

Avoiding Mistakes

Regardless of the race of the class you play in *World of Warcraft*, **you** are human. Humans make mistakes. It's just how we work. Practice, knowledge and planning all go towards *reducing* the inevitable mistakes we will make while raiding.

Mistakes can be hilarious or deadly, something to laugh about or something that will earn you a seat on the bench. No one, not even the best raiders, are immune to mistakes. There are three particularly memorable mistakes I've made that I'll share with you, just because I want to prove to you that *everyone* makes mistakes.

- 1) The Bloodboil Incident.** Picture it, Black Temple, late 2008. My raid group and I are working on getting Gurtogg Bloodboil down. All of a sudden, I'm dead and I don't know why. I figured it was some mechanic of which I wasn't fully aware. Then, our tank, complained that he couldn't move, couldn't use any of his abilities... and then it dawned on me: I had cast Divine Intervention on him. DI was a spell paladins had that would allow us to make another player immune to damage and remove them from combat, while killing us instantly. Yup. I had cast DI on the tank in the middle of a pretty good Bloodboil attempt. My old raid members *still* mock me for that.
- 2) The Festergut Incident.** It was my very first night raiding with a new guild during *Wrath of the Lich King*. I was just starting my trial. We'd worked our way through several bosses in Icecrown Citadel without incident and I was enjoying myself. I had taken a few minutes to edit a couple of keybinds just prior to the Heroic Deathbringer Saurfang encounter, which was completed easily. We then headed to the Plagueworks to kill Heroic Festergut, Heroic Rotface and normal Professor Putricide. I was informed that the tanks would swap once the first tank had reached nine stacks of the Gastric Bloat debuff. I nodded in approval, since if anyone reached the tenth stack, there would be a huge explosion that would kill the tank instantly and would almost certainly wipe the raid. Well, the second tank taunted and, being the proactive player I tend to be, I cast a cooldown on the tank, Hand of Sacrifice. Well, I did cast that, but when I'd edited my keybinds beforehand, I had accidentally *double-bound* that particular key combination. Casting Hand of Sacrifice was Ctrl-Right-Click for me, but I had accidentally *also* bound Hand of Protection to that bind. Due to the way Hands work, Hand of Sacrifice was cast but was then immediately removed by application of Hand of Protection. Hand of Protection, unfortunately, renders the target immune to physical damage, so a boss

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like Festergut immediately turned to the second-highest person on threat that he could beat on. That was the tank with 9 stacks of Gastric Bloat. A moment later, the tank blew up the entire raid by hitting 10 stack. It took looking through the logs to figure it out, but once I did, I apologized to the raid for my error and then quickly changed my bind for Hand of Protection to something else entirely.

3) My One and Only Elevator Death. During the *Cataclysm* expansion, there was an elevator in the Blackwing Descent instance. If you were impatient and leapt from the elevator's platform, you would fall to your death, unless you had various tools at your disposal such as Levitate, Slow Fall, Ice Block, Divine Shield or Hand of Protection. As a paladin, I routinely jumped off the elevator prematurely, hit my bubble (Divine Shield) and lived. On a particularly difficult near-kill of Heroic Chimaeron, I used both my Divine Shield and my Hand of Protection as we reached the second phase of the encounter and Chimaeron began running around trying to kill everyone. Without even thinking, as I was running back after the wipe, I hurled myself off the elevator platform and hit my button for Divine Shield – which was on cooldown. I panicked and tried to cast Hand of Protection on myself. It was also on cooldown. I had about three seconds to live with the realization that, after months of chiding people for dying due to being impatient with the elevator, I was about to crater. Obviously, I crashed into the ground, killing myself instantly. I'm pretty sure the raid cheered. To this day, my armory profile is permanently scarred by having a "1" next to **Deaths to elevator boss (Blackwing Descent)** in my statistics.

I'm sure everyone has similar stories of wipes, causing wipes, silly deaths and other mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes. Overcoming our tendencies to make those mistakes is where half the fun is found. So how can we minimize the mistakes we make? The answer is simple: by being *more aware*.

Awareness is an interesting category because there is *so much* of which you, as a raider, need to be aware that it's kind of silly to even try to group everything under "awareness". So let's break that down some more.

- **Encounter Awareness**

Hands down, the most important thing, as a raider, is to be aware of what the encounter you're facing entails. There are so many ways to get information about the fights in a raid that there's really absolutely no excuse for not being aware of how a fight works. None. This is what used to really get to me, as a raider and as a raid leader. How do you set foot into a raid without knowing what the fights are like? To me, not being prepared or aware of the fight mechanics was the cardinal sin of a raider. If I went through the trouble of

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reading strategies (or writing them, in many cases!) and you couldn't be bothered to do the same thing, how can I rely on you? How can I depend on you? If you don't know that, for example, Hagara puts up a water shield to protect herself every so often and around the outside of the shield, Ice Waves circle her platform, then how can I rely on you to stay alive during this period of time? I can't.

As a former raid leader, I saw this time and again in my raids. It was obvious who hadn't read the strategies I'd written or linked to and it was obvious who *had* done their homework, particularly on a new fight. (Chances were good that if someone was on the ground eating dirt, they didn't do their homework.)

Here are some quick links to resources to help you be prepared for raid encounters.

- Icy Veins (<http://www.icy-veins.com/raids-wow>): This site currently has strategies for all the *Cataclysm* and *Mists of Pandaria* raid encounters, from a variety of perspectives.
- Wowhead (<http://www.wowhead.com>): While this is mostly known for its item databases and other tools, check out the articles on each boss, plus the specific abilities the bosses (and their adds) can cast. This is best used in conjunction with a well-laid out strategy like those at Icy Veins. (Don't forget to read the comments, they can be quite helpful!)
- Wowpedia (<http://www.wowpedia.org>): A detailed site that will usually have basic strats available, this is another great resource that will also usually link to some other resources, plus will usually list hotfixes applied to the boss encounter.
- Healer CDs (<http://www.healercds.com/>): I actually have never personally used this site, but it seems to have a good amount of raid strategy guides for both normal and heroic modes as well as healing-specific guides, which is a great help for both healers as well as raid leaders who might be wondering how to organize their healers when figuring out the strategy.
- Various forums, including MMO-Champion (<http://www.mmo-champion.com>) and the official Blizzard *World of Warcraft* forums.
- Your guild's forums. If your guild posts their own strategies to your guild forums, make sure to read those first, even if you know the fight from doing it with another team. Everyone does things slightly differently!

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- TankSpot (<http://www.tankspot.com>): Although it seems a little out of date, TankSpot used to be *the* premier strat site. Over time, it's changed but you can still check out their forums for some raiding guides.
- YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/>): Searching YouTube for a strategy video for your particular encounter and raid size is bound to bring up several results unless you're on the cutting edge of progression and, even then, videos from the Public Test Realms may show up.
- Public Test Realms: The most dedicated raiders will tend to spend time testing raid encounters on Blizzard's public test realms (and beta servers, prior to an expansion) so that they can learn all they really need to learn on the test realm before the raid launches and they can go forth and plow through normal modes on the live servers without much difficulty. While my guilds have *generally* not taken advantage of PTRs and the like, I did spend a bunch of time testing out various Ulduar encounters (Flame Leviathan and Hodir, in particular) and the experience was quite useful for my raid team when we hit those encounters on the live servers.

The trouble is that even *after* having read up on the encounter, after preparing yourself to the best of your ability, there's still the potential of making mistakes. Even people who know that, for example, the outside portion of the Lich King's platform will occasionally crumble and fall away, will sometimes screw it up and end up dead during the encounter. The best way to combat problems with encounter awareness is the use of what are commonly called "boss mods".

Boss mods are addons that are installed with your game that basically tell you what is happening in a given boss encounter. There are timers for various boss abilities or add spawns, there are warnings if *you're* being targeted with a specific ability, plus range finders (in the case of encounters where you want to keep a certain distance between you and others). As boss encounters become ever more complex, boss mods become more necessary. It's quite likely that the encounter designers know that most raiders use boss mods and, which means that they can raise the complexity of the encounters, knowing that we have these addons that warn us of various impending dangers.

The main boss mod that most people seem to use is Deadly Boss Mods (aka DBM, <http://www.deadlybossmods.com/>). Other alternatives include Deus Vox Encounters (aka DXE, <http://www.wowace.com/addons/deus-vox-encounters/>) and BigWigs (<http://www.wowinterface.com/downloads/info5086-BigWigsBossmods.html>). I've used all three at various points and my personal preferences are DBM running with DXE's timers showing and some special alerts done through DXE. I've always found DXE's timers to be a smidgen more accurate than

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DBM's and, on certain encounters, DXE's customized alerts have saved me (and my raid group) a lot of frustration. (Vengeful Shade spawns on Heroic Lady Deathwhisper was a prime example of this, since when you were targeted, it was usually too late for you to run away, whereas if you knew where they were when they spawned, you could easily outrun them.)

I want to underline the fact that while boss mods are essentially required for most encounters, they do *not* replace your pre-raid preparation of reading and research. You will minimize your mistakes by being aware of how the fight goes and then will minimize *even more* mistakes by using a boss mod.

- Environmental Awareness

Environmental awareness is the bane of many a raider. Part of the challenge of raiding is doing your maximum output (healing, DPS, threat, whatever) while not standing in stuff.

Anyone who knows the rotation for a class can pull decent numbers for their level of gear while standing at a training dummy. But how well can people do those same decent numbers while dodging fire? Slime? Void zones? Spinning death lasers? This is another place where you, as a *kick-ass raider*, can distinguish yourself from the rest of the pack.

- Zoom Level

It might seem as though it's just common sense, but one of the most shocking mistakes a lot of players make is that they play while being very zoomed in to their characters.

Look, I'm *sure* your armor is pretty and shiny and stuff, but you don't need to see just how pretty and shiny it is in the middle of the raid. There is no reason, as a raider, to play while being zoomed in on your character either most or all of the way. None. Doing so restricts your view by an insane amount. How on earth are you going to see what's happening around you if you're zoomed all the way in to a first person perspective?

The key to the "proper" zoom setting is simple. Ask yourself this question: Can I see my character's feet and up to a few yards *around* my character's feet?

If so, that's great. You're probably good to go when it comes to seeing environmental effects on the ground.

If not, zoom out until you can.

Here's a tip: the default zoom is *not* as far out as you can go!

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Type this in your game client to be able to zoom out more:

`/console cameradistancemaxfactor 5`

If you don't like that extra zoom, to return to the default, type this:

`/console cameradistancemaxfactor 2`

Now, it's true, when people think of "environmental awareness", they tend to think about "stuff on the ground that can or will kill you". However, that's not all there is to environmental awareness.

- Moving Dangers on the Ground

Anyone who ever did the Archimonde fight in Mount Hyjal during *Burning Crusade* knows exactly what I'm talking about when I talk about "moving dangers on the ground". I'm talking about stuff like Doomfire. Doomfire was a trail of fire that might not have actually targeted people, but grew and spread around the fight area at random. If you're facing a fight like this one, one of the most important things you can do is to keep an eye out for this kind of effect and *not* let yourself get penned in by it! Slime puddles (that grew!) on the Professor Putricide encounter gets filed under this as well. Sartharion's Lava Wall, despite being a fairly tall wave, is definitely one of these, too!

- Other Players

During the *Wrath of the Lich King* expansion, there was a fight called the Blood Prince Council in Icecrown Citadel. One of the abilities one of the princes (Prince Valanar) used was Shock Vortex, which cast Shock Vertices near random raid members. A Shock Vortex would be cast and explode beneath you and throw you around the room. On heroic, this was particularly bad because if you moved, you got a damaging debuff on you. The point here is that your raid wanted to spread out to minimize the damage (and knock backs) taken by the raiders. If you were too close to someone and got a Shock Vortex on you, they would *also* be affected by the Shock Vortex and you would *both* be flung halfway across the room. (Avoiding Shock Vertices was not really possible, due to the short cast time, so if you were targeted by one, you knew you were going to be thrown across the room.)

As such, you wanted to be no closer than 12 yards to anyone else, period. You would think that, with the range finders that come with most boss mods, standing too close to other people would be a rare happening. You would be wrong.

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I cannot *tell* you how many times I went flying across the Blood Prince Council room because of *someone else's* Shock Vortex that blew me up. In fact, I asked my raid leader in Vent once if I could have permission to yell at people who blew me up. She granted me permission, so I freely admit that I did some yelling, which only made *more* people hug me during the encounter because they thought it was funny...

There aren't a *ton* of fights where you need to be a certain distance from other players, but whenever it happens, you really need to make sure you aren't crowding others. Not crowding people is actually a big part of being environmentally aware.

- Add Spawns & Missiles & Projectiles, Oh My!

As if watching where your feet are and being aware of people standing near you wasn't enough, the other major things you need to keep an eye out for are the spawning of adds and missiles. Let's tackle adds first.

On various boss encounters, new enemies will occasionally be summoned by the bosses. Generally, they wreak some havoc on the raid before being killed, but most of the time, these additional mobs need to be held by a tank. If you accidentally do something to draw the mob's attention to *you* before a tank has picked up the mob, you will probably die. This is especially important as a healer or as someone who uses a lot of Area of Effect (AOE) spells. Healing draws aggro from mobs and even just clipping a mob with a damaging AOE spell can be enough to have that thing turn around and hit you in the face.

A great example of this was when my guild was working on Lady Vashj in Serpentshrine Cavern. During Phase 2 of this encounter, four separate types of adds would spawn. Only two of them, the Coilfang Striders and the Coilfang Elites, cared about aggro. Well, there I was, healing merrily away, on the eastern side as my side-specific team of DPS tried to keep a handle on the water elementals spawning, when a Coilfang Elite spawned practically on top of me. A Coilfang Elite was not a happy mob. A Coilfang Elite was a particularly large Naga with a particularly wicked-looking scythe as a weapon that tended to take pleasure in bashing people in the face with the scythe.

I thought for sure I was about to die because I was so close to the mob and I'd just finished a heal, drawing his attention to me. Yet, miraculously, I didn't die because one of our tanks, Dayden, taunted the mob off me (well, actually, he cast Righteous Defense on me, but that's just me being pedantic) and you can clearly hear me say, in the audio recording of the encounter, "oh my God, thank you, whoever just saved my life!"

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The thing is, you can't always rely on a well-timed taunt. The best thing to do is to be aware of *when* the adds are spawning (thanks to boss mods keeping track of these things for you) and then to *watch for them*. If you know where the add is when it spawns, you can make better decisions in the moment. If it's on the other side of the room, you can carry on as usual. If the add is practically on top of you, you probably want to take that opportunity to run away a bit before doing anything else.

Similarly, missiles and projectiles can be a problem. For simplicity's sake, let's define "missiles and projectiles" to mean "crap that targets people, flies through the air and hits people who are too silly to move", although that's not always entirely the case. For right now, though, that definition will do.

One example of missiles in boss encounters is the Malleable Goo from the Professor Putricide encounter in Icecrown Citadel.

During the Professor Putricide encounter, a player would be targeted with Malleable Goo and then had to dodge the missile (or projectile). The only warning you would get would be from your boss mod, letting you know that one of the goos had you as a target. It was up to you to watch for them and start moving in the right direction so as *not* to be hit by goo. There were no ground effects to help show you that you were being targeted or where the goo was going to land. You *had* to watch for the flying goo.

Another example was the Shadow Crash from the General Vezax encounter in Ulduar. Periodically, General Vezax would cast Shadow Crash on a particular individual and throw a shadowy missile at that person. The only warning they had was that they had been targeted. Granted, he only threw out one Shadow Crash at a time (versus two or three Malleable Goos on Putricide, depending on difficulty), so it was a bit easier to avoid, but people *always* seemed to get beamed in the head with this. Honestly, I'm sure it's because people weren't zoomed out enough to see the direction of the missile as it was launched by Vezax. (In their defense, he was a pretty tall mob, so being able to see both your feet and his head was occasionally difficult.)

Possibly one of the more difficult things to master when it comes to this kind of environmental awareness was Heroic Majordomo Staghelm's Leaping Flames ability in Firelands. During the fight, Staghelm would occasionally turn into a large, fiery cat, when fewer than a certain number of players were within a certain range of him. So when we wanted Cat phase, we'd spread out.

As a cat, he would have an energy bar, similar to rogues or, more appropriately, a feral druid. Each time his energy hit 100, he would leap on a player at range, leaving a *huge* flaming circle on the ground. The only warning a player had for this was from the boss mod and usually, by the time your boss

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mod called it out, it was too late. If you weren't already moving, you were going to get hit by the fiery circle if you (or someone near you) was targeted. On heroic, taking any damage would remove the Concentration buff. The Concentration buff was a heroic-only mechanic which ramped up to grant you 25%, 50%, 75% and eventually 100% output. With a strict enrage timer, it was imperative that everyone do their best to maintain their Concentration. As such, while learning this fight, I insisted my raid group watch the timer for the next Leaping Flames ability and *start running away* with about two seconds left on the clock. Personally, I know this worked extremely well for me and, once I got past the initial learning curve, I rarely got hit by a Leaping Flames circle.

Another example, although slightly different, was the Rocket Strike ability from the Mimiron encounter in Ulduar. While it was another projectile, it *did* give a ground effect, so if you could see your feet, you could see that you were standing in the area in which the Rocket Strike was expected to hit. In my experience (bearing in mind I haven't seen Tiers 14-16), this is the more common type of missile you'll encounter. Raiders also saw this type of dodgeable missile, with a graphical warning on the Halfus Wyrmbreaker fight in Bastion of Twilight during *Cataclysm*. The Proto-Behemoth, who was flying just off Halfus' platform could, based on which other adds were available during that reset, throw a Fireball Barrage on the raid in 8-yard-wide circles. Unless one of the adds (the Time Warden) was freed from its shackles, these fireballs were impossible to dodge. Once freed, the Time Warden would slow the barrage, so you would get a graphical warning of where the fireball barrage would drop, giving you some time to move out of it.

The goal, with all of these types of projectiles and missiles, is simply to be *aware* of when they're going to launch and to check to see *where* they're heading. Are they going for you? Are they going for someone *near* you? Are there other dangers nearby? The best way to avoid the imminent danger is to keep an eye on your timers and then watch for specific warnings from your boss mod and know *where* you should run if you're targeted. Or, in the case of Majordomo Staghelm, to know to run *before* you could possibly be targeted.