

Chapter Nineteen

Imperative Mode

Imperatives convey commands directed either at the person(s) addressed (2nd person singular or plural) or at someone other than the speaker or the person being addressed (3rd person singular or plural). The imperative may be configured to command an **event-action**, a **process-action**, or even (rarely) a **resultant-state-action**. There are no future imperatives.

Morphology of Imperative Verbs

Generally, imperative verbs consist of two parts:

stem (= **base** + aspect marker) + imperative personal ending

More specifically, imperatives are composed as follows:

Event imperatives

Active event: **Aorist Active stem** + imperative active personal endings

Middle event: **Aorist Active stem** + imperative middle/passive personal endings

Passive event: **Aorist Passive stem** + imperative active personal endings

Process imperatives

Active process: **Present Active stem** + imperative active personal endings

Middle process: **Present Active stem** + imperative middle/passive personal endings

Passive process: **Present Active stem** + imperative middle/passive personal endings

Resultant-State imperatives

Active resultant-state: **Perfect Active stem** + imperative active personal endings

Middle resultant-state: **Perfect Mid./Pass. stem** + imperative mid./pass. personal endings

Passive resultant-state: **Perfect Mid./Pass. stem** + imperative mid./pass. personal endings

Imperative Personal Endings

You will find most imperatives wonderfully easy to recognize. Imperatives do not use several different sets of personal endings as the indicatives do. Instead, imperatives use a common, generic set of imperative personal endings, and almost all imperatives are formed by adding one of these generic endings to one of the five stems listed above. For reference purposes, I include charts of specific tenses of the imperative. A few forms use peculiar endings not included in the chart of generic personal endings. I have **boldfaced** those. Make sure to take note of them because they will be harder to remember.

Notice that Greek has two commonly used 3rd-plural endings. You will encounter both forms, sometimes even in the same author. They mean exactly the same thing.

Generic Imperative Personal Endings

	All Actives and Event (Aorist) Passive		All Middle/Passives except Event (Aorist) Passive	
Person	singular	plural	singular	plural
2 nd	<u>ε, θι</u>	<u>τε</u>	<u>σο</u>	<u>σθε</u>
3 rd	<u>τω</u>	<u>ντων</u> or <u>τωσαν</u>	<u>σθω</u>	<u>σθων</u> or <u>σθωσαν</u>

Forms of Event (Aorist) Active and Event Middle Imperatives

Weak Aorist

Weak Aorist Indicative (3rd principal part) of γράφω: ἔγραψα [ἐ/γραφ/σ/α].

Weak Aorist Active-Middle stem: γραψ/.

Theme vowel: α.

Person	Active Voice		Middle Voice	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
2 nd	γραφ <u>ον</u>	γραφ <u>ατε</u>	γρα <u>ψαι</u>	γραφ <u>ασθε</u>
3 rd	γραφ <u>ατω</u>	γραφ <u>αντων</u> or γραφ <u>ατωσαν</u>	γραφ <u>ασθω</u>	γραφ <u>ασθων</u> or γραφ <u>ασθωσαν</u>

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Thematic Strong Aorist

Strong Aorist Indicative (3rd principal part) of λείπω: ἔλιπον [ἐ/λιπ/ο/ον].

Strong Aorist Active-Middle stem: λιπ/.

Theme vowels: ο/ε.

Person	Active		Middle	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
2 nd	λί <u>πε</u>	λί <u>πετε</u>	λί <u>πεο</u> [λι <u>π</u> /ε <u>σο</u>] <i>Attic</i> : λίπου	λί <u>πεσθε</u>
3 rd	λι <u>πέτω</u>	λι <u>πόντων</u> or λι <u>πέτωσαν</u>	λι <u>πέσθω</u>	λι <u>πέσθων</u> or λι <u>πέσθωσαν</u>

Athematic Strong Aorist

Aorist Active of γινώσκω (3rd principal part): ἔγνων [ἐ/γνο/ο/ν].

Strong Aorist Stem (Athematic): γνο/.

Theme vowel: none

The final vowel of the base lengthens throughout the imperative in most athematic strong aorists.

Person	Active		Middle	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
2 nd	γνῶ <u>θι</u>	γνῶ <u>τε</u>	γνῶ <u>σο</u>	γνῶ <u>σθε</u>
3 rd	γνῶ <u>τω</u>	γνόντων [γ <u>νό</u> /ν <u>των</u>]* or γνῶ <u>τωσαν</u>	γνῶ <u>σθω</u>	γνῶ <u>σθων</u> or γνῶ <u>σθωσαν</u>

* The sound –ωντ is almost always spelled –οντ.

Other athematic strong aorists: ἔβην (βαίνω, βα/), ἔστην (ἵστημι, στα/), ἔάλων (άλίσκομαι, ἄλο/).

Greek Before Christmas

Kappa Aorist

Aorist Active of δίδωμι (3rd principal part): ἔδωκα [ἐ/δο/κ/α].

Strong Aorist Stem (Athematic): **δο**/.

Theme vowel: none

Unlike other athematic strong aorists, kappa aorists do not lengthen their final vowels.

Person	Active		Middle	
2 nd	δό <u>ς</u>	δό <u>τε</u>	δό ο [δο/σο] <i>Attic</i> : δοῦ	δό <u>σθε</u>
3 rd	δό <u>τω</u>	δό <u>ντων</u> or δό <u>τῶσαν</u>	δό <u>σθω</u>	δό <u>σθων</u> or δό <u>σθωσαν</u>

Other kappa aorists: ἔθηκα (τίθημι, **θε**/), ἤκα (ἵημι, **ἐ**/ [yε/ø]).

Forms of Event (Aorist) Passive Imperatives

Weak Aorist Passive Forms

Weak Aorist Passive (6th principal part): ἐλείφθην [ἐ/λ^ειπ/θ/ην].

Weak Aorist Passive stem: **λειφθ**/.

Theme vowel: **η**

Person	Passive Voice	
	Singular	Plural
2 nd	λείφθ <u>ητι</u> [λ ^ε <u>ιπ</u> /θ/ <u>ητι</u>]*	λείφθ <u>ητε</u>
3 rd	λειφθ <u>ήτω</u>	λειφθέντων (λείφθ <u>ηντων</u>)** or λειφθ <u>έτῶσαν</u>

*Grassmann's Law requires the loss of aspiration.

**The sound -ηντ is almost always spelled -εντ.

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Strong Aorist Passive Forms

Strong Aorist Passive (6th principal part): ἐγράφην [ἐ/γράφ/ο/ην].

Strong Aorist Passive stem: γράφ/.

Theme vowel: η.

Person	Passive Voice	
	Singular	Plural
2 nd	γράφ <u>η</u> τι [γράφ/η <u>τι</u>]*	γράφ <u>η</u> τε
3 rd	γραφ <u>ή</u> τω	γραφέντων (γράφ/η <u>ν</u> των)** or γραφ <u>έ</u> τωσαν***

* Grassmann's Law requires the loss of aspiration.

** The sound -ηντ is almost always spelled -εντ.

*** I don't know why the η theme vowel is shortened to ε here—probably by analogy with the present tense form.

Forms of Process (“Present”) Active and Middle/Passive Imperatives

Thematic Presents

Present Active (1st principal part): λαμβάνω [λα^νβ/αν/ω].

Process stem of the thematic verb: λαμβαν/.

Theme vowel: ο/ε.

Person	Active Voice		Middle/Passive Voice	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
2 nd	λάβαν <u>ε</u>	λαμβάν <u>ε</u> τε	λαμβάν <u>ε</u> ο [λαμβάν/ε <u>σ</u> ο] Attic: λαμβάν <u>ου</u>	λαμβάν <u>ε</u> σθε
3 rd	λαμβάν <u>έ</u> τω	λαμβάν <u>ό</u> ντων or λαμβάν <u>έ</u> τωσαν	λαμβάν <u>έ</u> σθω	λαμβάν <u>έ</u> σθων or λαμβάν <u>έ</u> σθωσαν

Athematic Presents

Present Active (1st principal part): δίδωμι [ο/δι/δο/μι].

Process stem of the thematic verb: διδο/.

Theme vowel: none.

Person	Active Voice		Middle/Passive Voice	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
2 nd	δίδο <u>ε</u> <i>Attic: δίδου</i>	δίδο <u>τε</u>	δίδο <u>σο</u>	δίδο <u>σθε</u>
3 rd	διδό <u>τω</u>	διδό <u>ντων</u> or διδό <u>τωνσαν</u>	διδό <u>σθω</u>	διδό <u>σθων</u> or διδό <u>σθωσαν</u>

Resultant-State Aspect Imperatives

Resultant-State (“Perfect”) Active and Middle/Passive Imperatives

Weak Perfect Stems

Perfect Active (4th principal part): δέδωκα [ο/δε/δο/κ/α].

Resultant-State stem (Active): δεδωκ/.

Theme Vowel: ο / ε.

Perfect Middle (5th principal part): δέδομαι [ο/δε/δο/μαι].

Resultant-State stem (Middle): δεδο/.

Theme vowel: none.

Person	Active Voice		Middle/Passive Voice	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
2 nd	δέδωκ <u>ε</u>	δέδωκ <u>ετε</u>	δέδο <u>σο</u>	δέδο <u>σθε</u>
3 rd	δεδωκ <u>έτω</u>	δεδωκ <u>όντων</u> or δεδωκ <u>έτωνσαν</u>	δεδό <u>σθω</u>	δεδό <u>σθων</u> or δεδό <u>σθωσαν</u>

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Strong Perfect Stems

Perfect Active (4th principal part): λέλοιπα [ο/λε/λ^οιπ/α].

Resultant-State stem (Active): **λελοιπ/**.

Theme vowel: ο / ε.

Perfect Middle (4th principal part): λελειμμαί [ο/λε/λ^ειπ/μ^{αι}].

Resultant-State stem (Middle): **λελειπ/**.

Theme vowel: none.

Person	Active Voice		Middle/Passive Voice	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
2 nd	λέλοι <u>πε</u>	λελοι <u>πε</u> τε	λέλειψο (λελειπ/ <u>σο</u>)	λέλειφθε (λελειπ/ <u>σθε</u>)
3 rd	λελοι <u>πέ</u> τω	λελοι <u>πόν</u> των or λελοι <u>πέ</u> τωσαν	λελείφω (λελειπ/ <u>σθω</u>)	λελείφω (λελειπ/ <u>σθω</u>) or λελείφωσαν (λελειπ/ <u>σθω</u> σαν)

Meaning of imperatives

Any verb configured in imperative mode is giving a command. To understand the nuances of that command, think through each of the three features of the form.

Person: Is it 2nd person or 3rd person?

Person and number have the same significance in all modes.

If it is a 2nd-person, it commands the person(s) being spoken to to do something. If it is in the 3rd-person, it advises the person being spoken to that the (nominative) subject(s) must do something.

Examples of 2nd-person imperatives: γράψον τὸν λόγον (“Write the speech” <a command to one person>); εἰπέτέ μοι (“Speak to me” <a command to more than one person>).

Examples of 3rd-person imperatives: γραψάτω ὁ γραφεὺς τὸν λόγον (“The scribe is to write the speech” or “Have the scribe write the speech”); εἰπέτωσαν μοι οἱ παῖδες (“The boys must tell me” or “Have the boys tell me.”)

Aspect: Is it event, process, or resultant-state?

Aspect has the same significance in all modes.

Event aspect imperatives envision the required action as a simple action, the most common sort of imperative. You would use an event imperative to command simple actions such as “Tell me your name,” “Step to the side, please,” and “Sign this document, please.”

Examples of event aspect imperatives: εἰπέ or εἰπετε (Speak!), εἰπέτω or εἰπέτωσαν (“He must speak” or “They must speak”).

Process aspect imperatives view the action they command as a process. Process commands imply habituation, repetition, or continuation. You would use process commands to say things such as “Whenever you give your word, *keep* it,” “*Run* three miles every day,” and “*Keep talking*.”

Examples of process aspect imperatives: λέγε or λέγετε (“Keep talking” or “<Habitually> speak”); λεγέτω or λεγέτωσαν (“He must keep talking” or “They must <habitually> speak”). Process imperatives can be preceded by μή to **prohibit** a process notion. μή λέγε: “Don’t be talking,” or “Quit talking.”

Resultant-state aspect imperatives are very rare and almost comic in their effect because they are inherently overstated. They command someone not merely to do an action (or a process), but *to be in the condition of already having done the action*. You might choose to say to your child who has been insisting that he did not eat the cookies you know he ate, “Be in a state of having told the truth,” which means something like “Tell the truth and have done with it.” A trainer might say to his scrawny client, “Be in a state of having put on fifty pounds of muscle,” which is something like a time-lapse way of saying, “Do lots of exercise till you have put on fifty pounds of muscle, and then enjoy being a muscleman.”

Examples of resultant-state imperatives: εἰρηκέ μοι τὴν ἀλήθειαν or εἰρήκετέ μοι τὴν ἀλήθειαν (“Be in a state of having told me the truth”); εἰρηκέτω or εἰρηκέτωσαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν (“Let him (or them) be in a state of having told the truth.”)

Voice: Is it Active, Middle, or Passive?

Voice has the same significance in all modes.

Active voice. In the imperative (as in all modes) the active voice tends to be transitive. I.e., the verb either stipulates or understands a direct object: “*Write* <a speech>!”; “*Leave* <the money on the table>!”; etc.

Middle voice conveys one of the middle-voice nuances: “*Sit!*” (intransitive); “*Educate* your children” (meaning “arrange for your children to receive an education”); etc.

Passive voice imperatives are rare because it simply isn’t natural to command someone to have something done to him by someone else. You might, of course, tell your little child, “Go *be bathed* by your mother,” but such commands are relatively rare. When you encounter aorist passive imperatives, they are probably intended to be heard as aorist middles. So, ἀποκρίθητι means “*Answer!*” rather than “Be answered!”