

**Ancient Greek Language and the First Philosophers**

## Handout 4: Tips for ongoing learning of the Ancient Greek

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### Learning Ancient Greek

I hope this course has allowed you to see that learning Ancient Greek can be valuable on several levels of dedication. If you have not studied the language before, you are now in a position (1) to continue to practice the alphabet and the basic paradigms so that you can learn key Greek terms when you are reading a translation or (2) to take up further study.

For the former (1), you will need at least a concise dictionary and grammar, e.g.:

- *Oxford Grammar of Classical Greek* by Morwood (2010)
- *Pocket Oxford Classical Greek Dictionary*

For the latter (2), you will need to study a textbook and/or take further courses. Your aim is to cross the seas of paradigm memorisation and arrive at the shores of “Intermediate Greek,” where you will need better dictionaries and grammars than those mentioned above and where you can take advantage of the plethora of helps now available. This might take one or two or more years of study and it is a good thing to have a particular author in mind for motivation. There are whole courses dedicated to, e.g., Homer or Plato.

There are two kinds of Greek textbooks, those which examine the grammar analytically and those which try to bathe the student in reading as much as possible.

The best of the former textbooks in my experience is *Learn to Read Greek* by Keller and Russel. The best of the latter remains Rowe’s *Greek Boy*, although more recent textbooks attempt to compromise between these approaches (e.g., the tried and tested JACT and Athenaze textbooks). However, if you are learning with a teacher or as a group, what textbook you use matter less than being able to ask questions and have things explained in detail.

A good self-study text is the *Teach Yourself Ancient Greek* by Betts and Henry, which is cheap, clear, covers all the essentials, and has answers to its exercises.

### “Intermediate Greek”

Once you’ve traversed a text book or year(s) of beginner’s Greek, there is now an abundance of helpful commentaries for the intermediate student that assist with vocabulary and syntax and which do not presume you have the imposing classical background and learning of a 13 year old Nineteenth Century British Public Schoolboy.

The Perseus and TLG sites mentioned below provide dictionary help.

An excellent source of free commentaries with both vocab and syntax help:

<https://geoffreysteadman.com/>

## Dictionaries, Online Lexica, and Grammars

The new *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* will now be the standard companion for anyone who has reached the shores of Intermediate Greek. You can also access the Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon at the **TLG** site:

<http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/lsg>

The LSJ was last revised in 1993 and remains the most comprehensive lexicon in English. The new Cambridge lexicon replaced the Intermediate LSJ (last edited 1876) but also involved a rethinking of basic meanings and takes account of many recent papyrus finds etc.

The **Perseus** site has a large share of the ancient Greek and Latin corpus. The editions are not the most recent but they have links for every word to a choice of Lexica.

<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>

The most comprehensive **grammars** in English are:

*Greek Grammar* [Revised Edition] by Herbert Weir Smyth, revised by Gordon M. Messing (Harvard, 1956) – make sure you buy a second hand one that is stitch-bound

*The Cambridge Grammar of Classical Greek* by E. van Emde Boas, A. Rijksbaron, L. Huitink and M. de Bakker (Cambridge, 2021) – unfortunately both softcover and hardcover versions are glue-bound

The *Cambridge Grammar* has many interesting updates and discussions of word order absent from Smyth, but Smyth remains the more comprehensive and if you get copy published before about 1980 it won't fall apart if you use it.

## Final suggestions

- It is impossible to overemphasise the importance of regular practice, even if it is just 5 minutes a day of writing out a couple of paradigms or re-reading a sentence. When you have done the work to acquire a short-term memory of a paradigm it takes little time to repeat it and make it a permanent possession.
- On the other hand, if you have to leave off study, even for large periods, a little practice will rapidly revive what you once learned.
- Don't be put off by the terminology: a grammarian is trying to describe to you what you already know how to do perfectly in one or more languages.