

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL
DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS
CLASSICS.UNC.EDU
ANCIENT GREEK FAQs

Who studies Ancient Greek? What is it?

The Greek language has been spoken and written in the Mediterranean region since about 1200 BCE. “Ancient” Greek refers to the early part of that long history – especially the approximately 1000-year period from the epic poetry of Homer into the early Christian centuries. Anyone interested in the cultures, history, religion, and literature of the Ancient Mediterranean may want to study Ancient Greek. Many students interested in philosophy, linguistics, archaeology, art history, and the literary humanities more generally also find Greek relevant to their studies.

Does Ancient Greek satisfy the general education language requirement?

Yes, you can take three semesters of Ancient Greek (GREK 101, 102, 203) to satisfy the UNC language requirement.

What happens in Ancient Greek classes?

Classes focus on the language itself, as a window on a fascinating culture very distant from our own. In the first two semesters you’ll learn about the basic grammatical structures of the ancient language and start to build a core vocabulary. In the third semester you’ll be reading original texts by writers like the philosopher Plato, the epic poet Homer, and the tragedian Euripides. In advanced classes you’ll read a variety of literary texts, from the historian Herodotus, to the lyric poet Sappho, to ancient Greek novels, and satires by Lucian. For a complete list of our course offerings in Ancient Greek, see the Academic Catalogue (catalog.unc.edu → Courses A-Z → Greek).

How much homework will there be?

Regular engagement is essential to acquiring a new language, and homework is assigned daily in ancient Greek. This means, however, that each assignment is comparatively low-stakes. Grades on homework generally align more closely with student effort than with the accuracy of their submissions. The amount of time needed to complete assignments will vary, but as a rule you should expect at least one hour of private study for every hour in class.

Are there opportunities for extra help if I feel like I need it?

Yes! Our chapter of Eta Sigma Phi, the national undergraduate Honors Society for Classical studies, holds weekly peer tutoring sessions in the department. They also have weekly reading groups that are open to students of all levels; these can help with vocabulary recognition and sentence structure. Our department faculty are also more than happy to meet with students during their office hours.

How long does it take before I can hold a conversation?

A primary goal in learning Ancient Greek is to read ancient literature and textual artifacts (e.g. inscriptions). So, while oral work may be a part of the learning process at various stages, the main emphasis – in contrast with modern language classes – is not on speaking, but on reading. One benefit of this text-centered approach is that, after only three semesters, students are prepared to embark upon reading great works of literature, from Homer to Sophocles, from Plato to the New Testament (and beyond).

Is Ancient Greek the same as modern Greek? Can I study modern Greek at UNC?

Modern Greek is the direct descendant of Ancient Greek, so the two are very closely related. We do not (unfortunately) teach modern Greek at UNC, but if you are interested in modern Greece, or if you have a family background in Greece, Ancient Greek can be a good way to begin to develop some understanding of the language and the culture in its historical context.

What about New Testament Greek?

Beginning Ancient Greek (GREK 101, 102, and 203) will give you an excellent grounding and will prepare you to read Biblical Greek and early Christian texts of all kinds. Introductory New Testament Greek (GREK 205) is normally offered as a fourth-semester Greek course every other spring (next probable offering Spring 2021). An advanced New Testament Greek course (GREK 409) is offered irregularly, depending upon faculty availability.

Should I start Greek now, or maybe later? Can I study ancient Greek and Latin - or another foreign language - at the same time? In my first year?

If you are interested in learning Ancient Greek, there is no time like the present. Courses are offered in a two-year sequence, beginning with GREK 101, which is offered *only* in fall semester (that is, you *cannot* start in the spring). You can, however, study Greek and Latin simultaneously. The study of one language reinforces, rather than interferes, with the other. If you love languages and the ancient Mediterranean world, why not go for it? This may be your best chance (there is currently no DuoLingo or RosettaStone course in Ancient Greek).

Can I major or minor in Ancient Greek?

The UNC Classics Department offers both a major and minor in (Ancient) Greek, as well as combined major in Greek and Latin for those who plan to pursue graduate study in Classics. Many students have found it appealing to have Greek as a second major (or minor) with another subject (e.g., computer science, religion, comparative literature, environmental studies, etc.). For more information about our different degree tracks and their requirements, see our website (Home → Undergraduate → Majors and Minors).

I have already learned some ancient Greek – is there a placement exam, or how can I find the right Greek course for me?

There is no formal placement exam, but faculty are keen to place interested students in classes suitable to their background and aspirations. Experienced students of Ancient Greek should contact the Director of the Elementary Greek Program for guidance on their placement (contact information on our website: Home → About Us → Administration & Contacts).

I've studied Latin for a long time in high school – would Greek be interesting?

Ancient Greek offers those who have studied Latin a new challenge, with variations on familiar themes. Your instructors, and likely some of your classmates, will also have some background in Latin and can discuss interesting similarities and differences. Furthermore, if you are interested in pursuing Latin into graduate school, a combined major in Greek and Latin can open many doors.

I've never studied a foreign language before – is ancient Greek a good idea? Are there prerequisites? Is it only for Classics majors? Do I need to know anything before I start?

Ancient Greek offers a unique, but accessible, way to study language. There are no prerequisites besides an eager mind willing to overcome such (satisfying) hurdles as a new alphabet and an absence of still-living native speakers. Ancient Greek is not only for Classics majors, and the skills and knowledge developed in its study are widely applicable.