

28. Deponents

Lesson in a Nutshell

A deponent verb has an active meaning even though its form is middle or passive.

Verbs that start with vowels augment by lengthening the vowel.



Deponents are weird, but they are not difficult.

If you understand the following sentence, you understand deponents.

Deponents are middle or passive in form
but active in meaning.

Allow me to illustrate.

Consider a very common Greek verb, ἔρχομαι (which means “I come”).

The ending is middle/passive, as you realize by now.

Personal Endings			
		Active (do the action)	Middle/Passive (receive the action)
Primary (present & future time)	(1s) I	ω	ομαι
	(2s) you	εις	η
	(3s) he/she/it	ει	εται
	(1p) we	ομεν	ομεθα
	(2p) you (all)	ετε	εσθε
	(3p) they	ουσι(ν)	ονται
Secondary (past time)	(1s) I	ον	ομην
	(2s) you	ες	ου
	(3s) he/she/it	ε(ν)	ετο
	(1p) we	ομεν	ομεθα
	(2p) you (all)	ετε	εσθε
	(3p) they	ον	οντο

Since ἔρχομαι has a middle/passive ending, you would expect the translation “I am come” or “I am being come” (which doesn’t even make sense).

Never fear! The correct translation of ἔρχομαι is “I come.”

See? ἔρχομαι is middle/passive in form, but active in meaning.

How will you know if a verb is deponent? Because when you learn the verb, you see that the ending is “ομαι” rather than “ω.”

You will learn the word as ἔρχομαι, not ἔρχω. There is no such verb as ἔρχω.

Deponent verbs are easy to spot in the lexicon because they will end in “ομαι” rather than “ω.” This is because...

Ἔρχομαι is deponent.

It is middle/passive in form but active in meaning.

Here are thirteen of the most common deponents in Hellenistic Greek. Please notice that four of the thirteen are forms of ἔρχομαι with a preposition attached.

Deponent Verbs (present)		
ἀπέρχομαι	I depart	
ἀποκρίνομαι	I answer	
ἄρχομαι (ἄρχω means “I rule”)	I begin	
ἀσπάζομαι	I greet, salute	
γίνομαι	I am, become	
δέχομαι	I receive	
δύναμαι	I am able, powerful	Dynamite gets the job done.
εἰσέρχομαι	I go into	
ἐξέρχομαι	I go out	We go out through the exit.
ἔρχομαι	I come (go)	
κάθημαι	I sit	
προσέρχομαι	I come to	
προσεύχομαι	I pray	

Ἔρχομαι indicates motion. The preposition shows the direction of the motion.

ἀπό means “away from.” ἀπέρχομαι means “I depart.”

εἰς means “into.” εἰσέρχομαι means “I go into.”

ἐκ means “from, out of.” ἐξέρχομαι means “I go out.”

πρός means “towards, with.” προσέρχομαι means “I come to.”

Verbs that are formed by a preposition plus a verb are called **compound verbs**. They are very common in Greek.

Here are the present and imperfect forms of ἔρχομαι.

Notice again that they are **middle/passive in form, but active in meaning**.

ἔρχομαι	I come	ἤρχόμην	I was coming
ἔρχῃ	You come	ἤρχου	You were coming
ἔρχεται	He/She/It comes	ἤρχετο	He/She/It was coming
ἔρχόμεθα	We come	ἤρχόμεθα	We were coming
ἔρχεσθε	You (all) come	ἤρχεσθε	You (all) were coming
ἔρχονται	They come	ἤρχοντο	They were coming

That's all there is to deponents.

Deponents are verbs which are middle or passive in form but active in meaning.

Augmenting on Augments

Verbs That Begin with Vowels

Augmenting a verb is simple if the verb begins with a consonant.

λυ becomes ἔλυ

But what if the verb begins with a vowel, as is the case with ἔρχομαι? If we were to simply add an ε it would look like this.

ἔερχ

You can probably guess by now that the Greeks did not like that barbaric double epsilon. So here's the rule.

If a verb begins with a vowel, it is augmented by lengthening the vowel.

ἔερχ becomes ἤρχ

Here is another example of augmenting a verb by lengthening a vowel.

Present	Imperfect
ἀγαπῶ I am loving	ἤγαπῶν I was loving

Verbs that begin with prepositions (compound verbs)

Many Greek verbs begin with a preposition. These are called compound verbs.

Where do you think the augment comes on a verb that begins with a preposition:

- before the preposition or
- between the preposition and the verb?

The answer is:

When a verb begins with a preposition,
the augment comes between the preposition and the verb.

Here are some examples:

Present	Aorist
περιπατέω	περιεπάτησα
προσεύχομαι	προσηυξάμην
ἐπερωτάω	ἐπηρώτησα
ἀποστέλλω	ἀπέστειλα

As you can see, the augment between the preposition and verb may do one of a number of things, including

- ➔ simply add an ε (as in περιεπάτησα)
- ➔ augment (as in προσηυξάμην and ἐπηρώτησα)
- ➔ change the vowel (as in ἀπέστειλα)

The trick is to look for some sort of change
after the preposition. If there is one, it's probably an augment.