

Diphthongs, the ‘Iota Subscript’, Breathing Marks and Accents

Pronouncing Diphthongs

Certain two-vowel combinations produce a *single* distinct sound. These two-letter combinations are known as ‘diphthongs.’ They are pronounced as follows:

<i>diphthong</i>	<i>pronunciation guide</i>	<i>phonic symbol</i>	
αι	bet	[e]	καί = ke
ει	feet	[iy]	αὐξάνειν = af- xa -niyn
οι	feet	[iy]	ἄνθρωποι = AN-thro-piy
υι	feet	[iy]	υἱός = hiy-OSS
ου	pool	[u]	οὔτος = oo -toss
αυ	like <i>af</i> before π, κ, τ (unvoiced stops), φ, χ, θ (voiced fricatives), σ, ξ, ψ (sibilants) ⁶ but like <i>av</i> elsewhere (as in <i>avenue</i>)	[af] [av]	αὐτοῦ = af- too αὐξάνειν = af- xa -niyn ἐπαύριον = e- pav -riy-on θαυμάσιος = thav- ma -siys
ευ	like <i>ef</i> before π, κ, τ (unvoiced stops), φ, χ, θ (voiced fricatives), σ, ξ, ψ (sibilants) but like <i>ev</i> elsewhere.	[ef] [ev]	πιστεύσωσιν = piys- tef -so-sin εὐθύνατε = ef- thiy -na-te πιστεύουσιν = piys- ev -oo-sin εὐρίσκει = ev- riys -kiy
ηυ	like <i>iyf</i> before π, κ, τ (unvoiced stops), φ, χ, θ (voiced fricatives), σ, ξ, ψ (sibilants) but like <i>iyv</i> elsewhere.	[iyf] [iyv]	ἠύξησεν = iyf -xiy-sen προσηύχeto. = pros- iyf -khe-to ἠύλησαμεν = iyv- liy -sa-men ἠύρισκον = iyv-riys-kon

Notes:

ει, οι, and υι are pronounced the same as η, υ, and ι, namely as [iy] (‘feet’). But αι is pronounced like ε (bet).

When two vowels occur together but not in one of the above combinations, pronounce each vowel separately.

Examples: θεός μαρτυρίαν ἔξουσίαν ἐπαύριον Λευίτας Ἀβραάμ
the-**os** mar-tiy-**riy**-an ex-oo-**siy**-an e-**pav**-riy-on lev-**iy**-tas a-bra-**am**

The 'Iota Subscript'

A small ι is sometimes written under the vowels α, η, or ω, especially when they are final. This 'iota-subscript' does not affect pronunciation: vowels with an *iota*-subscript are pronounced the same as the corresponding vowel without an 'iota-subscript.' Later, they will help you distinguish different grammatical forms of nouns, adjectives and verbs.

α	pronounced like	α	[a]	σκοτί _ι α
η	pronounced like	η	[iy]	Ἐν ἀρχῆ _ι
ω	pronounced like	ω	[o]	ἐν Αἰγύπτω _ι

Breathing Marks

Every Greek word beginning with a vowel carries a so-called 'breathing' mark above the vowel.¹⁰ These marks have the appearance of an English single quotation mark. Diphthongs receive their breathing mark on the second vowel. There are two types of breathing marks:

´	'rough' breathing mark (e.g., ἄ)	ὁ λόγος, ἡ ζωή, οὗτος
´	'smooth' breathing mark (e.g., ἂ)	Ἐν ἀρχῆ _ι , αὐτῶ _ι

Modern Greek pronunciation does not add any sound with either of these marks. Nonetheless, you should be able to recognize these editorial marks because they can be important for philological reasons.

Greek Accents

Three different accents appear in the Greek New Testament: ´ acute ἄ -- ` grave ἂ -- ˆ circumflex ἀ̂

The only effect of any accent is to indicate the *stressed* syllable; they all have the same effect on pronunciation.

Notes: Diphthongs always receive their accent on the second letter: for example, καί not κάι.

Words beginning with a vowel or diphthong may have *both* an accent and a breathing mark on the first syllable.

Examples: οὗτος ἦν ἦλθεν ἄνθρωπος