

SQUIGGLES OVER GREEK LETTERS: QUICK AND DIRTY OVERVIEW

BREATHINGS

Greek had no letter like the h in English. The h at the beginning of words was indicated by what we call *breathing signs* or simply *breathings*.

All words that start with a vowel have a breathing sign over them, either a *smooth* (᾿- pronounced 'a') or a *rough* (῀- pronounced 'ha') breathing. Diphthongs (vowel combinations) have the breathing over the second vowel: εὐ-, οὐ-.

Ever wondered why words of Greek descent starting in r have h-es in them? This is because in Greek, they have a rough breathing: ῥ-. Hence rhythm, rhetoric, rhino, etc.

ACCENTS

Greek also has three *accents*: The acute (´), the grave (`), and the circumflex (~).

- Most words carry an accent (you'll learn the exceptions). Accents can only be placed on the **final three syllables** of a word, and if the last syllable is long, only on the final two syllables.

[η and ω are always long, as are the diphthongs (=combinations of two vowels. Exceptions TBA: wordfinal -οι and -αι usually count as short). α, ι, υ can be long or short; ε and ο are always short.]

- The **acute** (´) accent can be placed on both long and short vowels and on all of the final three syllables: the **antepenult**, the **penult**, and the **ultima**. These syllables are abbreviated as **A**, **P**, and **U** in Mastronarde.
- On the final syllable, the acute is replaced with a **grave** (`) accent **if** the word is followed by another accented word. Exx: αὐτὸν τὸν ἄνδρα. But: (followed by punctuation) αὐτόν. (followed by word without accent) τὸν τε.
- The **circumflex** (~) can only be placed on **long vowels**, and only on the two final syllables, the **penult** and the **ultima**. The circumflex can only go on the penult if the ultima is short.
- If the penult is long and carries the accent, the following rule applies:
 - if the ultima is short: the accent will be a circumflex;
 - if the ultima is long: the accent will be an acute.

Practice questions:

- Could πραγματων have an accent on the antepenult? If so, what accent(s)?
Could it have an accent on the penult? If so, what accent(s)?
Could it have an accent on the ultima? If so, what accent(s)?
- Could πραγμασι have an accent on the antepenult? If so, what accent(s)?
- Could πραγμα have an accent on the penult? If so, what accent(s)?
- In fact, πραγμα has its accent on the penult. The first α is long, the second one is short. What will its accent be?
- ψηφος and ψηφων both have the accent on the penult. Which accent?
- What about δωρω and δωρον?
- Which of the following Greek words is most likely related to English 'heuristic', εὐρίσκω or εὐρις?
- Can you tell whether the iota in εὐρις is long or short?
- Can you tell whether the iota in χάρις is long or short?