

LANGUAGE (1)

The Mycenaeans had used the Linear B script, which was then forgotten when their civilization went into decline after the Dorian invasions. After these Dark Ages (ca. 1200–800 B.C.), when writing skills disappeared, the Greeks began to trade with the Phoenicians, who lived in the eastern Mediterranean where Lebanon is today. Around 800 B.C., they borrowed letters from the Phoenician alphabet which had been used from around 1000 B.C. The Greeks added extra signs for vowels as the original Phoenician alphabet contained only consonants. The Phoenicians spoke the vowel sounds but did not write them down. In the Greek system, a single character (a grapheme) represents a single sound (a phoneme), e.g., the “p” in “put,” “spin” and “top.”

Around 500 B.C., the Greeks began to write from left to right after years of writing in both directions.

Greek writers wrote on paper made from papyrus from Egypt but very few of their rolls have survived. The Romans, admirers of Greek culture, made many copies of Greek writings when Greece became part of the Roman Empire and these have been a source of knowledge for scholars studying ancient Greece.



Early Greek alphabet 800 B.C.	Classical Greek alphabet 200 B.C.		Name of Greek letter	Modern alphabet
	Capital	Small letter		
	A	α	alpha	A
	B	β	beta	B
← no C →				C
	Δ	δ	delta	D
	E	ε	epsilon "e" sound as in let	E
← no F →				F
	Γ	γ	gamma	G
	H	η	eta "e" sound as in day	H
	I	ι	iota	I
← no J →				J
	K	κ	kappa	K
	Λ	λ	lambda	L
	M	μ	mu	M
	N	ν	nu	N
	Ο	ο	omicron "o" sound as in hot	O
	Π	π	pi	P
← no Q →				Q
	Ρ	ρ	rho	R
	Σ	σς	sigma	S
	Τ	τ	tau	T
	Υ	υ	upsilon	U
← no V,W →				V,W
	Ξ	ξ	xi	X
← no Y →				Y
None	Z	Ζ	zeta	Z
None	Θ	θ	theta	TH
None	Φ	φ	phi	PH
None	Χ	χ	chi	KH
None	Ψ	ψ	psi	PS
None	Ω	ω	omega "o" sound as in cold	O

LANGUAGE (2)

Activity Box

1. Discuss with your partner any links you can see between our alphabet and an earlier one. List them below.

2. Where does the word "alphabet" come from? _____

3. Translate these words:

- (a) δ ε α δ _____ (b) λ α μ β _____
(c) ς ρ ε α Δ _____ (d) ς ο φ ε ς ρ _____
(e) τ θ α μ κ ε _____ (f) γ ρ α π _____

4. Make up some words for the other students to translate. Do not mix alphabets.

- (a) _____ (b) _____
(c) _____ (d) _____
(e) _____ (f) _____

5. Which letter shapes are the same in the three alphabets?

6. Which letter shapes are similar?

7. Write your name in each of the alphabets listed below.

- a. Early Greek

- b. Classical Greek

- c. Modern
