Vocabulary Entry Generation Specification

Goal:
Produce a **single, self-contained "word story" entry** that teaches a student the meaning, history, semantic development, causal tensions, and idiomatic life of an English vocabulary word from its origin to the present. The format should be **narrative, chronological, and historically precise**, beginning with modern usage, then moving backward and forward through time.

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1. Opening Contrast

- Begin by **stating the modern English meaning** of the word clearly and contextually (1–3 sentences).

- Contrast this with its earliest known sense to foreground **semantic distance**.

- This section should set up the reader to see the historical evolution as a *movement from X to Y*.

Example:

"Today, *omit* is mostly neutral and textual — meaning to leave something out of a document, speech, or procedure. But in Classical Latin, the word had nothing to do with texts..."

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2. Chronological Story Section

Present the story of the word as a **chronological list of dated sentences**, each beginning with a **bolded date** (approximate century is fine if exact year is unavailable), followed by 1–4 sentences of narrative.

Each stage should include:

- **Semantic value** at that time (what the word actually meant).

- **Sibling words / root family** in the source language, with brief glosses (e.g., *permittere*, "to allow").

- **Cultural / legal / technological / discursive contexts** that create *tensions* or *niches* driving shifts.

- **How and why** the meaning moves (lexical competition, moral coding, technological change, etc.).

- Any **borrowings into other languages**, noting approximate dates of entry into English.

Sub-guidelines

- Use **short paragraphs per date** rather than bullet points, to keep narrative flow.

- Center **causal explanations**, not just descriptive shifts. Each shift should answer: *what changed in the world that changed what this word was for?*

- When describing root siblings, give both **form** and **meaning** to clarify their roles in the lexical ecology.

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3. Structural Explanation (Why the Shifts Happened)

After the timeline, summarize the **structural drivers** of the shifts in a short analytical section (5–7 bullet points or short paragraphs).
 This should synthesize:

- Lexical competition / family structure

- Cultural-moral frameworks

- Administrative/legal developments

- Technological shifts (e.g., printing)

- Discursive specialization (e.g., scientific prose vs. theology)

- Fossilization of older senses in idioms

Purpose: give the student a compact conceptual model after the narrative.

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4. Common Phrases & Collocations

List idiomatic or fixed phrases in which the word occurs, especially if they preserve older senses. Provide brief glosses where relevant.

Example:

- *sin of omission* — theological term for failing to do good

- *lie of omission* — moral idiom

- *errors and omissions* — legal formula

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5. Optional Addenda (if available)

Include, as separate sections only if relevant or helpful:

- **Synonyms / Antonyms** (modern English)

- **French and Russian equivalents** (with notes on when they emerge historically)

- **Usage example(s)** that reveal the modern meaning clearly through context.

(These can also be stored as separate fields in your database for flexible display.)

✅ Formatting Conventions

- Dates should be **bold** (e.g., **1st c. BCE**) and start each historical sentence.

- Italicize foreign words and phrases (*omit*, *omittere*, *permittere*).

- Use en dashes for ranges (e.g., **15th–16th c.**).

- Keep tone **clear, educational, historically serious** — not slangy, not overly academic.

- The entry should read like a **mini intellectual history** of the word, not a dictionary definition.

🧠 Why This Matters

This format trains students to:

- Grasp semantic drift and lexical ecology.

- See language as historically embedded, not static.

- Retain vocabulary more deeply by understanding *why* the word means what it does now.

- Notice cultural/technological shifts mirrored in language evolution.