

Word Processing in Greek - Part Two

The first problem with word-processing in ancient Greek is finding a font with Greek characters. (see Part 1)

When you have a Unicode font with the polytonic Greek characters, the next problem is how to access them from the keyboard.

Problem # 2 - Accessing the Greek characters.

In order to do word-processing in ancient Greek, one not only needs a font with Greek characters, as well as the Latin characters used for English, one also needs to be able to access them easily by means of a keyboard.

There are programs available, some for free download, which give a "virtual keyboard" which enables one to use a single keyboard, but switch between character sets. Some include the ability to switch between Hebrew, Russian, even simple Chinese. However, I have not found one which is completely reliable. One of the best, which I used for some time, works very well up to a point - then it seems to run out of memory and freezes the word-processor or even crashes the computer.

However, I have found a simpler method, using MSWord, which involves a bit of time to set up - but less time than installing and getting used to a virtual keyboard program.

If you don't have MSWord, the word-processing program you do have will probably have a similar capability.

RTLTM - Read the lovely manual and find out how to "insert symbol" and "allocate short cuts".

Using MSWord, and a Unicode font, it is possible to set up a series of "short cuts" - keystrokes which will access characters outside the "Basic Latin" range associated with the normal keys.

The keyboard has a couple of keys - "Ctrl" (Control) and "Alt" (Alternate) which can be used in conjunction with the other keys to link to other characters.

In the Normal.dot template used by MSWord to open any new documents, the "Ctrl" key is already used for short-cuts for various commands : "Copy", "Cut", "Undo", "Paste" etc. These are so useful that I keep them, and only use the "Alt" key for accessing foreign language characters.

To set up shortcuts for the Greek characters (using MSWord) :

1. Open MSWord, and choose "Times New Roman" as the font. The font size doesn't matter.

2. Go to the "Insert" menu. Choose "Insert Symbol" OR use the shortcut Ctrl + d to bring up the dialog box.

The dialog box shows all the available characters in that font on your computer.

Starting from the top (the Basic Latin range) you will see the characters normally associated with the keyboard.

Then there are more subsets. There should be a box at the top right with a drop-down menu for the subsets. - choose "Basic Greek". This brings you to the region of the Basic Greek characters. You are not going to need to assign shortcuts for all of them - some of the capital letters are the same as English.

In the first row of the Basic Greek subset there are some capital letters with what look like commas in front of them - ignore them. They are followed by "A" and "B" - ignore them too - we will use the Latin capitals.

After the "B" there is a "Γ" - a capital gamma, (which has a "g" sound). Point to it with the mouse pointer.

3. At the bottom of the "Insert Symbol" dialog box there is a button labeled "Shortcut Key". Click on it - up comes another box labeled "Customize Keyboard".

There are two boxes towards the middle of the "Customize Keyboard" dialog box, labeled "Press new shortcut key" and "Current keys" - both are probably blank. Put the cursor in the "Press new shortcut key" box and type on the keyboard : Alt -Shift - G (holding them all down together). There is a drop-down box at the lower right-hand corner of the dialog box labeled "Save changes in" - choose Normal.dot as the option.

Then click on the button which says "Assign"

Congratulations - you have assigned your first Greek shortcut.

Now every time you press Alt-Shift-G you should get a capital gamma - Γ - in your text.

4. Next to the capital gamma there is a capital delta - looking like a triangle. Highlight it, and use the Shortcut Key to assign the shortcut Alt-Shift-D

Between what looks like an "H" and an "I" there is a capital theta Θ . The English keyboard doesn't have a key for a "th-" sound, but traditionally theta is assigned to the "q" key. So assign shortcut Alt-Shift-Q for capital theta.

Between what looks like a "K" and an "M" is a capital lambda Λ - assign the shortcut Alt-Shift-L

Between what looks like an "N" and an "O" is a capital xi Ξ . It has the sound of an "x", so assign Alt-Shift-X.

Between what looks like an "O" and a "P" is a capital pi Π - assign the shortcut Alt-Shift-P

Between what looks like a "P" and a "T" is a capital sigma Σ - assign the shortcut Alt-Shift-S

Between what looks like a "Y" and an "X" is a capital phi Φ - assign the shortcut Alt-Shift-F

After what looks like an "X" is a capital psi Ψ . It has the sound of "ps". The English keyboard doesn't have a key for a "ps" sound, but traditionally psi is assigned to the "y" key. So assign Alt-Shift-Y for capital psi.

After capital psi comes capital omega Ω , the end of the Greek alphabet. Capital omega usually needs an extra mark to show whether or not it is aspirated (pronounced with a "h" of air). So don't assign a shortcut to this character yet. Congratulations - you can now type out the whole Greek alphabet in Upper case.

5. Now we go through a similar process to assign shortcuts for the Greek lower-case letters.

Ignore the letters with accents which follow the capital Omega, until you get to the accented iota $\acute{\iota}$ (that is an accent, not a dot - Greek iota does not have a dot above it).

Assign shortcut Alt-Shift-~ (the tilde key at the top left-hand row of keys)

Now we get to the main alphabet in lower-case letters :

alpha	α	assign shortcut Alt-a
beta	β	assign shortcut Alt-b
gamma	γ	assign shortcut Alt-g
delta	δ	assign shortcut Alt-d
epsilon	ϵ	assign shortcut Alt-e
zeta	ζ	assign shortcut Alt-z
eta	η	assign shortcut Alt-h
theta	θ	assign shortcut Alt-q
iota	ι	assign shortcut Alt-i
kappa	κ	assign shortcut Alt-k
lambda	λ	assign shortcut Alt-l
mu	μ	assign shortcut Alt-m
nu	ν	assign shortcut Alt-n
xi	ξ	assign shortcut Alt-x
omicron	\omicron	assign shortcut Alt-o
pi	π	assign shortcut Alt-p
rho	ρ	assign shortcut Alt-r
terminal sigma (the form which sigma takes at the end of a word)	ς	assign shortcut Alt-j
sigma	σ	assign shortcut Alt-s
tau	τ	assign shortcut Alt-t
upsilon	υ	assign shortcut Alt-u
phi	ϕ	assign shortcut Alt-f
chi	χ	assign shortcut Alt-c
psi	ψ	assign shortcut Alt-y
omega	ω	assign shortcut Alt-w

That concludes all the shortcuts to the Basic Greek subset that we will need.

You will now be able to type complete Greek words, though not yet able to mark where the accents fall.

6. Now we go to the "Greek Extended" subset, which was a later addition to the Unicode specification.

This contains loads of combination characters - letters with accents, with "breathings" that look like commas and show whether or not to aspirate the letter, and/or with iota subscripts where a tiny little iota is printed under the main letter.

We only want the most common combinations.:

lower-case alpha, smooth breathing (no "huh")	ᾱ	Alt-2
lower-case alpha, rough breathing ("hah")	ᾶ	Alt-Shift-@
upper-case alpha, smooth breathing (no "huh")	Ἀ	Alt-Shift-A
lower-case epsilon, smooth breathing	ἒ	Alt-3
lower-case epsilon, rough breathing ("heh")	ἔ	Alt-Shift-#
upper-case epsilon, smooth breathing	Ἐ	Alt-Shift-E
lower-case eta, smooth breathing	ἦ	Alt-4
lower-case eta, rough breathing ("hay")	ἧ	Alt-Shift-\$
upper-case eta, rough breathing ("hay")	Ἡ	Alt-Shift H
lower-case iota, smooth breathing	ἰ	Alt-1
lower-case iota, rough breathing ("hih")	ἱ	Alt-Shift-!
upper-case iota, smooth breathing	Ἰ	Alt-Shift-I
upper-case iota, rough breathing ("hih")	Ἱ	Alt-Shift-(
lower-case omicron, smooth breathing	ῶ	Alt-5
lower-case omicron, rough breathing ("hoh")	ῷ	Alt-Shift-%
lower-case upsilon, smooth breathing	ῦ	Alt-6
lower-case upsilon, rough breathing ("huh")	ῷ	Alt-Shift-^
upper-case upsilon, rough breathing	Υ	Alt-Shift-U
lower-case omega, smooth breathing	ῶ	Alt-7
lower-case omega, rough breathing ("hoe")	ῷ	Alt-Shift-&
upper-case omega, smooth breathing	Ω	Alt-Shift-W
lower-case omega with rough breathing and iota subscript	ῶῖ	Alt-Shift-*
alpha with iota subscript (no accents)	αῖ	Alt-8
eta with iota subscript (no accents)	ηῖ	Alt-9
lower-case rho with rough breathing ("hruh")	ῤ	Alt-` (the character which shares a key with the tilde)
upper-case rho with rough breathing ("hruh")	ῤ	Alt-Shift-R
omega with iota subscript (no accents)	ωῖ	Alt-0

That gives us shortcuts to all the most-frequently used characters. When we need any of the others, we can use Ctrl-d to bring up the "Insert symbol" dialog box, then go to the Extended Greek section for the font, hunt for the symbol we want, and insert it.

It is a good idea to type out a keyboard map, showing the "English keys" with the "Greek keys" below them.

There is only one glitch to using the Alt-key for accessing characters, and that is that Microsoft has designated **Alt-space** as a short-cut to a command to open a dialog box for minimizing or closing the current page - and there seems to be no way of re-assigning this command to something more useful, or at least less distracting. Most of the other Microsoft short-cuts to commands can be re-assigned, but not this one.

So when typing Greek text, keep one finger on the Alt key while typing the characters, but remember to release it when coming to a space.

Even with that aggravation, using the "Alt" key has proved to be better than using virtual keyboard software.