Enhancing Your Vocabulary

To make sure that you get the most out of your study time, start by setting realistic goals for yourself. You can't learn every single word in the English language, nor do you need to! Instead, focus your efforts on words that you will find yourself using more often.

- Focus on words you hear or see often
    - In articles you read
    - In lectures/class discussions
    - On tv or in movies
    - talking with friends

- Choose words that carry key meaning in things you read/hear
    - Can you understand the main ideas without knowing the word? Prioritize words that you MUST know in order to understand the general idea of a sentence.

- Learn the pieces that make up words
    - Common word roots
    - prefixes often qualify word (show negation, time, quantity, direction/position)
    - Suffixes frequently determine how word works grammatically (part of speech

- Take advantage of resources in systematic way
    o Consider investing in a dictionary of your own—have a hard copy on hand, not just online dictionaries.
    o Circle words you look up in the dictionary
    o Read the whole definition – words can often mean more than one thing; good dictionaries will give examples of usage, collects, idioms, etc.
    o Use a thesaurus in conjunction with good dictionary—synonyms can have different connotations/shades of meaning.

- Don't try to learn too many words at once
    o Too many at a time and you won't be able to practice using them in focused way
    o Practice new words as much as possible: several times per day
    o Try 2-3 per week?

- Process the words thoughtfully so that the depth of learning is better. Use techniques which encourage you to make a lot of associations with the words you are learning. For example, think of language contexts and situational contexts in which you could use the words.

- Space repetitions of words; this results in longer lasting memory. The best spacing is to review the words a few minutes after first looking at them, then an hour or so later, then the next day, then a week later and then a couple of weeks after that.

- Avoid interference between the words you are learning by choosing words which are spelled differently and start with different letters. Don't learn words with similar meanings at the same time. Words which look the same or share similar meanings are easy to confuse and make your learning less effective.

- Keep track of new vocabulary in organized form
    - Vocabulary book rather than only stray flashcards
    - Contextualize words: write a couple of (complex!) sentences with the word

However you select the words you learn, you'll want to make flashcards to practice them! To maximize the benefit you get from your flashcards, write cards that encourage you to learn the words in ways that promote deeper learning:

1. Put the vocabulary word in the middle of the card in a circle.

2. Put the abbreviation for its part of speech (n, adj, adv, v) below the word.

3. In the upper left-hand corner, write "Context" and copy the context (spoken or written) in which you heard or saw the word. Also put the source (citation).

4. In the middle of the right-hand side of the card, write "Meaning and Example," put the dictionary meaning *for your context*, and write an example sentence using the word.

5. In the middle of the left-hand section write "Related Words," and list words that come from the same root. Put their part of speech beside them. Not all words will have related words, but many will.

6. Don't make cards for words you already know! It's a waste of time.

7. Don't write in any other language on the front of the card. You may write a translation on the back of the card *in pencil* for difficult words. Later, when you know it in English, erase the translation.

8. Use a separate card for each word. This is so we can use them for games later.

Using the Academic Word List: To help you figure out which words to study, you may want to be aware of the Academic Word List.

- The Academic Word List is a list of the most commonly-used words in English academic writing.
- Divided into 10 sublists, with most frequently-used words on sublist 1, second most frequently-used on sublist 2, and so on.
- Useful to help focus vocabulary-building on words that will be useful to academic work
    - See if words they encounter are often used/worth prioritizing (in conjunction with West's General Service List)
    - basis for building vocabulary *alongside* work they read for classes/research

- Pair with lists of words specific to your discipline—Might ask advisor for list of words, or look at sites like http://www.uefap.com/vocab/select/selfram.htm, which has subject-specific lists in addition to GSL and AWL.
- And of course make note of/word cards/lists from unknown words you encounter in your reading.

And, finally, your vocabulary will benefit as much from learning the phrases in which your new words are used as you will from studying the words themselves. Pay attention not only to word lists, or to individual words you encounter, but to the collocations in which those words occur.

- What is collocation?
  - Words often used with other words—certain nouns, e.g., are paired with particular verbs or adjectives; certain verbs with particular verbs.
  - These are called 'collects'.
- When learning new words, taking note of the specific phrase in which you heard the word helps you learn its collects
- When you hear people use words that you are learning, ask them to repeat their usage
- So does its entry in a good dictionary, which will include collect-usage
- Practice using new words with their collects—you'll get a better grasp of not only what they mean, but how to use them in natural-sounding speech/writing.