

Learner Profile: Greek

This guide presents common challenges faced by Greek learners of English and typical features of language production. Please note, these guidelines are intended to advise teachers on areas where students may experience problems; however, native speakers may not all find the following points challenging.

Facts

- **Language family:** Greek is a language isolate within the Indo-European language family.
- **Native speakers:** Around 13 million
- **Location:** Greek is an official language in Greece and Cyprus and a recognised minority language in Albania, Italy, Hungary and Turkey.
- **Writing system:** Greek alphabet
- **Alphabet:** There are many differences between the Greek and Roman alphabets, including different upper and the lower case letters.



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Pronunciation

- The initial sounds in ‘house’ /h/, ‘church’ /tʃ/ and ‘judge’ /dʒ/ don’t appear in Greek and may cause difficulties.
- The Greek ‘s’ is produced in between the initial sound in ‘shut’ /ʃ/ and the initial sound in ‘say’ /s/. Native Greek speakers will have to learn to produce these two sounds and when to use one over the other. It’s especially confusing for native Greek speakers when English orthography doesn’t correlate, such as the /ʃ/ at the start of ‘sugar’.
- The Greek ‘r’ is quite different to the English ‘r’, which can cause pronunciation difficulties.
- Modern Greek has 5 short vowels compared with British English’s 12. Pairs of vowels, such as ‘seat’ and ‘sit’ can be difficult to recognise and pronounce.
- The Greek letters which are closest the English letters ‘B’ and ‘b’ are ‘Β’ and ‘β’. This sound is pronounced as a ‘v’ in Greek.
- Greek pronunciation of English words which are etymologically Greek might be different, such as ‘democracy’ and ‘phobia’.

Grammar

- Word order is less rigid in Greek because of the high level of grammatical inflection and so English’s rigid word order can be confusing.
- Greek does not indicate the present continuous or past continuous tenses. Therefore, using these tenses in English can be confusing.

Writing

- Native Greek speakers will have to learn the Roman alphabet.
- Be aware that native Greek students may be used to different punctuation symbols. Modern Greek uses the symbol ‘;’ to represent a question mark. A semicolon and colon are both represented by a ‘.’ symbol.

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Non-verbal Communication

- Greek speakers expect direct eye contact during conversation, which shows honesty.
- Greeks tilt their head backwards and raise eyebrows to express 'no' and forwards and slightly close their eyes for 'yes'. Nodding might be confusing.
- For Greek speakers, it is impolite to point at someone with an index finger.
- The 'okay', 'stop' and the 'thumbs up' hand gestures might be considered rude to Greeks as similar hand gestures are used for profanities in Greece.

Recommended FlashAcademy® lessons and resources

- [Beginner > Phonics > Sets 1, 4 and 5](#)
- [Beginner > Letters & Numbers > Lessons 1-12](#)
- [Beginner > Shopping, Numbers & Colours > Present Continuous](#)
- [Beginner > Health & Body > Past Continuous](#)
- [Beginner > English Language > Sentence types](#)
- [Beginner > English Language > What is a clause?](#)
- [Beginner > English Language > Simple sentences](#)
- [Beginner > English Language > Complex sentences](#)
- [Beginner > Punctuation > Question marks and Semi-colons](#)