

PROVISIONAL

TEXTBOOK REVIEWS

Review of textbooks for the teaching of Classical Greek

June 2015

GCSE, AS and A Level



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The following reviews were written by teachers from a variety of backgrounds and contexts all of whom have extensive experience in teaching Classical Greek to a diverse range of learners. These reviews are not intended as official endorsements or an indication of OCR's preference for teaching materials, instead they are supposed to be a resource to help teachers make informed decisions about the textbooks they choose to use with their learners. All the opinions are those of the teachers and practitioners consulted, not OCR. These reviews and notes are targeted both at new teachers seeking to teach Classical Greek for the first time, and also those who have been teaching for some time and are looking to update their resources. We hope you find them helpful.

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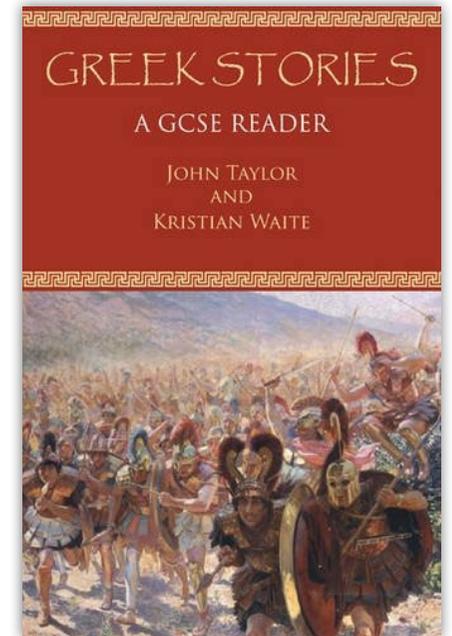
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John Taylor & Kristian Waite, *Greek Stories*

This book covers all the stories you could ever need at GCSE level. The work contains 100 passages all at around GCSE standard with the first twenty being shorter, at a lower level, and working up to some quite challenging passages which fit with the GCSE language paper requirements.

This book works best as a support to John Taylor's *Greek to GCSE* course and provides a great variety of passages so you can tailor your choices to those that will interest your students. There really is something to suit every taste with extracts from Xenophon's *Anabasis* to Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* put into accessible prose. This book allows you to explore the wealth of literature from the Greek world in a way that still supports the students' language learning.

For most Greek courses, there may be little time to study many of these passages; however, they can serve as useful extension work, as material for support classes for those finding the language difficult or even as a quick way to link to other aspects of Classics the students may encounter. Overall, this book helps to show students the value of their ability to translate Greek in giving them access to the Greeks' rich literary history.



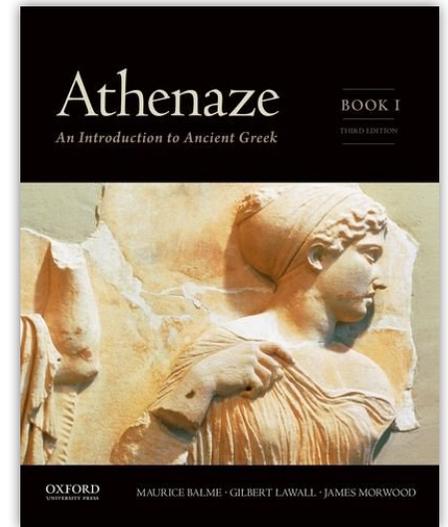
Maurice Balme, Gilbert Lawall, and James Morwood, *Athenaze*

Athenaze is an excellent resource for those wishing to teach/learn Greek from scratch. It follows the character of Dicaeopolis, an Athenian farmer, and his family and contains an interesting array of cultural, historical and mythological background.

While the vocabulary it uses does not tie into such specifications as the GCSE word-list, it does provide a good overview of common Greek idioms and paradigms. The lists at the beginning of each chapter neatly supply the student with the requisite knowledge to translate the passages and practice sentences.

As for the clarity of the grammar explanations, occasionally pupils find the layout and explanations a bit difficult to follow, but they can be effective if the teacher outlines the material to them. The translation passages (which are usually of an appropriate length) and sentences help the student practise their constructions and there are even some English-Greek sentences for those wishing to extend their knowledge.

As the course progresses, the grammar that is taught does not correlate precisely with the GCSE specification, but provides a good introduction to further study in the Greek language.



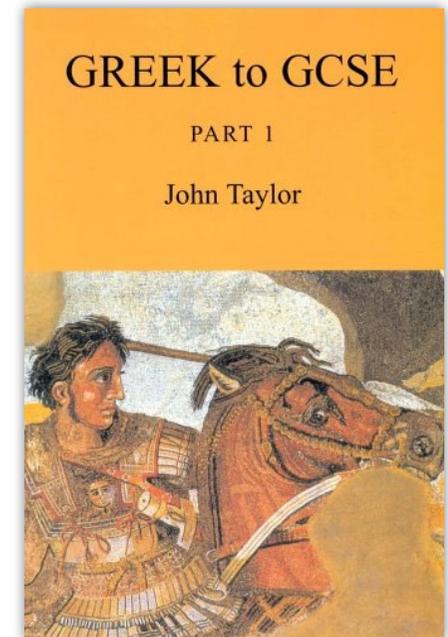
John Taylor, *Greek to GCSE Parts 1 and 2*

Taylor's *Greek to GCSE* is a popular choice for teachers, and it's clear to see why. It works well as a 'one stop' textbook for GCSE and covers the relevant knowledge right from introduction of the alphabet up to uses of the subjunctive and optative.

New concepts are introduced clearly and the book(s) are easy to navigate for both staff and students. Explanations can be a little excessive or overlong in places, as Taylor offers multiple ways of explaining ideas and concepts. This is excellent in theory, as hopefully there will be an explanation which is understandable to every student, but in reality students can get themselves confused and I would advise teachers to talk these through with their learners.

The book has a myriad of exercises and passages for translation of varying difficulty. The short exercises are excellent for checking understanding of new concepts and the translation passages are good practice at working with connected prose. These passages vary in length which is great to help choose an appropriate piece for a given class, activity or timescale. The passages are generally on interesting topics and I especially liked the practice passages in the final section of Part 2 which cover some of the narrative of Herodotus and allowed students to feel like they were translating 'real' Greek.

The Reference Grammar at the back is clear and comprehensive and an excellent reference point for students, I always encouraged mine to get into the habit of checking here themselves first before asking me for help. I found this developed their confidence and independence (as well as stopping them from bombarding me with simple queries!) An excellent set of texts to introduce students to the language and prepare them for GCSE.

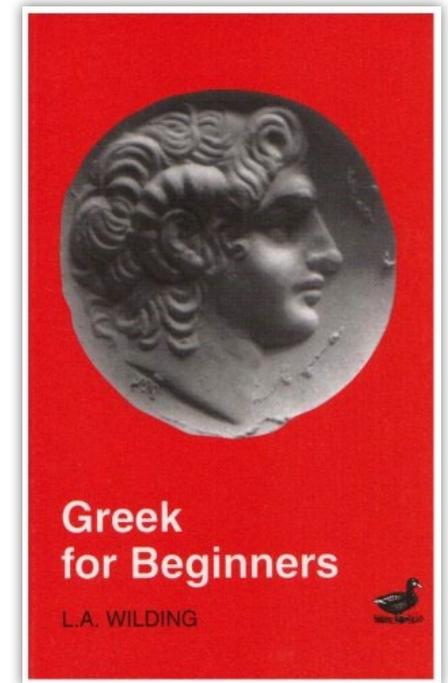


L.A. Wilding, *Greek for Beginners*

Wilding's *Greek for Beginners* takes an old fashioned but very thorough approach to learning Classical Greek which still suits some teachers and students very well. Whilst the focus is on rather 'traditional' topics in the longer texts (plenty of military narrative!) and the rote learning of grammar and accidence might be off putting this small, inexpensive volume still provides an excellent grounding in the language.

Every chapter contains exercises, expecting students to translate both into and out of the target language. This approach ensures that students have a really sound grasp of the basics of the language and can really create confidence in translation. The book takes a while to work up to translating prose passages, and these are at first rather short, but by the end of the book they are long and complex. The choice of passages (often adapted from Herodotus and similar) creates a sense of "authenticity" and students feel a great sense of accomplishment when they manage to work through them.

This book does require the use of a grammar primer in conjunction with the later chapters and makes reference to Abbot and Mansfield, however I have found the Morwood to be an excellent substitute and partner volume. The concepts covered are not directly targeted at the GCSE syllabus, as more modern textbooks often are, and some things covered are not amongst those a GCSE candidate would be expected to know (for example the pluperfect tense) but the order in which concepts are introduced feels very sensible and the coverage gives an excellent grounding in the language. Certainly a useful tool for the modern teacher, even if the first edition was published in 1957!



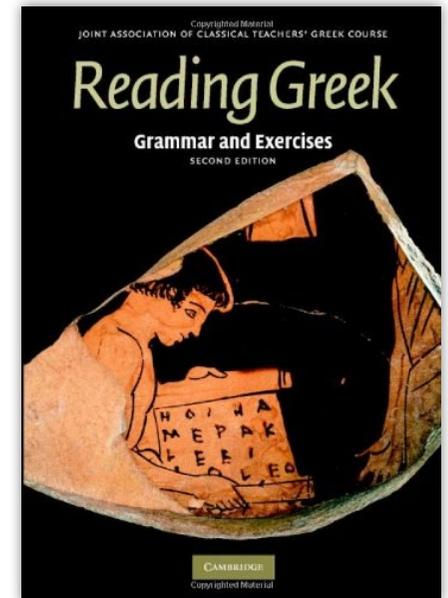
JACT, *Reading Greek*

The focus in Reading Greek is on enabling student to read passages and put their language skills into practice as soon as possible. In order to enable students to read connected prose almost immediately many words are glossed and do not require knowledge of their grammar or accidence (for example εἰσι might be glossed as “they are” without explanation at first). Due to this the “reading” can feel a little artificial or forced, however students can respond well to this structure and the course does really improve their confidence with longer texts and makes these feel very accessible.

The book focuses on the story of Dikaiopolis throughout its modules and creates a good, clear sense of progression from simple, large print texts through to unedited Plato. Students can really see their progress and all texts are supported by very good vocabulary lists.

Whilst the book is designed for learners of all ages and situations it could possibly do with more revision exercises if it were to be used by independent learners, but it is very straightforward to teach from and is very easy to navigate. Ironically the desire to avoid traditional military narratives has meant that whilst the readings are well structured, they can feel a little lacking in variety.

This book provides a more modern take on Ancient Language teaching, with less focus on rote learning and more on application of learning. Developed by teachers for teachers, it is a really sound introduction to the language which works well for many students and teachers.



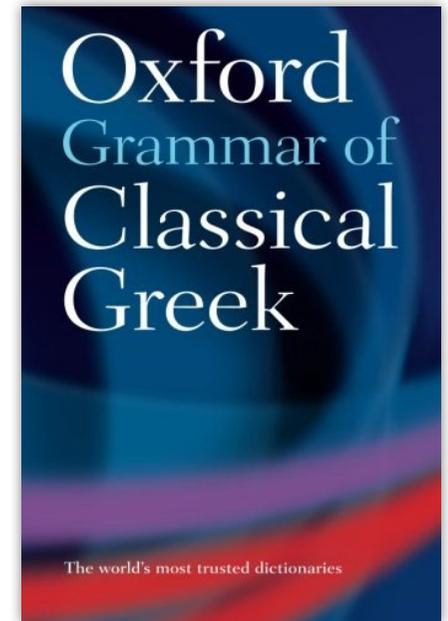
All levels Classical Greek

James Morwood, *Oxford Grammar of Classical Greek*

James Morwood's *Oxford Grammar of Classical Greek* is a concise and clear resource, containing a good overview of the accidence and syntax of Classical Greek.

Whilst it may not be appropriate for those just starting Greek and is more tailored for those continuing their studies to AS Level and beyond, it includes a brief description of the basics (use of cases, the definite article etc.) before laying out the more complex nuances of the language. It is comprehensive in its explanation of the formation of nouns and verbs etc. and it contains an incredibly useful list of the more common principal parts.

In its explanation of constructions, it is once again an easy resource to follow. Each of the chapters is clearly laid out and provides an excellent outline of the grammar. One area where it falls short is in the number of exercises and sentences it contains. There are only a token number of practice sentences at the end of each chapter and these are not always appropriate or useful. As a result, it is best used in conjunction with a text book that can allow the student to practise the constructions in more depth.



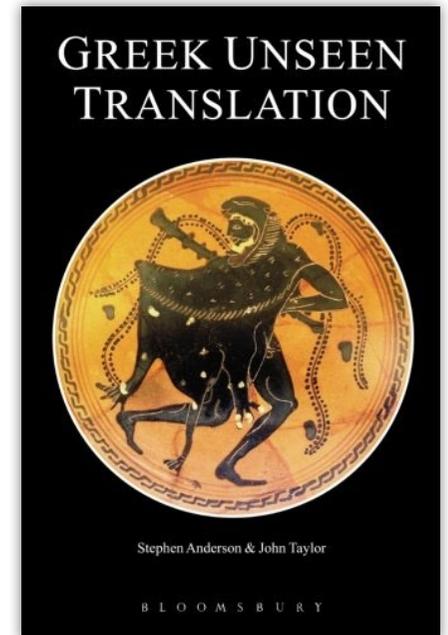
All levels Classical Greek

John Taylor & Stephen Anderson, *Greek Unseen Translation*

This course does exactly what it says on the tin. 120 Greek unseen passages, one per page, for students at GCSE, AS and A-Level. An appendix on Greek iambic trimeter is the only additional section but an extremely useful one given the scansion requirement at A Level.

The most entertaining passages are actually the GCSE ones, some of which even take Aesop's fables as their basis which makes for a good class story. The passages for AS provide a good variety of authors but the level required can often be beyond typical AS standard. However, A Level passages are at an appropriate level and the addition of some 'easy' verse passages is very welcome as by glossing extra vocab and identifying crasis and elision, they provide a good starting point for those first starting their sixth form studies.

As a teacher, you will have to provide additional background to many of the texts (particularly the plays) as the English introductions can be limited. However, in a subject where much time can be wasted trying to find suitable passages for unseen translation, Anderson and Taylor have provided an easy way to pull out passages for all your Greek classes in one book. Therefore, this is a must by for all Greek students and departments.



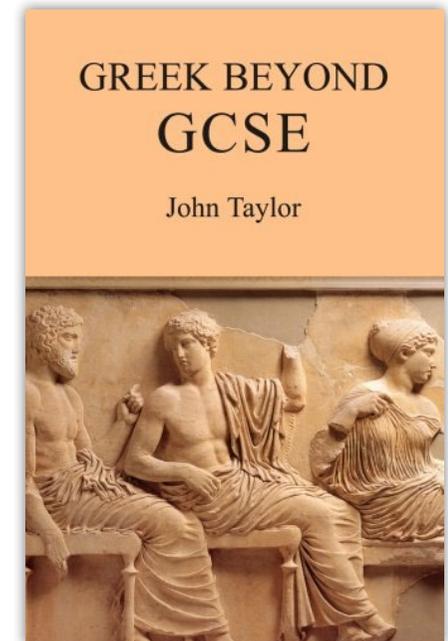
AS and A Level Classical Greek

John Taylor, *Greek Beyond GCSE*

As with all Taylor's books, *Greek Beyond GCSE* is characterised by detailed, extensive explanations and clear progression through the relevant concepts needed for AS and A level study. Ideas are introduced in a logical fashion and Taylor tries to make sure his explanations are accessible to all, although sometimes it can feel a little like it could do with being more concise.

There are a range of exercises throughout the book which test students' ability to translate both into and out of the target language and enable them to put their knowledge of constructions into practice. The vocabulary lists are clear and helpfully correspond closely to those expected by AS level exams. The texts and exercises are well supported by reference grammar as well as these vocabulary lists and so can be set for independent work quite successfully. Some constructions and concepts feel a little under-supported by exercises, but on the whole the coverage is very good.

The texts covered are varied and Taylor has obviously tried to create a textbook which will engage a range of learners, not just those who want to read about battles and naval voyages. A very useful, deservedly popular, resource.



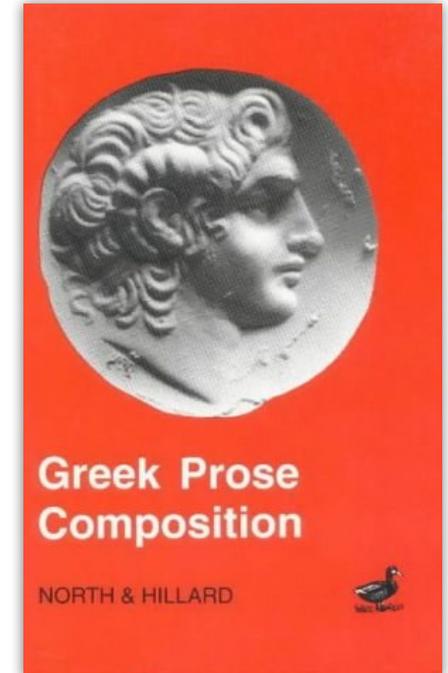
AS and A Level Classical Greek

North and Hillard, *Prose Composition*

North and Hillard's Prose Composition books are an excellent, if old-fashioned, tool for those wishing to study the languages to an advanced level.

They include an explanation of every grammar point and construction as well as the irregularities that can be found within these. However, due to the often sparse descriptions found in it, it is best used as a teacher-led resource, with appropriate guidance and elucidation through supplementary materials. Also, they do not contain any accident lists, so books such as Morwood's Oxford Grammar of Classical Greek are necessary to compliment them.

These books really come into their own in the sheer exposure they give the pupil to the world of prose composition. There are hundreds of practice sentences within their pages, backed up with an impressive array of vocabulary to assist with translation. The vocabulary lists are not only tailored to each section, but help train the student in the various nuances of Greek idiom and, while the volume of words included may seem like overkill for an AS student, it is appropriate in preparing those studying A Level to tackle the prose composition elements of the paper.



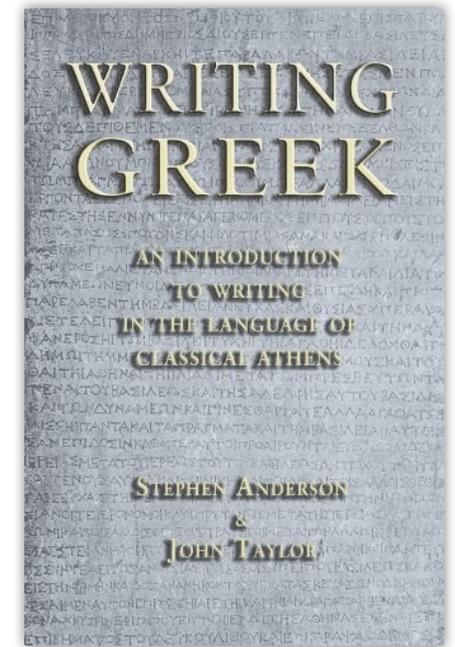
A Level Classical Greek

John Taylor & Stephen Anderson, *Writing Greek*

It is a real challenge to get students to the level required for A Level English into Greek in a short amount of time but Anderson and Taylor's course does well at treading the balance between a thorough account of constructions with accessible exercises.

Each chapter takes a new grammatical topic and provides different sentences or passages to test the students' knowledge at a progressive level of difficulty (starting from basic use of cases and ending with gerundives). The explanations are detailed and provide good examples to help guide students. There are even further practice passages from North and Hillard at the end of the chapters which serve well as A2 practice passages.

The vocabulary in the back of the book is comprehensive without being so dense as to put students off and this is combined with a list of common irregular verbs to reduce the amount of referring to separate grammar books. Anderson and Taylor clearly recognise that much of this course has to be covered through independent learning and the Answer Key book, which is also available for purchase, provides a way for students to work through this course on their own. For those students wishing to opt for the English into Greek part of the A Level paper, or even for those wanting to sharpen up their grammatical understanding of certain constructions, this book is of great use and serves as a good update to the much loved English to Greek course by North and Hillard.





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