

Tips for Reading the Greek New Testament

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This is a program for reading the Greek New Testament in one or two years, depending on the strength of your Greek. The program presupposes one year of elementary New Testament Greek as typically taught at a theological seminary or the equivalent. If your Greek is rusty, this program will help you recover and sharpen your skills. If you follow this simple program, your ability to read the Greek New Testament will increase dramatically. It's like weight lifting. If you're consistent, it's amazing what you can accomplish by doing a little every day.

Texts and Tools

- The One-Year Calendar – www.upper-register.com/papers/GNT_1yr_calendar.pdf
- The Two-Year Calendar – www.upper-register.com/papers/GNT_2yr_calendar.pdf
- My “Greek Syntax Notes” – <http://www.upper-register.com/papers.html#GNT>
- *The UBS Greek New Testament: A Reader's Edition*. Running Greek-English dictionary by Barclay M. Newman. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007.
- Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich (BDAG). *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Tips

1. Read every day. Don't let it go for a while and try to play catch-up. It is very hard to catch up when you're behind. Read every single day – even on Saturdays and Sundays – in order to reinforce the habit.

2. I would strongly discourage you from using your Bible software as your primary reading text. If you want to use your Bible software for parsing purposes, that's fine, but read out of a hard copy. I recommend this because your long term goal is to carry your Greek New Testament to church, school, the beach or the park, and to be able to read with minimal recourse to crutches. Or perhaps someday you'll be asked to write an exam using only your Greek New Testament.

3. Read the Greek out loud. If you're not in a private place, whisper. Hearing the words will improve your comprehension and retention. It encourages you to slow down and take in the meaning one word at a time.

4. Keep a notebook and write down your exegetical and homiletical observations, or flag any issues that you would like to explore in the future. Admittedly, this requires additional time, but you'll be compiling a mini-commentary that you can consult in the future. If you're a pastor, imagine the time you'll save in sermon preparation.

5. If you are using the *Reader's Edition*, you will not need to look up much vocabulary, since this is provided in the footnotes. But it is still a good exercise to look up words in BDAG from time to time, especially when dealing with rare usages or theologically significant words. It is useful to scan the bold headings in BDAG in order to get an overview of the semantic range of a word and to find the specific usage your passage falls under. It is also profitable to study prepositions, particles, and other utility words (e.g., according to BDAG ἐπί has 18 different usages!). I know BDAG is expensive, but in view of its treasure trove of grammatical, exegetical, and theological information, it's worth every penny and may even be a bargain. I find BDAG's extended definitions to be extremely helpful, providing deeper insight beyond the glosses typically used in older lexicons or even in the *Reader's Edition*. In addition, BDAG often includes discussions of scholarly views (e.g., see the fascinating entry on ἐπιούσιος).

6. For syntactical issues, consult my "Greek Syntax Notes." My notes are focused on providing concise explanations of grammatical features that are not immediately obvious. It also includes references to various Greek tools, and it may be useful on occasion to look up some of these citations, particularly if you want to deepen your knowledge of Greek grammar. I do not include any parsing and only rarely help with meanings of words, since I assume that you have the *Reader's Edition* or a digital edition of the GNT that provides parsing or a printed parsing guide.

7. Attempt a wooden translation in your head for each verse. A wooden translation ought to follow the word order and grammatical structure of the Greek as closely as possible. It's surprising how often I thought I could translate a verse until I tried this.

8. Try not to consult an English version too quickly when you encounter difficulty. Nevertheless, the contemporary English versions are useful for pointing you in the right direction when you're stuck. But always go back and make your own wooden translation.

9. *This is the most important piece of advice.* Even with the aid of the *Reader's Edition* and my "Greek Syntax Notes," you may feel a bit overwhelmed. My advice is this: Pick a time limit – say, 30 minutes a day – and do just enough to get through that day's reading. Don't be a perfectionist. Press on even if you don't understand every Greek construction or nuance. If you finish with time to spare, and as your reading ability improves, you can add the more ambitious things like exploring BDAG and the Greek grammars.

10. Finally, for encouragement in becoming a student of the Greek New Testament, I highly recommend A. T. Robertson's classic, *The Minister and His Greek New Testament*. I continually go back to this little gem of a book for the anecdotes, exegetical insights, and inspiration from this godly grammarian.