# 3. Vowels & Diphthongs, Syllables, Punctuation

# Lesson in a Nutshell

Greek vowels are very similar to English vowels:  $\alpha$  ( $\eta$ ),  $\varepsilon$ ,  $\iota$ , o ( $\omega$ ),  $\upsilon$ .

The diphthongs are  $\alpha_1$  (aisle),  $\epsilon_1$  (eight),  $o_1$  (oil),  $\alpha_v$  (sauerkraut),  $o_v$  (soup),  $v_1$  (suite),  $\epsilon_v/\eta_v$  (feud).

One syllable per vowel or diphthong.

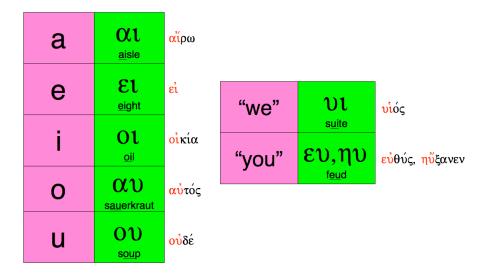
## Vowels

Greek vowels are similar to English vowels. I think of the  $\eta$  as a long " $\alpha$ " sound and the  $\omega$  as a long "o" sound.

а	α	η
е	ε	
i	ι	
0	0	ω
u	υ	

## Diphthongs

Diphthongs are two vowels that combine to create a single sound. I find it helpful to remember the diphthongs like this:



In most cases, the diphthongs make the sound you would expect if you were to say the two single vowels together very quickly.



Do diphthongs seem stupid to you? Think about English. We have diphthongs and they are not nearly as consistent.

Consider the words

eight height Leigh (girl's name)

Notice how inconsistent English is. Aren't you glad you are learning Greek instead of English?

# Improper Diphthongs

Sometimes at the end of a word, you will notice that an iota has crawled under an  $\alpha$ ,  $\eta$ , or  $\omega$  like this:



These are called "improper diphthongs." The iota is not pronounced.

### Syllables

To pronounce Greek, it is important to be able to divide Greek words into syllables. Thankfully, this is relatively easy — much easier than English. The rule is simple:

#### One syllable per vowel (or diphthong).

You can see how many syllables any word has by counting vowels/diphthongs. Notice how important it is to recognize diphthongs. If you fail to see them you will create two syllables where there should only be one. I underlined them and put them in bold type to help you see them.



A consonant cluster that cannot be pronounced together is divided. The first part goes with the preceding vowel and the second part goes with the following vowel. You can tell if a consonant cluster can be pronounced together by two tests: 1. Try it! If it is awkward it probably does not belong together. For example, in ανθρωπος, try saying the letters vθρ together. Doesn't work, does it? 2. Look up the letters in a dictionary. If no words start with a given set of consonsants, it is probably a cluster that cannot be pronounced together.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> You might wonder how to place the consonants. Actually, this is not important since when you put the word together and say it, it will sound the same whether you put the consonants with the preceding vowel or the one that follows. But in case you want to know, here are the rules:

<sup>•</sup> Single consonants and consonant clusters that can be pronounced together go with the following vowel.

<sup>•</sup> Double letters are divided (see  $\dot{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\dot{\alpha}$  below).

But please do not sweat too much about this. The important thing is to recognize the vowels, not to be precise in the division of consonants.

Notice the difference between  $\delta\iota\dot{\alpha}$  and  $\kappa\alpha\dot{\iota}$  in the next two examples. Since  $\iota\alpha$  in  $\delta\iota\dot{\alpha}$  is not a diphthong, it is separated into two syllables. But since the  $\alpha\iota$  in  $\kappa\alpha\dot{\iota}$  is a diphthong, this word remains a single syllable.



**Mt. Κοίνη 17** 



Practice dividing some words into syllables in the "Take a Hike" workbook.

## Punctuation

Greek punctuation is super easy:

- The period and comma in Greek are identical to English.
- The Greek question mark looks like an English semicolon.
- The Greek semicolon looks like a dot above the line.

Greek	English
•	•
,	,
;	?
•	,