

I. The Recessive Accent

For most Greek verbs, the principle of RECESSIVE ACCENTUATION determines which syllable will receive the accent. In other words, the accent on a Greek verb form will fall as far back from the ULTIMA as the rules allow. There are three rules.

Rule 1:

If a verb form has THREE or more syllables, and the ULTIMA of the word contains a SINGLE SHORT VOWEL, the accent “recedes” to the ANTEPENULT. Whether the penult is long or short is irrelevant in this situation:

δίδοτε
κατενόησε

In this situation, the accent can recede only to the last short vowel sound of the antepenult, so the accent on an antepenult always appears as an acute (“/”), regardless of the length of vowel in this syllable. In other words, if an antepenult receives an accent, it must be an acute:

δώσετε (= δοόσετε)

Rule 2:

If a verb form has THREE or more syllables, and the ULTIMA of the word contains a LONG VOWEL sound, the accent “recedes” to the PENULT:

διδότω
λαμβάνει

In this situation, the accent can recede only to the last short vowel sound of the penult, so the accent always appears as an acute (“/”), regardless of the length of vowel in this syllable:

παραδώσω (= παραδοόσοο)

Rule 3:

If a verb form has only TWO syllables, the PENULT always receives the accent. This accent may be an ACUTE (“/”) or CIRCUMFLEX (^), depending upon the following three situations:

1. If the penult is short, it always receives an acute accent (“/”), regardless of the length of the ultima:

δότε
δότη (= δότηο)

2. If both the penult and ultima vowels are long, the penult receives an acute accent (“/”):

δώσω (= δοόσοο)
δώσεις (= δοόσεις)

3. If the penult is long and the ultima is short, the penult receives a circumflex accent (^):

σῶσε (= σόοσε)
σῶσον (= σόοσον)

II. Enclitic Accents

The rules for accenting enclitic words are as follows:

Rule 1:

If an enclitic has ONE or TWO SYLLABLES, and the preceding word has an ACUTE accent on its ANTEPENULT, the preceding word adds an acute accent on its last syllable, and the enclitic word receives no accent.

Ἕλληνες → Ἐλληνές ἐσμεν. (= Ἐλληνέσεσμεν)
We are Greeks.

Note that the acute accent on the ultima does NOT change to grave. It is as if the whole combination of preceding word and enclitic were pronounced as one, and accented recessively.

Rule 2:

Similarly, if an enclitic has ONE or TWO SYLLABLES, and the preceding word has a CIRCUMFLEX accent on its PENULT, the preceding word again adds an acute accent on its last syllable, and the enclitic form receives no accent.

παῖδες → παιδές ἐσμεν. (= παιδέσεσμεν)
We are children.

Rule 3:

If an enclitic has TWO SYLLABLES, and the preceding word has an ACUTE accent on its PENULT, the enclitic retains its own accent on its ultima. If the enclitic has only ONE SYLLABLE, it does not receive an accent.

φίλοι ἐσμέν.
We are friends.

λέγεις τε καὶ γράφεις.
You speak and you write.
(note: τε is another enclitic word, meaning *and*)

Rule 4:

If an enclitic has ONE or TWO SYLLABLES, and the preceding word has ANY ACCENT on the ULTIMA, then the enclitic usually receives no accent.

ἄλωτοί ἐσμεν.
We are captured.

εἰ οἱ λησταὶ εἰσιν ἀγαθοί...
If the pirates are good...

Notes on Accents

1. We have already learned that while some vowels are LONG “BY NATURE” (e.g. η, ω...), ALL DIPHTHONGS are long (e.g., ει, οι, ευ...). There are two exceptions, however, to this diphthong rule. For indicative verbs – and all nouns and infinitives – FINAL –αι and –οι were pronounced quickly by the Greeks, and so regarded as short when determining accent type and placement. Note, for example, the accents on the following verbs:

βούλομαι, δύνανται, τίθεται, τίθεσαι...

2. The INFINITIVE mood does not follow the recessive accentuation rules that govern all other moods of a Greek verb. It is best simply to memorize the accent tendencies for each infinitive form as they are encountered in the lessons. For infinitives ending in –ναι, for example, the accent always falls on the PENULT.