Guidelines for Vocabulary Learning: Vocabulary in 4 Dimensions

For each word you are learning create an “entry” to include the following information in your notes to help you learn every aspect of the word. Include more information on words you are least familiar with. It’s ok to include less information on words you know well. Creating an entry for each word will give you a “3 dimensional” understanding of the words. You can incorporate the 4th dimension of time to solidify your “4D” knowledge!

1) Keys to accuracy:
   - Write the word.
   - Note the correct spelling.
   - Note the correct pronunciation.

2) Keys to understanding meaning:
   - Write the part of speech (noun, verb, adj., adv, etc) and note suffix (if any)
   - Note other possible suffixes to determine other word forms of the word.
   - Note roots and prefixes that may help you remember the word and other words with the same root or prefix.
   - Write the definition. After you read and understand the dictionary definition, try to use words that are easy to remember to write your definition. Synonyms are helpful.

3) Keys to understanding use:
   - Find and highlight the sample sentence in which the vocabulary word appears.
   - Note synonyms (vast, immense, enormous) and antonyms (tiny, petite, small) and the context of use.
   - Note that the word in your list and some synonyms are only used in very specific situations, so pay close attention to this. (e.g., illustration, photo, diagram, cartoon).
   - Note collocations (words that “go with” the new vocabulary word). Ask a native speaker to use the word in a sentence. Search the Internet for use of the word in sentences. Use a corpus such as such as Corpus for Contemporary American English (COCA).
   - Note different contexts (situations) for use. Is the word used in everyday language? Is it a technical word? Is it specific to a particular field of study? Is it academic or commonly used by well-educated people? Is it used socially or as a slang word? Is it used only in this culture or in a specific setting such as the university?
   - Note register. Is the word used in formal, informal, or any situation?
   - Read additional sentences with the word being used in it. Try using a search engine or a corpus such as Corpus for Contemporary American English (COCA).

4) Keys to practicing:
   - Apply your knowledge by using the new word in a written sentence.
   - Try using your new word in a conversation.
   - Ask a native speaker if you are correctly using the word.
   - Use the word frequently across time until you feel confident it is in your personal vocabulary.