

ENGLISH WORDS FROM GREEK LETTERS

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Riddle: What common six-letter English word can be spelled using two Greek letters?

Answer: AUTHOR, because it's made up from TAU and RHO.

For some time I've been bemused by the word UNIX, the name of a computer operating system, because it can be spelled out from the names of two letters of the Greek alphabet, XI and NU. Additionally, the two letters are simply spelled in order backwards. This set me thinking about what other words might exist whose letters could be used to spell out the names of two or more Greek letters. And would any of them display their Greek letters in order or reverse order?

The 24 letters of the modern Greek alphabet are alpha, beta, gamma, delta, epsilon, zeta, eta, theta, iota, kappa, lambda, mu, nu, xi, omicron, pi, rho, sigma, tau, upsilon, phi, chi, psi and omega. Additionally, there are 6 letters that appear in earlier versions of the Greek alphabet: digamma, episemon, koppa, sampi, san and vau. These 30 letters can be combined in 450 ways. I have managed to find real words for exactly one-sixth, or 75, of them. In the list below, words not in Webster's Third New International are labeled, and the > symbol indicates that the names of the Greek letters are spelled out forwards (< symbol, spelled out backwards).

alpha, nu	= pulahan	kappa, nu	= paukpan
beta, chi	= Thebaic	lambda, nu	= labdanum
beta, mu	= beatum (OED nil admirari)	lambda, rho	= rhabdomal
beta, nu	= butane	mu, mu	= mumu>
beta, omicron	= embrocatation	mu, nu	= unum< (OED unum necessar.)
beta, psi	= baptise	mu, pi	= pium (OED)
beta, san	= Abanates (W2)	mu, psi	= Pisum
beta, tau	= batteau	mu, rho	= humor
chi, chi	= chichi>	mu, san	= manus
chi, episemon	= phonemicise	mu, tau	= autum (FW)
chi, eta	= thecia	nu, nu	= nu-nu> (OED nu 1970q)
chi, mu	= Chimu>	nu, omega	= Mongeau (websites surname)
chi, nu	= Chiun (W2)	nu, phi	= unhip
chi, omicron	= chironomic	nu, psi	= Pinus
chi, pi	= pichi>	nu, rho	= Huron
chi, san	= chains	nu, sampi	= Pisanum (OED pisane etym.)
chi, tau	= Taichu (WGD)	nu, san	= sunna
chi, theta	= hatchite	nu, sigma	= amusing
chi, zeta	= zaitech (TCD)	nu, tau	= Autun (WGD)
delta, nu	= undealt	nu, xi	= Unix< (NODE)
delta, pi	= plaited	omicron, tau	= otocranium (W2)
delta, san	= eastland (W2)	omicron, theta	= monotrichate
delta, vau	= valuated	phi, pi	= hippie (websites)
episemon, rho	= mesonephroi	phi, zeta	= zaptieh (W2)
epsilon, eta	= epistolean (OED)	pi, pi	= pipi>
epsilon, tau	= epulations	pi, psi	= pipis
eta, eta	= aetate (durante minore aetate)	pi, rho	= Ophir (W2)
eta, mu	= autem (W2)	pi, san	= spain

eta, nu	= atune (W2)	pi, tau	= pitau>
eta, omicron	= craniotome	psi, rho	= ropish (W2)
eta, pi	= tapie (OED tabi)	psi, san	= spains
eta, psi	= pastie (OED)	psi, theta	= Peshitta (W2)
eta, rho	= Theora (NYB)	rho, sampi	= aphorism
eta, san	= ansate	rho, san	= shoran
eta, sigma	= sagamite	rho, tau	= author
eta, xi	= axite	san, sigma	= amassing
iota, rho	= Horatio (W2)	san, xi	= Saxin (OED)
iota, san	= Antaios		

Hippi is the abbreviation for High-Performance Parallel Interface.

What about English words that can be spelled out using the names of three Greek letters? Here are 35 combinations of Greek letters for which I've found real words and names. In theory there are 4500 different possibilities. Where there are multiple transposals, I have shown all the transposals I have been able to find, due to the increased rarity of such words compared with the two-Greek-letter words.

chi, eta, pi	= Pithecia
chi, eta, san	= Anchistea, Hanseatic
chi, eta, tau	= Auchattie (Geographica: Aberdeenshire county)
chi, iota, rho	= aithochroi
chi, mu, san	= humanics, inasmuch
chi, nu, san	= anchusin (W2), chunnias (W2), unchains
chi, pi, san	= Chinipas, Hispanic, Schipani (websites surname)
chi, psi, san	= Hispanics
delta, mu, pi	= amplitude
delta, mu, psi	= amplitudes
delta, nu, pi	= unplaited
delta, nu, psi	= dipneustal, spinulated
delta, psi, san	= displeasant
delta, psi, tau	= adstipulate, astipulated
epsilon, mu, phi	= Hipposelinum (W2)
eta, mu, psi	= tapesium (W2)
eta, mu, san	= manteaus
eta, nu, pi	= petunia
eta, nu, psi	= petunias, supinate
eta, nu, san	= nauseant
eta, omicron, psi	= anisometropic
eta, phi, san	= antiphase (W2), aphanites, Panesthia, Stephania (RHD)
eta, pi, san	= sinapate
eta, psi, rho	= Aisthorpe (Barth), atrophies, Tephrosia
eta, psi, san	= Apantesis, sinapates
iota, phi, san	= Siphoniata
mu, pi, san	= Pisanum (OED pisane etym.)
mu, psi, rho	= Phromius (Odyssey, name of a ship-owner)
mu, rho, san	= man-hours
nu, nu, nu	= nu-nu-nu (OED nu , 1970q)
nu, psi, rho	= Phronius (Odyssey, name of a ship-owner)
omicron, pi, theta	= photometrician (W2)
phi, pi, san	= hippians (FW)
psi, rho, san	= parsonish (W2)
psi, rho, tau	= outparish

What about English words that can be spelled out using the names of four Greek letters? Here are a mere seven combinations for which I've found real words and names.

delta, eta, phi, san	= pheasant-tailed (W2)
eta, mu, rho, san	= athermanous
eta, nu, pi, rho	= euphoriant
eta, nu, psi, rho	= euphoriants
eta, nu, rho, san	= anantherous (W2)
eta, pi, rho, san	= Phanariotes (W2), Shaitanpore (Mare)
eta, psi, rho, san	= Aristophanes (RHD)

I haven't been able to find any words spelled out using five Greek letters. How about words using five Greek letters plus at most two additional English letters?

beta, chi, pi, rho, san, OT	= Opisthobranchiate
beta, chi, psi, rho, san, OT	= opisthobranchiates
beta, chi, pi, rho, san, NO	= Siphonobranchiate
beta, chi, psi, rho, san, NO	= siphonobranchiates
chi, eta, mu, pi, san, OR	= Actinosphaerium
chi, eta, mu, rho, san, PR	= pneumatorrhachis (W2)
chi, eta, nu, pi, san, LT	= unpantheistical (RHD)
chi, pi, rho, san, zeta, IN	= antischizophrenia (various websites)
eta, mu, phi, rho, san, CR	= pneumatorrhachis (W2)
eta, mu, pi, rho, san, CI	= Actinosphaerium
eta, mu, pi, rho, san, O	= hemianatropous

Here is a dictionary phrase formed out of six Greek letters plus three added letters:

eta, mu, nu, pi, rho, san, ADI	= pseudo humanitarian (W2)
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Sources

W2 Webster's New International, Second Edition
 Barth Bartholomew's Gazetteer of the British Isles
 FW Funk and Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary
 Geographia Great Britain Road Atlas, Geographia 1972
 Mare *The Mare's Nest*, Rudyard Kipling
 NYB Name Your Baby, Lareina Rule
 NODE New Oxford Dictionary of English
 Odyssey Homer's epic poem
 OED Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition
 RHD Random House Dictionary
 TCD The Century Dictionary
 WGD Webster's Geographic Dictionary