

Vowels, Diphthongs, and Breathing

The Greek language uses seven vowel forms: α, ε, η, ι, ο, υ, ω. η is the long form of ε and ω is the long form of ο. Therefore, ε and ο are always short, whereas η and ω are long. The list of vowel relates in a similar way to the English vowels a, e, i, o, u. α, ι, υ can be long or short, which are no distinguished by a separate form.

A diphthong is two vowel sounds fused into one sound.

The diphthongs are:

αι is spoken as **ai** in aisle.

ωυ is pronounced as **au** in German haus, or ou in house.

ει sounds like **ei** in height.

ου combine to **ou** in group.

ευ forms an **eu** sound as in feud.

ηυ approximately represents the sound **eu**.

υι is vocalized as **we**.

Also, there is an iota subscript (α, η, ω), which is the iota written below the vowel; however, it does not impact the sound of the vowel. e.g. α̣ is spoken as **ai** in aisle, the same as αι.

Many Greek words begin with the English sound h, which is indicated by the sign of the rough breathing (῀) over a vowel or diphthong at the beginning of the word. With a diphthong it is over the second vowel. Thus ὁδος is pronounced as hodos, and εὐρισκω as heruisko. When the initial vowel does not make an h sound the smooth breathing mark (῁) is used. ἄκουω is pronounced aloud and οὐρανός as ouranos. When υ is at the beginning of a word, the rough breathing mark is always used.