

# 2. The Greek Alphabet

## Lesson in a Nutshell

The Greek Alphabet is similar to the English alphabet and may be learned using the following memory aids:

1. a, b, “g” d e ( $\alpha \beta \gamma \delta \epsilon$ )
2. zeta ate a theta! ( $\zeta \eta \theta$ )
3. Line up i - u ( $\iota \_ \kappa \lambda \mu \nu \xi \omicron \pi \_ \rho \sigma \tau \upsilon$ )
  1. drop “j” and “q” (which are junkie anyway).
  2. add  $\xi$ . There is “no” reason for  $\xi$  to be between “n” and “o.”
4. Poughkeepsie ( $\phi \chi \psi$ ) and  $\omega$ .

Name	Upper Case	Lower Case	Pronunciation	Transliteration
Alpha	A	$\alpha$	car	a
Beta	B	$\beta$	book	b
Gamma	$\Gamma$	$\gamma$	good	g
Delta	$\Delta$	$\delta$	donkey	d
Epsilon	E	$\epsilon$	every	e
Zeta	Z	$\zeta$	zebra	z
Eta	H	$\eta$	beta	$\bar{e}$
Theta	$\Theta$	$\theta$	think	th
Iota	I	$\iota$	intrigue	i
Kappa	K	$\kappa$	kitchen	k
Lambda	$\Lambda$	$\lambda$	lazy	l
Mu	M	$\mu$	monkey	m
Nu	N	$\nu$	nut	n
Xi	$\Xi$	$\xi$	extra	x
Omicron	O	$\omicron$	blot	o
Pi	$\Pi$	$\pi$	person	p
Rho	P	$\rho$	rotten	r

Name	Upper Case	Lower Case	Pronunciation	Transliteration
Sigma	Σ	σ, ζ	snake	s
Tau	Τ	τ	trick	t
Upsilon	Υ	υ	super	u/y
Phi	Φ	φ	phone	ph
Chi	Χ	χ	Bach	ch
Psi	Ψ	ψ	psychology	ps
Omega	Ω	ω	no	ō

The Greek alphabet has much in common with the English alphabet. I find it easiest to memorize it in blocks.

### Alphabet Memorization Tricks

1					2			3										4						
a	b	c	d	e	ζ	η	θ	ι	κ	λ	μ	ν	ξ	ο	π	ρ	σ	ς	τ	υ	φ	χ	ψ	ω
α	β	γ	δ	ε	ζ	η	θ	ι	κ	λ	μ	ν	ξ	ο	π	ρ	σ	ς	τ	υ	φ	χ	ψ	ω
a b "g" d e					zeta ate a theta!			there is "no" reason for ξ to be there!										write your own ending (Poughkeepsie)						

The first five letters are as easy as a, b, "g," d, e.

1

a	b	c	d	e
α	β	γ	δ	ε
a b "g" d e				

Just remember to replace the "c" in the English alphabet with a "g" (γ) in the Greek alphabet.

Next, we depart from the English script because something truly terrifying happens: In a horrifying act of alphabet cannibalism, “Zeta Ate-a Theta!”

2

ƒ	Ϸ	Ɑ
ζ η θ		

zeta ate a theta!

This is my corny trick to remember the letters zeta, eta, and theta.

Next comes a long stretch of thirteen letters that pretty much correspond to the English alphabet.

3

i	j	k	l	m	n	o	p	Ϸ	r	s	t	u
ι		κ	λ	μ	ν ξ	ο	π		ρ	σ, ς	τ	υ

there is “n o” reason for ξ to be there!

First, let’s get rid of the English letters “j” and “q.” These are JunQue! After all,

- There is no soft “j” sound in Greek (as in “jelly”).
- “Q” is a lame letter, don’t you agree? It is codependent on a “u” just to survive. So throw it out!

Otherwise the letters line up nicely with the exception of ξ. ξ is inserted between “n” and “o.” I remember this by reminding myself that there is “N-O” reason for ξ to be there!

One other little quirk is that there are two forms of sigma. One is used when the letter appears within a word and the other is used when it comes at the end, (called “final sigma”). The word κόσμος is a good example of this.

κόσμος  
(universe)

That’s all but the last four letters. At this point we depart again from the English alphabet and write our own ending.

Everyone knows that the last letter of the Greek alphabet is ω, right? So all we have to learn is the three letters φ, χ, and ψ.

4

ϕ	χ	ψ	ω
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write your own ending  
(Poughkeepsie, NY)

This is my weakest memory aid, but it helps me to think of the town of Poughkeepsie, New York. The consonants don’t line up exactly with the Greek ones but it points me in the right direction.



Pough =  $\Phi$  phi

kee =  $\chi$  chi

psie =  $\Psi$  psi

If that doesn't help you, maybe you can come up with a better way to remember the last four letters. Let me know and I'll make you famous.

One of the best ways to learn the Greek alphabet is to practice writing it as you say the names of the letters aloud. Open up the "Take a Hike" workbook and practice writing and saying the letters out loud.