

How to make a Linear B tablet: information for teachers

Materials needed:

- clay: pottery-grade clay will be the best for trying out different methods of tablet-making, but you could also use air-drying or modelling clay
- 'styluses': wooden skewers or toothpicks are an easy option (in fact, Mycenaean styluses had a curved flat blade, but this is hard to replicate)
- water
- string

This worksheet accompanies the video 'How to make a Linear B tablet', available at <https://www.bsa.ac.uk/videos/how-to-make-a-linear-b-tablet/>. After watching the video, which gives some more information about these tablets and shows some different ways in which they were made, your students can try out making tablets themselves. You might like to ask them to discuss questions such as:

- how easy/difficult do you find it to make a tablet using any of these methods?
- do you prefer one method of making a tablet? why? would you use different methods in different situations?
- apart from those mentioned in the video, what factors do you think might influence tablet-makers in choosing a particular method of making tablets? (e.g. time required, availability of space/tools... and anything else they can think of!)

Below is a worksheet intended to help the students write on their tablets, giving a basic explanation of how the writing system works and some examples of real tablets. You might also ask them to discuss questions such as:

- how easy/difficult do you find it to write on clay?
- what are some advantages/disadvantages of clay tablets for writing and keeping records?

Some further information on the tablet examples:

Pylos Aa 62 is one of a large number of tablets recording work-groups of women, girls, and boys, or of men and boys, located both in the palace of Pylos and around the palace's territory and carrying out a range of different jobs. They will have been either enslaved, or (almost) entirely dependent on the palace; some records list their monthly rations of grain and figs. The Mycenaean Greek forms of the terms on this tablet are *me-re-ti-ri-ja* = *meletriai* 'flour-grinders'; *ko-wa* = *korwai* 'girls'; *ko-wo* = *korwoi* 'boys'.

Knossos Sc 230 is one of a series in which each tablet records the issue of a suit of armour, a chariot, and horses to an individual man. The origin of the ideograms as pictures of each item is especially clear here. The broken sign *ZE* at the end is an abbreviation for *zeugos* 'pair'; we know from other similar records that the numeral 1 would have followed.

Knossos De 1112 is one of hundreds of records recording the sizes of flocks of sheep located all over Crete. Akmonios is either the shepherd looking after the flock, or an official ultimately responsible for them to the palace; *ku-ta-to* is the place-name, whose interpretation we don't know. The abbreviation *o* stands for *o-pe-ro* = *ophelos* 'missing'. The small stroke transcribed as , is a word-divider.

For more information on Linear B, including how it was deciphered, see (e.g.):

'The decipherment of Linear B', Cambridge Faculty of Classics website

www.classics.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/mycep/decipherment

'Linear B' on Mnamon, a guide to ancient writing systems in the Mediterranean:

mnamon.sns.it/index.php?page=Scrittura&id=20&lang=en#presentazione

'The decipherment of Linear B: people, process, challenges': bit.ly/2NzAJ0j (pdf download of a chapter written by me for an exhibition at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge)

For more information on my research, visit my blog www.itsallgreektoanna.wordpress.com

and find my academic articles at <https://hcommons.org/members/annapjudson/>.

Credits:

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Images: drawn by Anna P. Judson after the *Corpus of Mycenaean Inscriptions from Knossos* and a photograph taken in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

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How to write a Linear B tablet

The Linear B writing system includes two kinds of signs: syllabograms (signs standing for syllables, used to spell out words) and ideogram (signs representing objects or goods being counted).

Syllabograms

a	𐀀	e	𐀁	i	𐀂	o	𐀃	u	𐀄	a ₂	𐀅 (ha)	a ₃	𐀆 (ai)	au	𐀇
da	𐀈	de	𐀉	di	𐀊	do	𐀋	du	𐀌	dwe	𐀍	dwo	𐀎		
ja	𐀏	je	𐀐			jo	𐀑								
ka	𐀒	ke	𐀓	ki	𐀔	ko	𐀕	ku	𐀖						
ma	𐀗	me	𐀘	mi	𐀙	mo	𐀚	mu	𐀛						
na	𐀜	ne	𐀝	ni	𐀞	no	𐀟	nu	𐀠	nwa	𐀡				
pa	𐀣	pe	𐀤	pi	𐀥	po	𐀦	pu	𐀧	pu ₂	𐀨 (p ^h u)	pte	𐀩		
qa	𐀪	qe	𐀫	qi	𐀬	qo	𐀭								
ra	𐀮	re	𐀯	ri	𐀰	ro	𐀱	ru	𐀲	ra ₂	𐀳 (rya, lya)	ro ₂	𐀴 (ryo, lyo)	ra ₃	𐀵 (rai, lai)
sa	𐀶	se	𐀷	si	𐀸	so	𐀹	su	𐀺						
ta	𐀻	te	𐀼	ti	𐀽	to	𐀾	tu	𐀿	ta ₂	𐁀 (tya)	twe	𐁁	two	𐁂
wa	𐁃	we	𐁄	wi	𐁅	wo	𐁆								
za	𐁇	ze	𐁈			zo	𐁉								

Undeciphered signs

*18	𐁊	*19	𐁋	*22	𐁌	*34	𐁍	*47	𐁎	*49	𐁏	*56	𐁐
*63	𐁑	*64	𐁒	*65	𐁓	*79	𐁔	*82	𐁕	*83	𐁖	*86	𐁗

NB: lots of these signs stand for more than one sound-value!

j = *y*; *k* = *k*, *kh*; *g*; *p* = *p*, *ph*, *b*; *q* = *kw*, *kwh*, *gw*; *r* = *r*, *l*; *t* = *t*, *th*

In spelling words, final consonants are not written; two adjacent consonants are either written with a 'dummy' vowel or the first one is not written; *-i* after another vowel is not always written; *h* is not usually written.

E.g. *ti-ri-po-de* = *tripodes* 'tripods'; *da-da-re-jo-de* = *Daidaleyonde* 'to the sanctuary of Daedalus'; *pu₂-ke-qi-ri* = *Phugegwri* (name of an official at Pylos)

Try writing your name in Linear B! If you can't find a sign corresponding to a particular sound in your name, choose one that sounds similar in some way (e.g. there are no signs for *f*, so use *p*- = *ph*).

