

Gear & Professions

There are a few different ways to look at your character's gear:

- 1) A fashion statement (hello, transmogrification!)
- 2) A reward for a job well done
- 3) A necessary piece of the progression puzzle

The best raiders recognize that while option one is fun (and even profitable!) and option two can be satisfying, it's generally the third option that allows them to push forward. Didn't get your "best in slot" trinket? No matter, there's another raid tier on the horizon. That doesn't mean that these best raiders don't work hard or try to maximize their chances for the pieces of gear they believe will serve them best in forthcoming content, mind you, because they do.

When the Looking for Raid tool came out at the same time as Patch 4.3, which introduced the Dragon Soul raid, even heroic raiders who had fully cleared Heroic Firelands went running to the Dragon Soul LFR in order to snag a piece of tier gear (even though, at 384, it was probably 7 item levels lower than their heroic Tier 12 gear, which was 391) to help them get the appropriate set bonuses more quickly. Even more so, new weapons and trinkets from the Dragon Soul LFR, even at a lower item level, were often much more powerful than the weapons and trinkets gained in Heroic Firelands, due to the chance of various random effects (known as "procs") happening, or other bonuses. The LFR version of a mace for healers, the Maw of the Dragonlord, just 390 in terms of item level, was vastly superior to the heroic version of another healing mace, Vagaries of Time, which was 410. Why? It was due to the simple fact that every cast of a healing spell had the chance to trigger ("proc") Cleansing Flames, which was a frontal cone healing effect. As such, the Heroic Vagaries of Time had no chance against the Maw, not even with a 20 item level disparity between them.

Paragon, one of the top guilds in the world at the time, even allegedly found a way to glitch things so that their raiders could get loot more than once from the same bosses in LFR during the same week. This led to a quick hotfix, the removal of gear from people found to be abusing this exploit and bans ranging from 3-8 days in length, depending on the severity. It's clear that, despite its target audience being the casual raider, LFR has its fair share of heroic raiders running it for a variety of reasons, but gear was a huge part of it.

Why is this? Quite simply, the best raiders aren't content to sit on their laurels and wait for the next reset. They're out there exhausting *every single possibility* for a chance at that next upgrade, which will increase their damage done by a

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fraction or will allow them to cast just one more healing spell before running out of mana or will let them take just one more hit from a boss before keeling over.

In general, the best way to gear yourself up is to, well, have continuously played and raided on your choice of raiding characters from the start of the expansion, to be honest. That way, you hit the level cap, dive into your heroic dungeons, followed by raiding. You'll start raiding at one of the difficulties available to you (either LFR, Flex or Normal) and then, should you so desire, you can move up to the next level once you complete each level of difficulty or, realistically, until you reach the difficulty level that's too hard for you (or your group). Then, a new raid tier comes out and, once again, it's a scramble for progression – and gear.

If you haven't been raiding continuously, or you've decided to change your main raiding character to your undergeared alt, that's where some work comes in. Happily for you, in the late stages of an expansion, loot is plentiful.

You've Got the Gear: Now What?

Of course, just getting the gear you want doesn't mean your work is done for the day, oh no. You then need to *optimize* your gear through reforging and you need to *enhance* your gear with enchantments, gems and (if applicable) profession perks.

First of all, don't just reforge your gear blindly. That will get expensive, quickly. What you want to do is use a reforge calculator, such as WoW Reforge (<http://www.wowreforge.com>) or Ask Mr. Robot (<http://www.askmrrobot.com>). I know that Ask Mr. Robot has occasionally gotten a bad rap due to its seemingly bizarre stat priorities, but the team works hard to make things easy with videos, diagrams and such to try to help you out, so I'd still recommend them. The problem is that how these two sites weigh your stats may be different. If you have no idea what stats you ought to be going for, that's when you go back to the drawing board and do some research. If you have a haste breakpoint, for example, you can factor that in and you can use sites like these to specify a certain cap for that stat and then give that stat *no priority* beyond that cap. That works great for something like hit and expertise, too. So be aware of your stat priorities (which will undoubtedly change at some point during the expansion) and then use these tools intelligently.

Next up, using gems. Ideally, you should plan out how to use your gems while you're figuring out reforging so that you don't need to return to the reforging afterwards, but that kind of depends on how you're using your gems. Early on in an expansion, if you're a DPS, you are almost certainly going to try your best to up your levels of hit (and expertise if you're melee or a hunter). Believe it or

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not, getting to your caps for hit and expertise are your number one priority in the vast majority of cases for DPS classes and specs.

But Kurn, hit and expertise don't increase my LEET DAMAGE!!!! Isn't that a waste?

It might seem like it, and for some classes it can be, but for the most part, if you're a DPS, you want to aim to cap your hit and expertise. For a melee class or a hunter, that's 7.5% hit and 7.5% expertise. For a caster, you're looking at 15% hit. (Incidentally, expertise will count as hit for a caster, so if you have a piece of gear that already has hit on it along with another stat, you can reforge the other stat to expertise and you'll be treated as having more hit. This is great at low levels of gear. Spirit also grants hit to shadow priests, balance druids, elemental shaman and mistweaver monks.)

Why is this important, though? Well, allow me to tell you a story.

Picture it, Gruul's Lair, September of 2007. Apotheosis of Eldre'Thalas has defeated the High King Maulgar encounter for perhaps only the second time and all twenty-five raiders advance down the hallway towards Gruul, the Dragonkiller, with a healthy sense of trepidation. While the group knows the basics of the fight, they have absolutely no idea what's in store for them...

The Gruul fight had Gruul self-buffing himself with "Growth" every 30 seconds. It increased his damage done by 15%. After, oh, say, 10 grows, you're looking at 150% increased damage. Ideally, you wanted to kill him before then, so you had about five minutes before things started to get *really* difficult for your raid.

Would it surprise you at all, then, to know that on that particular night, we had several attempts lasting in excess of **seven** minutes? With, you know, up to 20-something Grows.

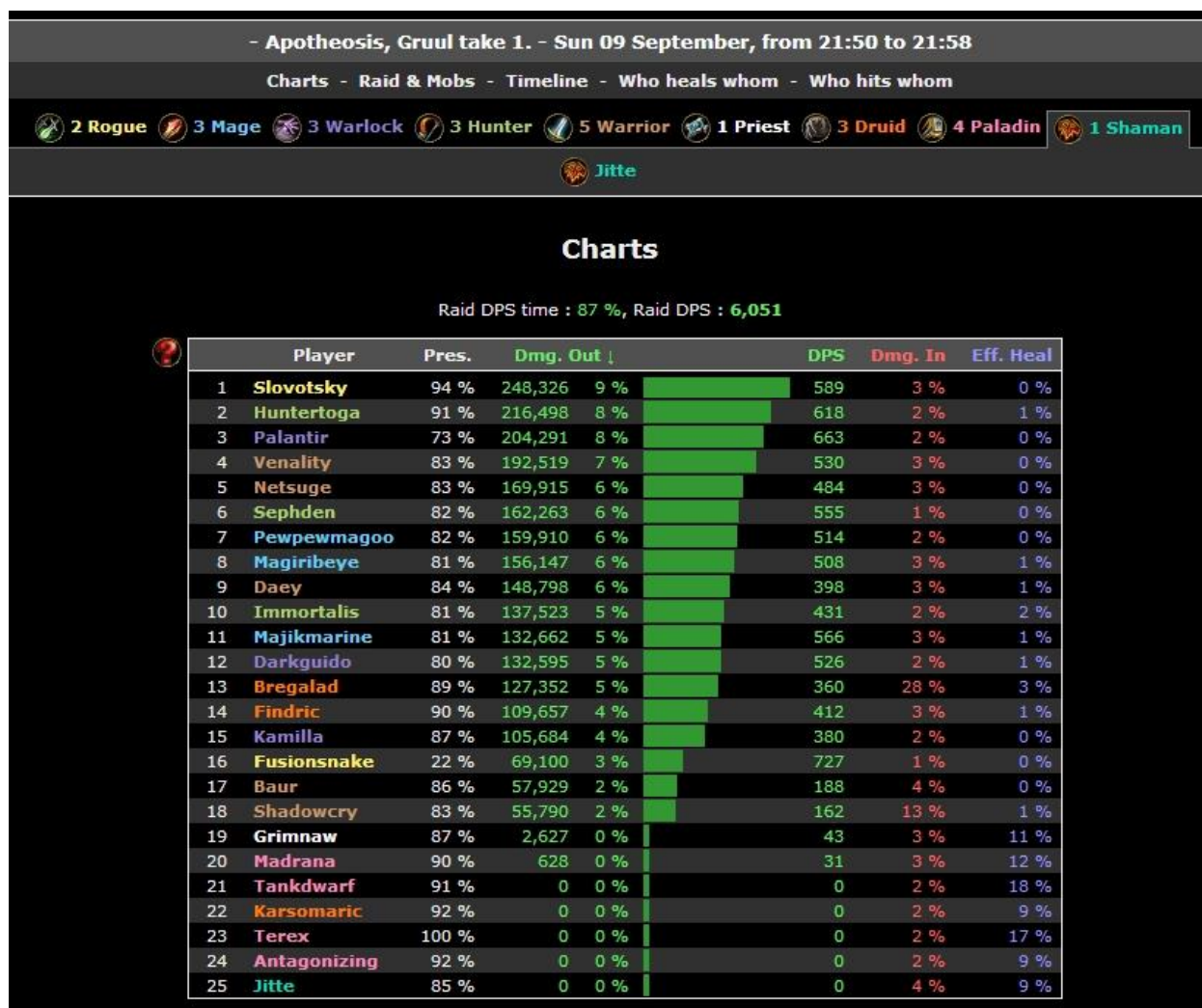
Attempt 1: 8 minutes. Overall raid DPS: 6,051.

Attempt 3: 9 minutes. Overall raid DPS: 5,974.

Attempt 4: 7 minutes. Overall raid DPS: 7,345.

Clearly, we were missing something. We had several wipes beyond the 10 grows mark. Why wasn't our damage up to par? What were we missing? Well, as it happens, we were missing *the boss*.

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I started logging with WoW Web Stats that night, September 9, 2007, and it changed *everything*. I was able to see that my brother (raiding as his rogue, Slovotsky) was doing 589 DPS, and topping the charts, but...

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 Slovotsky														
Present from 21:51 to 21:58 (94 %)														
DPS time : 7mn (98 % of presence), DPS : 589														
Damage dealt to foes : 248,326 (9 %)														
Damage received : 51,191 (3 %), heals received : 45,552, overheal on this player -12 %														
Effective heals on friends : 5,034 (0 %)														
Dmg. Out														
	Total	%	Hits	Avg	Max	Ticks	Avg	Max	Crits	Avg	Max	Crit%	Miss%	Resist%
Melee	125,221	50 %	136	274	444				120	572	933	34 %	22.3 %	0.1 %
27 % glancing			93	206	350									
Mutilate	80,610	32 %	92	607	949				16	1545	2060	15 %	5.3 %	
Deadly Poison VII (Nature)	24,521	10 %				126	194	230						4.5 %
Shatter	15,863	6 %	10	1586	2935									
Eviscerate	6,948	3 %	4	1136	1183				1	2402	2402	20 %		
Rupture (Physical)	6,164	2 %				24	256	293						
Ambush	2,714	1 %							1	2714	2714	100 %		
Romulo's Poison (Nature)	2,148	1 %	9	238	310								25.0 %	13.0 %
Heals														
	Total	%	Hits	Avg	Max	Ticks	Avg	Max	Crits	Avg	Max	Crit%	Overheal%	
Master Healthstone	5,034	71 %	2	2517	2746								0 %	
Seal of Light	2,081	29 %	8	260	395								100 %	
Dmg. In														
	Total	%	Hits	Avg	Max	Ticks	Avg	Max	Crits	Avg	Max	Crit%	Miss%	Resist%
Normal	39,366	77 %	12	3280	22392								25.0 %	
Physical	11,825	23 %				3	3941	5938						

He had an astonishing 22.3% miss rate on his white melee hits! And 5.3% on Mutilate. Plus, an insane 27% glancing blow rate! Now, obviously dual-wielders have always been at a disadvantage in terms of hit, but this seemed excessive. That's when I started reading about hit. To that point, I had only ever used "hit gear" on my hunter during the Magmadar fight in Molten Core, to ensure that my Tranq Shot hit and dispelled the enrage. It never really dawned on me that there was any kind of "hit cap" to reach. I started reading.

About an hour later, I wrote to my guild on the forums and posted the hit cap for *every single class*, including alternate hit caps based on talents and racial bonuses. I instructed them that a 4% wipe, such as we'd experienced on Sunday, was due primarily to our lack of DPS, which, in turn, was due to *not hitting the boss enough*.

Our next raid was the following Tuesday. I told my guildies to be hit capped, or as close to it as possible, before the raid if they wanted to see Gruul dead.

Fusionsnake, one of our rogues, took my advice to heart and *regemmed everything for hit*. His personal DPS shot up from 656 DPS (on an attempt where he was alive for most of the fight) to a whopping 850 DPS! His misses dropped by 5%, his glancings even dropped a couple of percentage points.

Our raid DPS *skyrocketed* from 6,051 to **8,859**. That was with absolutely no new upgrades. It was pretty much all due to hit! Instead of soul-crushing 4%, 2% and even 1% wipes, we actually killed Gruul that night. Everyone's DPS

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went up, the boss went down and the entire guild was sold on the idea of “hit rating”.

Back to gems, now that storytime is over. I was talking about attaining your hit and expertise caps. Because the item budgets on your gear are *so low* at the start of an expansion, it's considered “okay” to use hit and expertise gems (or, ideally, hybrid stat/hit or stat/expertise gems) to reach your required caps. However, going forward, you'll find it a lot easier to reforge gear into hit (and expertise) and you may even be horrifically over your caps in the late stages of the expansion. That's okay, as long as you've done everything you can to rid yourself of extra hit and expertise. As such, once you're out of dungeon blues, you probably don't want to gem for hit or expertise, unless you're really stuck. Nor do you want to enchant for these stats unless you're desperate. Why? It's because your caps for those stats should be easily attainable via reforging and, with a reforging calculator, you'll waste the minimum amount of stats in reforging. That leaves all of your sockets and enchantable pieces open for beefy stats that will increase your throughput or whatever stats you happen to be chasing, depending on your class and spec.

Next up, enchanting! I know they can be expensive, but trust me, you want the best enchants you can get. What is “the best” will, of course, depend on your class and spec, so research that, but don't be cheap. This is your gear! You want it to be in tip-top shape so that you're always capable of giving your best performance.

While I'm on the subject of enchanting, let's also talk about run speed. For your boots, you should have an enchant on them that increases your run speed. In *Mists of Pandaria*, the ones you want to look at using are Enchant Boots – Pandaren's Step (140 mastery, 8% run speed) and Enchant Boots – Blurred Speed (140 agility, 8% run speed). Of course, if you already have a speed enhancement through something like talents, you should feel free to pick up another enchant, but the key is that your speed enhancement should be *persistent*. It shouldn't be on use. Dash and Sprint are great, but they have cooldowns and aren't terribly helpful in terms of a persistent speed boost. By contrast, the paladin talent Pursuit of Justice, even with 0 Holy Power stored, gives a 15% speed boost, going up to 30% if you have at least 3 Holy Power stored.

Why should you have a passive, persistent run speed increase? It's simple. Sometimes, when raiding, one tick of damage from an environmental hazard (like fire) is the difference between living and dying. The faster you move out of the crap on the floor, the less damage you're going to take. Not only that, but the faster you move, the less time is spent moving, even if it's just fractions of a

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second. That allows you to get back to what you *should* be doing – dealing damage, healing and tanking – more quickly.

You're probably not wholly convinced. That's okay, I get it. Let's go back, then, to the Trial of the Crusader, back in the autumn of 2009.

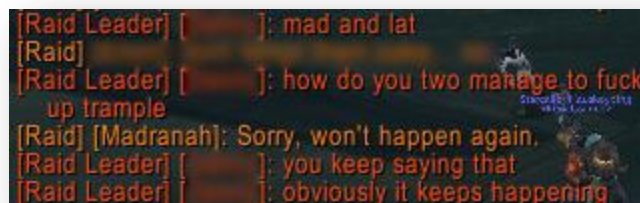
The first fight in Trial of the Crusader was the Northrend Beasts. First, you faced Gormok the Impaler (and his snobold friends). Then, the twin worms of Acidmaw and Dreadscale. Finally, the third and final portion of the encounter was Icehowl. I'll ignore the use that run speed increases had for Gormok (running snobolds to the melee) or the worms (getting out of fire and poison, ferrying fire to the poison tank) and just skip right to Icehowl.

Every so often, Icehowl would cast something called "Massive Crash", which would fling the entire raid from wherever they were standing to being right up against the walls of the room. It would also stun everyone for a short time. While everyone was stunned, Icehowl would move to the center of the room and randomly select one of the raid members to charge. He'd then back up a bit (to get a running start) and charge the spot where his target was standing with an ability called Ferocious Butt. If anyone got hit by this, they would instantly die and cause Icehowl to enrage. If he hit no one, he'd hit the wall and be stunned, taking extra damage for a few seconds.

On Normal mode, players received a speed buff as soon as the stun wore off and Icehowl started backing up. This made avoiding the charge pretty simple, once you figured out the timing.

On Heroic mode, no speed buff was given.

I didn't really accept run speed augmentations as *necessary* until I faced this fight on heroic and got killed. Repeatedly. Here, witness me (as "Madranah") getting chewed out by the raid leader/guild master of the guild I was in at the time.



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That's when I realized how important even 8% extra run speed was. I've made it a point never to raid without it since that incident. Now, hopefully, neither will you!

Okay, lesson learned, so let's talk about profession bonuses. The crafting professions all give bonuses that are roughly equal to one another, but the important thing is you have to be of a certain level in that profession in order to make use of them. If you have 17/600 Leatherworking, for example, you're not going to get the Fur Lining Bracer enchants. You have to be 575 in Leatherworking to get the maximum bonus.

As to which professions to take, that's kind of up to you, but I have to highly recommend using two crafting professions. You can have alts to do your herbalism, skinning and mining for you. As my paladin, I raided with Alchemy and Jewelcrafting as my professions, giving me the Mixology bonus (extra stats and duration from flasks) and two special jewelcrafter-only gems with beefed up stats. My shaman alt was, subsequently, an herbalist and a miner. My hunter, Kurn, was a skinner/leatherworker, because I didn't raid much on Kurn and felt I didn't need the second crafting profession on that toon. You'll find that many of the best raiders will have two crafting professions to maximize the bonuses. Extra crit, extra haste (on-use) and extra stamina, which are the bonuses for skinning, herbalism and mining respectively, are *rarely* useful compared to the major stat bonuses the others provide.

Having said that, it's important to, you know, *make use* of your profession bonuses. On more than one occasion, I can remember not using the proper number of special jewelcrafting gems. Jewelcrafters need to use both their special gems. Enchanters need to enchant *both* of their rings. Leatherworkers need to make sure they have their bracer enchants. Blacksmiths need to ensure they have their extra sockets in bracers and gloves. Engineers need to ensure their tinkers are applied. Tailors need to enchant their cloaks. Scribes (not inscriptionists, *scribes*, people!) need to use their special shoulder inscription. Alchemists, well, you kind of have it easy – just remember to flask!

There's one other profession I haven't talked about, because it's a secondary profession, but for a raider, it's still somewhat important. That profession is *Cooking*.

Don't get me wrong, I loved Cooking. A lot. I had three max-level cooks. I had two characters with the title "Chef" (before achievements and everything merged) and had three characters with the chef's hat from Dalaran. I have spent *a lot of time cooking*. That said, cooking in *Mists of Pandaria* was enough to drive me away from the profession. It was easy for me to mostly ignore, since I wasn't raiding in *Mists*, but if we're going to talk about being a truly kick-ass

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raider, you need to know how to cook your preferred 300 stat food. That's right. I said *300* stat food. 275 isn't maximizing your performance, although it may help to maximize your overall time. However, they have introduced Noodle Carts and "Pandaren Treasure Noodle Carts" give you 300 stats.

Still, it's important that you be self-sufficient, as much as you can be. It'll set you apart from others. Even if your guild gives you flasks and food and potions and everything, being able to provide your own 300 stat food is fantastic and, in my opinion, shows a certain dedication to both your character's advancement as well as your performance. Even better, if you're able to provide Noodle Carts for your raid team, that's really going above and beyond what most people will bother to do. You can also buy your food off the Auction House, but that can get expensive. 500 gold for a single stack of 300 stat food is not uncommon.

I'm not saying that you *have* to go level up cooking and do all the ridiculous things they want you to do for the maximum stat food, but to be a truly kick-ass raider, you probably want to get around to doing that. Oh, and also pray to whatever entity in whom you may believe that they change cooking back to not be ridiculous with all the different "ways" in the next expansion...