Overview of Consonants

GREEK 101: Introduction to Ancient Greek

A **consonant** is a sound in spoken language that is characterized by a constriction or closure at one or more points along the vocal tract, in contrast to a **vowel**, which are characterized by an open configuration of the vocal tract.

Recognizing **stop consonants**, and what happens when stops are followed by σ, is very useful for understanding Greek.

	Voiceless	Voiced	Voiceless Aspirated
Labial	π	β	φ
Dental	τ	δ	θ
Velar	κ	γ	χ

Note what happens when a stop is followed by σ:

Labial: π or β or φ, when followed by σ, becomes ψ.
Example: γραφ + σω = γράψω

Dental: τ or δ or θ (or ζ), when followed by σ, stop is lost.
Example: σπευδ + σω = σπεύσω

Velar: κ or γ or χ, when followed by σ, becomes ξ.
Example: διωκ + σω = διώξω

Double Consonants

Three Consonants represent combinations of other sounds and are called *double consonants*:

ζ = σ + d
ξ = κ + σ or γ + σ or ζ + σ
ψ = π + σ or β + σ or φ + σ

(Definitions on reverse)

Different types of consonants:

- **Continuants**: articulated by constricting (but not closing) the vocal tract [the opposite of a stop consonant]

  Continuants can be further classified based on how they are articulated:

  - **Nasals**: produced when the air is allowed to escape through the nose, while its oral passage may be blocked by the lips or tongue. μ ν (sometimes γ)
  - **Liquids**: regarded as intermediate between vowels and typical consonants. In the articulation of approximants, articulatory organs produce a narrowing of the vocal tract, but leave enough space for air to flow without audible turbulence. λ ρ

  - **Spirants** or **fricatives**: produced by air flowing through a narrow channel made by placing two articulating organs close together σ

- **Double**: produced when two distinct consonant sounds are combined into a single articulation. ζ ξ ψ

- **Stops** or **plosive** is a consonant sound produced by closing or obstructing airflow in the vocal tract by the lips or tongue. π β φ τ δ θ χ γ χ

  Stops can be further classified based on how they are articulated:

  - **Labial**: articulated with both lips or with the lower lip and the upper teeth.

  - **Dental**: articulated with either the lower or the upper teeth, or both.

  - **Velar**: articulated with the back part of the tongue (the dorsum) against the soft palate (the back part of the roof of the mouth, known also as the **velum**).

  - **Voiced**: produced with vibration of the vocal cords.

  - **Voiceless**: produced without vibration of the vocal cords.

  - **Aspiration**: the strong burst of air that accompanies the release of some stop consonants.

For additional information: http://www.wordiq.com/definition/List_of_phonetics_topics