Word Attack Strategies

What do you do when you encounter a difficult or unfamiliar word while reading?

- Some people look it up in a dictionary. This is a good habit to cultivate, but there are certain disadvantages.
  - This disrupts reading fluency.
  - It is time consuming.
  - The dictionary may have multiple definitions, some of which have no application to this text.
- Some try to guess at the meaning by trying to see how the word relates to the other words in the sentence or paragraph.
- Others may try to break the word up into parts and try to analyze each part to guess the meaning of the whole word.

These are examples of word attack strategies. Word attack strategies help students decode, pronounce, and understand unfamiliar words. They help students *attack* words piece by piece or from a different angle. Strategies include:

1. **Using picture clues**
   a. Look at the picture
   b. Are there people, objects or actions in the picture that might make sense of the words in the sentence?

2. **Sound the word out (graphophonemic clues)**
   a. Start with the first letter or syllable and say the letter-sounds out loud.
   b. Blend the sounds together and try to say the word.
   c. Does the word make sense in the sentence?

3. **Look for chunks in the word (morphologic clues)**
   a. Look for familiar chunks or groups of letters.
   b. These may be sound/symbols, prefixes, suffixes, endings, whole words, or base words.
   c. Read each chunk by itself.
   d. Blend the chunks together and sound out the word.
   e. Does that word make sense in the sentence?

4. **Connect to a word or part of a word you know (semantic clues)**
   a. Think of a word or a word chunk that looks like the unfamiliar word.
   b. Compare the familiar word to the unfamiliar word
   c. Decide if the familiar word is a chunk or form of the unfamiliar word.
   d. Use the unfamiliar word in the sentence to see if it makes sense.
   e. If so, the meanings of the two words may be close enough for understanding.

5. **Reread the sentence (syntactic clues)**
   a. Read the sentence more than once
   b. Think about what word might make sense in the sentence.
   c. Use that word and see if the sentence makes sense.

6. **Keep reading (contextual clues)**
   a. Read on past the unfamiliar word and look for clues within the text.
   b. If the word is repeated, compare the two sentences where it is used.
   c. Think of a word that would make sense in both sentences.

7. **Use prior knowledge**
   a. Think about what you already know about the subject, sentence or paragraph.
   b. Do you know anything that might make sense in the sentence?
   c. Reread the sentence with the unfamiliar word to see if it makes sense in light of your new understanding.