνος	<i>ýpnos</i>	ýpnos	"sleep"
υγιεινή	<i>ygeiiní</i>	ygeiiní	"hygiene"

ΟΜΙΚΡΟΝ, ΩΜΕΓΑ

Greek	Romanization	Pronunciation	"Meaning"
όνομα	<i>ónoma</i>	ónoma	"name"
ορίζοντας	<i>orízontas</i>	orízondas	"horizon"
ώρα	<i>óra</i>	óra	"hour," "time"
ωροσκόπιο	<i>oroskópio</i>	oroskópio	"horoscope"

That's all the vowel sounds for you! Remember to keep your mouth moving, even exaggerating when you practice to get yourself used to the sounds and movements!

Good luck!