

World of Warcraft: Quest Types Generalized Over Level Groups

Max Evans, Brittany Cariou, Abby Bashore

Writ 1133: World of Rhetoric

Abstract

Examining the ratios of quest types in the game World of Warcraft provides a foundation for researching the motivation behind Blizzard's quest breakdown and how it is influenced both

by the game's setup and players. Using a sample of random quests categorized into generalized groups, as well as defined level groups, to give a generalization of the ratio of our selected quests. Given how little research has been done in the past, we believe this will open new paths of research into Blizzard's reasoning and motivation in the game.

Introduction

It's no secret that the popular online multiplayer game known as World of Warcraft has become one of the most influential pieces of video game history. As a whole, video games have had a large impact on the way players view and confront the real world. It is important to look at these video games and critically examine them in order to continue advancing the video game medium. World of Warcraft specifically is quite a rich game, as it is layered with multiple gameplay mechanics such as raiding dungeons, player vs. player combat, and pet battles. This paper will be analyzing the 'questing' aspect of World of Warcraft, and what impact it has on the game as a whole, as well as the world of video games.

Even though World of Warcraft is an online game to be played with thousands of other people, there is a very large Player versus Everything (or PvE) aspect. Simplified, this is the single-player version of the game, where the player can go around exploring the map, slaying monsters, and collecting resources. While players can do this without any sort of structure, it is highly recommended that they do so with what the game calls a 'quest'. Simply put, a quest is a task a non-player character in the game offers to a player's character. If completed, the non-player character will give the player's character better equipment or money. These tasks can vary from slaying several fierce ogres, to collecting some mushrooms for research.

In the past, there has been research on quests and their categorization [1, 2], as well as research which uses quests as a category for studying player movements [3]. There has also been

research on how to change the game-play or quests to generate more player interest [4, 5, 6]. These research papers range from how quests are similar throughout other MMORPG's, what impact players have in the world when they do questing, and how non-player characters affect questing, respectively. These are similar to this paper, as they all looked at the questing aspect of World of Warcraft, and how they either affect the player, the world, or other games. However, there has yet to be any research done on how quests change over the course of the game. By looking into this aspect of the game, it will be similar the other research papers, as it will shed light on how the quests affect the player's experience. The goal of this research paper is to highlight these in-game quests and see how they change over the course of play.

Since quests make up a critical part of the game mechanics in World of Warcraft, it is important to analyze them and see how they change fundamentally as the player advances. By looking at this specific gameplay element in World of Warcraft, it will be much easier to see just what overall effect it has on the rest of the gameplay elements. Similarly, since World of Warcraft is such an influential game in the video gaming industry, it will be much easier to see the effects it has on other video games (and even other forms of media).

Through analyzing the data of the number of quests in the game, as well as researching previous studies, this research paper will be answering the question as to whether or not the ratio of killing, exploration, and gathering quests change as the player's level increases, and why the results are significant.

Methods

World of Warcraft is a popular massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) which focuses on following quest-lines to gain experience and knowledge in the world of Azeroth.

To achieve a better understanding on what types of quests are offered, we referred to wowhead.com, a secondary WoW website that offers a database of information on quests, items, characters, and so on. For this research, we focused on looking at all quests offered in certain level ranges defined as: Beginner (levels 1-10, n = 200), Low (levels 11-49, n = 200), Medium (levels 50-79, n = 200), and High (Levels 80-99, n = 200). Quests in the Beginner range usually aim to teach players the basics of the game (e.g., how to move, how to use abilities). In the Low range is where players tend to level up the fastest. Dungeons are more prevalent in the Medium level range, where it is hardest to level up, and raiding becomes an option for leveling once it becomes unlocked. High level players are usually in guilds, where they focus social interaction through participating in dungeons, raids, and scenarios.

Through each level range, we searched for and recorded data on 800 quests total (200 for each of the four categories), categorizing them in the following categorizations: Killing, Gathering, and Exploring. While looking at killing quests, we found quests that fit into two different types of killing quests: Pure Killing, which has the player kill creatures in the current environment, and Kill and Gather, where players kill creatures and gather supplies the creature had, or parts of their body. Gathering quests also fell into sub-categories: Pure Gathering, in which players collect items in their current environment, and Profession-Based Gathering, where items gathered are strictly for the players profession (e.g. skinning animals for the skinning profession). Exploring quests provide two types of exploring: Flight Master, which players found the flight master of a typically new environment to unlock a new flight path, and Finding Someone or Something, in which the player has to travel a certain amount to distance to speak to a person or find an item in an neighboring environment. These six specific categories were generalized into the three original categories (Killing, Exploring, and Gathering) for data

analysis purposes. This generalization stems from the fact our question asks specifically about killing, exploring, and gathering quests. The sub-categories are more definitions than actually categories—distinct rules as to what gives a quest the ‘killing’ label. For example, if a quest asks for seven animal hides, this would be a ‘Kill/gather’ quest. At the end of the day, the ‘kill’ label would take precedence and this quest would be generalized under that category.

In our research, we excluded any dungeons, raids, player-vs-player, and World Events (e.g. Darkmoon Faire in which players attend a festival to collect special items). These quests do not follow the main quest-lines, and are usually offered to retrieve extra items, and extra boosts in experience. Although many high level players tend to participate in dungeons and raid more often, there are also quests that players may choose to follow, and we take these quests into consideration.

Results

To examine the ratio of quest types between level groups, we first need to examine the ratio of quest types within each group. To do this, we used the numbers for each quest category versus the level group and graphed our data (figure 1). This graph shows our numbers in a visual format that is easier to understand when analyzing the breakdown of quests both within and between the groups. Along with the graph, the tables (tables 1 and 3) show the numeric breakdown of quest types within each group by their broad category, as well as the breakdown of quests in the six specified sub-categories (tables 2 and 4).

Within Level Groups

We found that the number of quests within each level group are far from equal. In the Beginner group, exploring quests have the largest number, double the number of killing quests and making up almost half of that category’s quest type. The Beginner group (levels 1-10) aims

to lead players in a ‘tutorial’, where players spend their time learning the game’s mechanisms and uncovering as much of the map as possible (which makes future gaming all the more feasible). Therefore, the percentages of quests (K= 21.5%, E= 48%, G= 30.5%) that we found makes sense. Gathering quests in this category outnumber killing quests, which again seems justifiable by looking at the level range of the players. As many gathering quests conclude with monetary rewards, this suggest Blizzard set this ratio for the purpose of helping new players gain gold faster, as well as to give them a solid working knowledge of the game before starting the higher leveled quests. The fact that there are less killing quests here suggest that Blizzard is “easing” players into the next level group by letting them do tasks which will help them accomplish the repetitive killing-based quests which predominate the higher groups.

This trend changes in the Low group, where the number of killing quests outnumber gathering and exploring quests combined (K= 57.5%, E= 17.5%, G=25%). The Low level group (levels 11-49) is often the group in which players are able to level their characters the fastest (the most levels achieved in the least amount of time). As such, the quest ratio most likely has something to do with this trend. Killing quests yield experience- both from killing mobs and from turning in the quest— whereas exploring and gathering quests only yield experience from turning in the quest. With so many killing quests available, it could allow players to ‘grind’ with ease, and thus gaining levels is easier here than the other level groups.

In the Medium group, the ratio of quests take a drastic turn with exploring quests increasing by a factor of two and both killing and gathering quests decreasing. This result makes sense as the Medium group seems the hardest to level up in. While killing quests are still the majority in this level group, there are less than in the Low group (a decrease from 57.5 % to 45.5%). As stated before in this section, exploring quests yield far less experience than

‘grinding’ with killing quests, meaning that players in this level range will need more time and effort to level. It is in this level group that raiding and dungeons become frequent in game play. In this group, players are also transitioning to areas where they are not familiar with the layout of the map. World of Warcraft divides the ‘continents’ into playable ‘zones’ which each have their own minimum level requirement (for example, the Duskwood zone has a player level of 20-25). As a player transitions into the Medium levels of the game, they must re-explore their surroundings to aid their questing and travels in the game. This zone also introduces the “other worlds” playable in World of Warcraft: Pandaria and Northrend, for example. As the player “unlocks” these areas, these too need to be explored as high level characters will often return to these lands for the daily quests they offer.

The High level group shows little difference than the Medium level group, with gathering quests increasing slightly. This increase causes the killing quests to decrease in response. As level increases, so does the number of profession based quests. This is where the rise in gathering quests comes from. This suggests that, as the player approaches end game, Blizzard adds more gathering type quests, perhaps for one of two reasons: to give the player more quests that yield gold (from making the items) as well as experience, or to prepare the player for the endgame where questing no longer matters and raiding, dungeons, and professions dominate the game.

Across Level Groups

By comparing the number of quests across the four categories using percentages, it’s clear that the imbalance of quest type continues across the level groups. The use of these ratios also reveals a startling revelation for an MMORPG: the killing quests has the smallest ratio of the three quest categories over every level group. Considering the game often deals with killing, this seems counter-intuitive. However, one of the categories we did not consider were the quests

based off dungeons and raids. Especially in the higher level groups, raids, dungeons, and battlegrounds become an integral part of gameplay. As the game shifts to focus more on these instances, the number of quests becomes less important and the same general breakdown is kept through the level groups. However, the number of quests in the ‘end game’ do not necessarily decrease — while raids and dungeons are generally seen as important, players can chose to play the game in whatever way they wish.

| | Killing Quests | Exploring Quests | Gathering Quests | Total Quests |
|----------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|--------------|
| Beginner Group | 43 | 96 | 61 | 200 |
| Low Group | 115 | 35 | 50 | 200 |
| Medium Group | 91 | 72 | 37 | 200 |
| High Group | 86 | 73 | 41 | 200 |

Table 1: Number of quest recorded in each category.

| | Pure Kill | Kill/Gather | Uncover Map | Find someone/ thing | Pure Gathering | Gather by creating | Total |
|----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|---------------------|----------------|--------------------|-------|
| Beginner | 26 | 17 | 13 | 83 | 53 | 8 | 200 |
| Low | 79 | 36 | 1 | 34 | 50 | 0 | 200 |
| Medium | 55 | 36 | 11 | 61 | 36 | 1 | 200 |
| High | 65 | 21 | 2 | 71 | 41 | 0 | 200 |

Table 2: Types of Quests(Specified) by number

| | <i>Killing Quests (%)</i> | <i>Exploring Quests (%)</i> | <i>Gathering Quests (%)</i> |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Beginner Group</i> | 21.5 | 48 | 30.5 |
| <i>Low Group</i> | 57.5 | 17.5 | 25 |

| | | | |
|---------------------|------|------|------|
| <i>Medium Group</i> | 45.5 | 36 | 18.5 |
| <i>High Group</i> | 43 | 36.5 | 20.5 |

Table 3: Types of Quests (generalized) by percentages.

| | Pure Kill (%) | Kill/Gather (%) | Uncover Map (%) | Find someone/ Something (%) | Pure Gathering (%) | Gather by creating (%) |
|----------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Beginner | 13 | 8.5 | 6.5 | 41.5 | 26.5 | 4 |
| Low | 39.5 | 18 | 0.5 | 17 | 25 | 0 |
| Medium | 27.5 | 18 | 5.5 | 30.5 | 18 | 0.5 |
| High | 32.5 | 10.5 | 1 | 35.5 | 20.5 | 0 |

Table 4: Types of Quests(Specified) by percentage

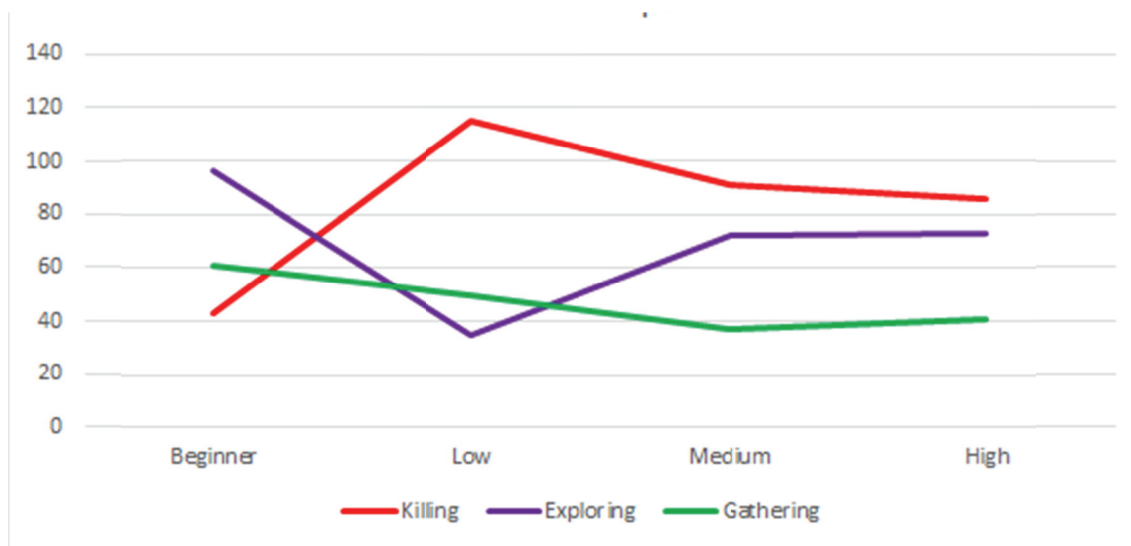


Figure 1: The change in Killing, Exploring, Gathering Quests over Level Groups

Conclusion

By looking at the results of the study, we are able to conclude that there are some definite changes in the quest progression system in World of Warcraft. Our study has looked at a set number of quests for a set number of category, and has allowed to visualize the noticeable

changes that take place as the player advances through the game. By looking at the raw, randomly picked, data of the game through websites like Wowhead, we were able to get accurate and unbiased results.

However, this study did not look at a few other variables that may or may not have changed our data. One of these variables is that we only used randomly selected quests for our data. While randomly selected quests allows for unbiased data, it may not accurately represent exactly how many types of quest are in each category, as randomizing the quests chosen to study may leave out some crucial data points that may have tipped the scales. Another variable that we did not account for is how we set our categories for the Beginner, Low, Medium, and High level groups. While we did have some semblance behind it (i.e., these seemed like accurate amounts where leveling was relatively similar inside each category), but there may be something we are not aware of or did not account for, such as something happening midway through the Low group quests that change the way the player accepts quests dramatically? Another somewhat complex variable that we didn't account for when looking at all the quests was that we only used general questing that you use in the mainland, as in no dungeon or raiding quests. Since we decided to forgo these quests in order to get the specific results of mainland questing, we have missed important numbers for each kind of quest in each specific category (i.e., Low level groups could have a large influx of dungeon quests, thus explaining why there are few exploring quests).

While there may be a few pieces of information that are missing that might affect our data, it still accurately shows how questing changes over gameplay advancement. Future studies of a similar topic should look at the percentages of each quest by category. For instance, why do killing quests have such a lower ratio than collecting or exploring quests? Future studies should

also look at all quests, including dungeon and raiding quests, as well as looking to see how a player's progression affects if they do mainland, dungeon, or raiding quests on average. While players may not have any idea that the game is subtly changing itself as they advance through the quest lines, the developers of the game has definitely properly thought out the best types of quest for each specific part in the game.

References

1. Walker J. A Network of Quest in World of Warcraft. *Electronic Book Review*. 2008 Apr 20; N.V: N.I.: 1-5.
2. Rettberg J. *Quest in World of Warcraft: Deferral and Repetition*. MIT Press. 2008; 167-183.
3. Yee N, Ducheneaut N, Shiao H, Nelson L. *Through the Azerothian Looking Glass: Mapping In-Game Preferences to Real World Demographics*. N.j. 1- 4.
4. Doran J, Parberry I. *A Prototype Quest Generator Based on a Structural Analysis of Quests from Four MMORPGs*. 2nd International Workshop on Procedural content Generation in Games. 2011; 1-8.
5. Tomai E, Salazar R. *Simulating Adaptive Quests for Increased Player Impact in MMORPGs*. *AIIDE*. 2012; 185-190.
6. Grey J, Bryson J. *Procedural Quests: A focus for Agent Interaction in Role-Playing Games*. *Proceedings of the AISB 2011 Symposium*. 2011; 1-8.
7. Anonymous. *Quests*. Wowhead. N.j. N.d.