

**Beginning Greek I**  
**Session 4: Greek Voice**

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Voice is the relationship of the subject of a clause to the main verb in the clause. There are three voices:

- ACTIVE VOICE - Subject is doing the action of the main verb. *The boy bit the dog.*
- PASSIVE VOICE – Subject is being acted upon. *The boy was bitten by the dog.*
- MIDDLE VOICE – Subject is acting upon him/her/itself. *The boy bit himself.*

In English, we talk about the active and passive voice, but rarely if ever do we talk about middle voice. We do have a few examples of it but they are rare.

- MIDDLE VOICE – *I washed. I bathed. I showered.*
- ACTIVE VOICE – *I washed the car. I bathed the dog. I showered him with praise.*

Greek verbs

As we have learned, Greek verbs are formed by

**Stem + Vowel + Ending**

To indicate tense, Greek added markers to the basic form of a verb except for present and imperfect.

- Second aorist and future – Sigma
- Perfect and pluperfect – Reduplication and kappa
- First aorist – Different stem from the present stem

Another indication of tense is the ending. There are two sets of endings.

- Primary – present, future, perfect
- Secondary – imperfect, aorist, pluperfect

The endings are also the main way that Greek indicates voice. There are active endings and middle/passive endings. Below are the primary active and middle/passive endings. *Note contraction of the connecting vowel and endings in some cases.*

Active voice

Λυ – ω	I loosen.
Λυ – εις	You loosen.
Λυ – ει	He/she/it loosens.
Λυ – ο – μεν	We loosen.
Λυ – ε – τε	You (plural) loosen.
Λυ – ουσι	They loosen.

Middle/passive voice

Λυ – ο – μι	I am loosened. OR I loosen myself.
Λυ – η (σαι)	You are loosened. OR You loosen yourself.
Λυ – ε – ται	He/she/it is loosened. OR He/she/it loosens he/she/itself.
Λυ – ο – μεθα	We are loosened. OR We loosen ourselves.
Λυ – ε – σθε	You (plural) are loosened. OR You (plural) loosen yourselves.
Λυ – ο – νται	They are loosened. OR They loosen themselves.

In the present and imperfect tenses, middle and passive voices have the same endings. Context determines which is intended.

In the future and aorist, an additional marker is added to the stem -  $\theta\eta$  or  $\eta$ . What tense and voice is this verb? The stem is  $\lambda\upsilon$ .

## Λυθήσομαι

Form the following verbs using

- the stem  $\lambda\upsilon$
- the first person plural active ( $\mu\epsilon\nu$ ) and middle/passive endings ( $\mu\epsilon\theta\alpha$ )

We loosen.

We are being loosened.

We loosen ourselves.

We were loosening.

We were being loosened.

We were loosening ourselves.

We loosened.

We were being loosened.

We were loosening ourselves.

We will loosen.

We will be loosened.

We will loosen ourselves.

- Stem + connecting vowel + ending
- Augment + stem + connecting vowel + ending
- Reduplication + stem +  $\kappa$  + connecting vowel + ending
- Stem +  $\sigma$  + connecting vowel + ending
- Augment + stem +  $\sigma$  + connecting vowel + ending
- Augment + reduplication + stem +  $\kappa$  + connecting vowel + ending
- Augment + stem change + connecting vowel + ending

Let's look again at the verbs from chapter 1. See if you can figure out the voice for each.

γράφομεν

ἦν

ἀκηκόαμεν

ἐωράκαμεν

ἐθεασάμεθα

ἐψηλάφησαν

ἐφανερώθη

μαρτυροῦμεν

ἀπαγγέλλομεν

ἔχητε

πεπληρωμένη

ἐστίν

ἔχομεν

περιπατῶμεν

ψευδόμεθα

ποιοῦμεν

καθαρίζει

εἵπωμεν

πλανῶμεν

ὁμολογῶμεν

ἡμαρτήκαμεν

### BONUS

All languages change over time. While they might start very regularly, irregularities occur as the language is used and the speakers of language use or don't use different words or different forms. In English, for example, the second person plural (ye) was lost and the singular form was used to cover both. The "thee" form of second person singular also disappeared. Overtime, common usage overrules the rules.

Ancient Greek went through changes too. One of the places this has happened is with verbal voices. Theoretically, every verb had every form originally, but over time certain forms were lost. These verbs are called "deponent," which in Greek specifically means that the active form has been lost and the middle/passive form is used as active. Here is the most common example.

ἔρχομαι

If you thought this has a middle/passive ending, you would be right. However, it is deponent. It has a middle/passive form, but it is translated as active. English equivalents to this word are "I go" or "I come." If you think about it, the middle voice means exactly the same as the active.

I go.

I go myself.

You do not need two forms. The passive is unnecessary because the verb is intransitive and therefore cannot take a direct object. You cannot "go" something.

A legitimate question is – why didn't the Greeks keep the active form? We don't know, but my guess is it is the same reason we prefer certain forms in English.

- The active might have been too similar to another word.
- The active might have been difficult to pronounce.
- The Greeks might have preferred how the middle/passive sounded.
- OR as my Greek professor used to say, "That's just how the Greeks did it."