

The Greek alphabet

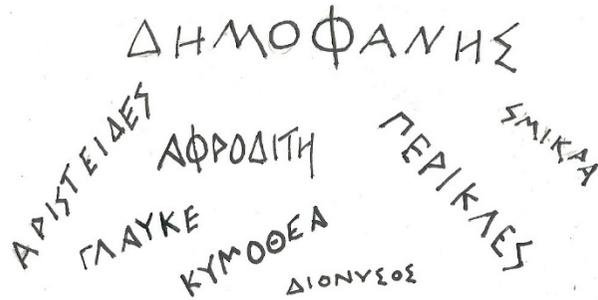
The invention of the alphabet

The earliest examples of writing in Greek date from about 1300 BC. Around 1000 BC, the Greek world experienced great change and the skill of writing was lost. In the middle of the 700s BC, writing in Greek appeared again. The Greeks had borrowed the alphabet of the Phoenicians, wealthy traders who lived in the region of modern Lebanon.

Phoentian	Greek
	aleph  alpha
	beth  beta
	gimmel  gamma
	daleth  delta

Here are the first four letters of the Phoenician and Greek alphabets. The Greeks made changes to the Phoenician alphabet to suit their language. You can see the similarities between the letters and their names in Greek and Phoenician.

The ancient Greeks used their alphabet to write on many different materials including papyrus, stone and pottery. They often wrote just in upper case. Here are some examples of names of people and gods in ancient Greek writing.



Letters and sounds

Lower case	Upper case	Greek name	English letter	Ancient pronunciation
α	Α	alpha	a	<u>ca</u> t
β	Β	beta (beeta)	b	<u>bi</u> g
γ	Γ	gamma	g	<u>go</u> t
δ	Δ	delta	d	<u>di</u> m
ε	Ε	epsilon	e	<u>w</u> et
ζ	Ζ	zeta	z	<u>wi</u> sdom
η	Η	eta	e	<u>fai</u> r
θ	Θ	theta	th	<u>thi</u> nk
ι	Ι	iota	i	<u>si</u> t, <u>poli</u> ce
κ	Κ	kappa	k	<u>ke</u> ep
λ	Λ	lambda	l	<u>lo</u> t
μ	Μ	mu (mew)	m	<u>mo</u> on
ν	Ν	nu	n	<u>no</u> on
ξ	Ξ	xi (ksie as in pie)	x	<u>ta</u> x
ο	Ο	omicron	o	<u>ho</u> t
π	Π	pi	p	<u>pi</u> n
ρ	Ρ	rho (slow)	r	<u>ro</u> b
σ or ς	Σ	sigma	s	<u>se</u> nd
τ	Τ	tau (cow)	t	<u>ta</u> le
υ	Υ	upsilon	u or y	<u>fe</u> w
φ	Φ	phi	ph	<u>gra</u> ph
χ	Χ	chi	ch	<u>lo</u> ch
ψ	Ψ	psi	ps	<u>lap</u> se
ω	Ω	omega	o	<u>co</u> at