Reading Strategies

**Vocabulary**: Unfamiliar words can make it difficult for you to understand the meaning of a text, but there are a lot of ways to try to figure out what the meaning of a word is. Here is a list of things to try when you encounter an unfamiliar word.

1. Try saying it out loud. Sometimes the word just looks unfamiliar to us, but it is a word we already know. Saying it out loud can help trigger our brains.
2. Context: Be a detective. Look at the words surrounding the word. Can you figure out whether the word is a verb, noun, adjective, or adverb? (more on this later). Look for words that you already know and then try to figure out what the word you don’t know is doing there.
3. Decipher: Words are just basically codes and you can decipher the code. Look for prefixes, suffixes and roots that you already understand. Use those as clues to figure out the meaning of the word itself.
4. Ask someone around you. It’s hard to admit that you don’t know something, but even the smartest people in the world have to ask questions. In fact, the smartest people in the world got to be so smart by asking questions. Asking questions doesn’t make you seem dumb; not asking questions does. Being smart is not about spitting out information that your teachers give you, it is about knowing what questions to ask to make information relevant to you.
5. Skip it: When you are reading something long, like a novel, just skip the word. Chances are that if the word is something that is very important to the plot, the author will explain it in greater detail later. If not, there are too many words for you to look up every one of them.
6. Look it up: Dictionaries are awkward. They are helpful, but sometimes they give you too much information or they give you a strange definition of a word (remember, words are not static and their meanings change all the time). Use a dictionary or just google a word, but be careful that you have the correct definition.