

Intermission ;; Accents, Briefly

We have been largely been rushing past accents without describing the rules for their exact placement. While this may be frustrating at first, it is far too easy to get caught up in learning dozens and dozens of rules for the placement of accents in Greek before you actually have enough knowledge of Greek forms and word formation to make sense of these rules or to understand the “exceptions” when you come across them. Do your best to learn the patterns of accentuation by noting the positions of accents in the various types of words we encounter. We will later learn more fully the rules for accentuation in Greek, but, for now, a few simple notes will suffice for most of the words we encounter.

Accents can occur on any of the final three syllables of a Greek word and are always marked over the vowel of that syllable or the second vowel, if a diphthong. We refer to these syllables by the following technical names (derived from Latin): the **ultima**, or the “last” syllable; the **penult**, or the “next-to-last” syllable; and the **antepenult**, or the “one before the next-to-last” syllable. There are three types of accents: the **acute** (ᾱ́, ἕ, ῆ́, ἴ, ὄ, ὕ, ὰ́, αὔ, κτλ.), the **circumflex** (ᾱ̂, ἧ̂, ῑ̂, ῡ̂, ὠ̂, αῦ̂, κτλ.), and the **grave** (ᾱ̀, ἓ, ῆ̀, κτλ.).

The quantity (or length) of the vowels or diphthongs in a syllable and its position will determine the type of accent a syllable will bear. You already know the quantities of the various vowels and diphthongs you will encounter. The only nuance about vowel quantity to keep in mind for accentuation is that word-final -οι and -αι will usually be short (we will discuss the exception to this at a later point in the course).

When we first described the Greek alphabet and diacritical marks, we mentioned that the accents originally represented a **change in pitch**, but most of us largely just read them as **stress accents** now (and encourage you to do so, too). Knowing that these accents originally marked a change in pitch, however, explains the possibilities for their placement:

- The **acute** accent can occur on any of the last three syllables and, since it represented a brief rise (/) in pitch, both short and long vowels (and diphthongs) can bear an acute accent.
- The **grave** accent represented *no change* in pitch (-) and only occurs on the ultima. In short, when the ultima should bear an acute accent, but the word is immediately followed by another word, the accent becomes a grave to

remind the reader *not* to change the pitch of this last syllable immediately before saying another word.

- The **circumflex** represented both a rise and a lowering of pitch (/ \) and can only occur on long vowels and diphthongs, since you need the length of the long vowel or diphthong to both raise and lower the pitch. The circumflex can only appear on the final two syllables (the penult and ultima) and only on the penult before a short ultima. Additionally, the presence of a circumflex often (but not always) marks some kind of vowel contraction or lengthening.

****Important Note for all possible forms:** The syllable to be accented should be determined before any instances of vowel contraction.

Step One: Knowing the part of speech of the word to be accented is the first step to determining how it will accent. We will tackle each of these groups separately.

- 1) In **finite verbs (verbs with person and number)**: accents are **recessive**, i.e. they will move as far back on the word as they can. For this reason, verbal bases are not noted with accents in the lexicon of *Lexis*.

Finite Verbs, Step Two: When accenting a finite verb, then, first determine the length of the ultima. If the ultima is short, the accent will recede back three syllables to the antepenult (which will by nature be an acute) or, if the verb is disyllabic, it can only recede to the penult (which may then yield an acute or circumflex depending on the quantity of the penult). If the ultima is long, the accent can only recede to the penult (and will be acute because of the long ultima).

Exercise: Accent each of these finite verb forms according to the patterns and rules of recessive accentuation. (Some of these forms may be unfamiliar to you)

λυομεν

ποιεω

καλεουσι

κατεσκευαζε

εβουλομην

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εἶχε

ἐπεισθη

ἡύρον

- 2) In **nominal words (nouns and all “nouny” things, including adjectives, participles, κτλ.)**: accents are **persistent**, i.e. the accent has an expected position on the word and it prefers to remain there unless it is forced to move. This is why you should *always* note and learn the position of the accent in the bases of all nouns and adjectives.

Nominal Stuff, Step Two: Determine the quantity of the syllable that *should be naturally accented* and the quantity of the ultima.

Nominal Stuff, Step Three: Determine based on the quantities of those two syllables whether the accent is forced to move or can remain on the naturally accented syllable. Based on the accent’s position and the quantity of the following syllable(s), determine the type of accent that syllable will bear.

Exercise: In each of these nominal words, the bolded syllable indicates the natural position of the persistent accent. Determine the final position and type of accent based on the steps described above.

ἄνθρωπος

ἄνθρωπου

τειχος

τειχεος

πυραμιδα

πυραμις

κομη

κομαων > κομων

Other useful notes:

Participial Markers: Perfects bear accents on the markers (-ότ-, -μέν-).

Strong Aorist Forms: all nominal forms of the strong aorist bear persistent accents on the theme vowel itself (act. ppl. = -όντ-; med. ppl. = -όμεν-; act. inf.: -εῖν; mid. inf.: -έσθαι).

Enclitics: (τε, τιν/, ἐστι, εἰμι, γε, κτλ.) An enclitic adds an acute to the final syllable of the preceding word, *so long as this does not result in two successive acute accents*, in which case this is ignored. A word-final acute that should have become grave when followed by another word will remain an acute before an enclitic.