Consonant Changes: Ain't Misbehavin'?

In Greek, sometimes consonants undergo changes when they come into contact with other consonants. This happens in English. For ex., the prefix *in-* indicates negation, and we see it in a word like *inability*, meaning "no ability." But when we add *in-* to a word that begins with the letter "m," *in-* changes to *im-*: in+mobile should become *inmobile*, but it actually becomes *immobile*. In+resistible should become *inresistible*, but it actually becomes *irresistible*. So, consonants in English, as in Greek, misbehave! But, there is some predictability to many of the sound changes, and I outline some important ones for you below that you need to start memorizing.

1. Labials + ς → ψ

    The labial consonants are π, β, φ, and so:

    π + ς → ψ
    β + ς → ψ
    φ + ς → ψ

2. Velars + ς → ξ

    The velar consonants are κ, γ, χ, and so:

    κ + ς → ξ
    γ + ς → ξ
    χ + ς → ξ

3. Dentals + ς → ς

    Unlike the two above, the result of joining these letters does not produce a letter with a double sound (ψ = ps, ξ = ks). Rather, the dental letter drops before the sigma. The dental consonants are τ, δ, θ, and so:

    τ + ς → ς
    δ + ς → ς
    θ + ς → ς

Note, #'s 1–3 above are part of your Noun Rule # 7, the Square of Stops.

4. Other sound changes:

ν + ς → ς

[The nu drops, and usually the vowel right before nu undergoes compensatory lengthening. Remember how the acc m pl of λόγος is really λόγονς? The nu dropped (λόγο-ς), and the omicro lengthens to the diphthong ου, resulting in λόγους.]

ντ + ς → ς

[The dental τ + ς combination causes the tau to drops, leaving νς. But we have just learned that the nu in νς also drops, leaving the sigma alone.]

final τ + -- → --

[This is another way of saying that when a word ends with tau, if you don't add any consonants to the tau, then the tau will always drop. I refer to this phenomenon as "throwing in the tau."] Note: this last one is your Noun Rule #8.