

Sohrsa's guide to the art of tanking

Disclaimer

This guide will not tell you what buttons to push, or what talents to take. Those things are dependent on class and the latest patch. This guide attempts to rise above that. However, it is coloured by my own experiences playing World of Warcraft as a human warrior. If that makes this guide worthless to you, so be it.

Lesson 1: You are the group

There is no time to waste for the first lesson. You are a tank, and without you the group does not exist. The dps may hurt stuff, and the healer may keep all of you alive, but you, the tank, are what binds those elements together. You are always in the center of the action, and your decisions affect everyone else. Remember that, and act like it.

The list

There are four things the tank needs to worry about:

- aggro
- the pull
- crowd control
- position

Note that surviving is not on the list. Keeping you alive is the healer's job. Of course, he will appreciate it if you make this easier for him.

I will assume that we are talking about a group with a tank, a healer and three dps. This is the group that teaches you how to tank. Once you accomplish that, bigger raids follow naturally, but the underlying principles remain the same.

Aggro

Every mob attacks the character that has the highest aggro towards it. It's your job to ensure that you are that person, for every mob, *every mob* in combat.

Some will say that the highest priority is to keep mobs off the healer. This is incorrect. A

mob may run towards the dps, but when the hunter feigns death it will turn towards the next target on its aggro list. Too often, that target is the healer. And the healer must survive if you want the group to live.

Every tanking class has ways to generate aggro from single and multiple mobs. Single mobs are easy, it should be no problem to keep aggro then. Only fights with groups of mobs are problematic.

One tactic when dealing with groups is to inflict continuous area damage (as much as your class allows). This makes most mobs equally difficult to pull away from you, except your own target (who gets extra aggro from your attacks).

A second tactic is to switch targets often. This allows you to divide your higher aggro attacks over the mobs that need it, but it requires a lot of clicking and selecting that you may not have time for. Sometimes, however, it's the way to go, especially when you are ambushed or the situation is likewise chaotic.

The third tactic is to train your group. If you do this, you can expect them to attack your target (through either assisting or marking). This means you can keep the mobs on you with a minimum of area damage, but focused aggro.

Of course, there is one moment when aggro is more difficult. This is because all aggro starts at zero. And that leads us to the next subject on the list.

The pull

The pull starts the combat, and it determines a lot about where and how it is fought. Therefore, you should always be the one to pull.

There are different ways of pulling. The most basic is the body pull. You walk towards the mobs until they notice you, and the fight is on. This gives you a minimum of aggro, and virtually no control over what is going to happen.

A ranged pull does the same thing from a distance. Melee mobs will come towards you, casters and hunters mobs will join the fight from where they stand.

Most classes have a way of charging a group. This delivers you at the group's location. A

charge followed by an area attack generates instant aggro to all the mobs, and is a standard pull for many tanks.

A last class of pull is the los-pull, short for line-of-sight-pull. This is essentially a ranged pull, after which you duck out of sight, forcing the mobs to come to you. This delivers not only the melee mobs, but also the caster mobs to the party. However, bear in mind that caster mobs will start casting a spell at the very instant they are pulled. When you get in cover, they will first finish their spell, and only then follow the other mobs towards you. In these moments your aggro towards them is very fragile, and the dps can very easily cause chaos.

The biggest single complication in choosing a pull is the existence of casters among the mobs. Most tanks, most of the time, want to keep the mobs together for easier control so charging seems logical. However, there can be patrols of mobs, there can be little room for the fight, line-of-sight issues for the healer, etc.

There are rare other pulls, like traps or misdirection from a hunter, shackle or sheep pulls, or missed saps. In these cases, on the one hand you must do area aggro as soon as possible, and on the other you must not break the crowd control that pulled. And the dps will still blame you if you fail. When you fail.

Simply put, there are always multiple solutions, and the choice depends as much on play style as tactics and common sense.

Another realisation you should have by now, is that you should always have a plan before pulling. It doesn't have to be an elaborate strategy telling everyone where to be, but it should at least take into account which mob you want to kill first, and where you will do that. Don't worry, this will become automatic soon enough. One thing that may help is crowd control.

Crowd control

Crowd control (cc) is the general term for temporarily incapacitating a mob so that it is no longer involved in the combat. Game mechanics

change all the time, but classic examples are the wizard's sheep, the rogue's sap, the priest's shackle undead, the warlock's banish and the hunter's freezing trap.

To use cc, it is vital to know what the ability does. What mobs will it work on, how long will it last, is it renewable and can it be performed in combat? Answers to this will shape your plan for the fight. Know your party.

An important point to remember is that even though most characters can perform crowd control, players vary widely in their approach. Healers especially tend to feel it's taking them away from their real duty. There are also many players who simply don't care for it. Asking your companions to do something they don't like is a step on the road to disaster. **Know your party.**

If you do decide to ask them for cc, it's a good idea to mark the mobs for it. Not only does it clarify to them which target they must neutralise, it also tells other players not to damage that mob. Almost all damage breaks cc.

The use of cc influences your choice of pull. Since damage breaks cc, combining it with a charge and area damage is a bad idea. Because of this, the usual tactic is to use a ranged pull, which separates the melee from the casters, and use cc against the casters.

Remember that a ranged pull grants less aggro and more tenuous control than a charge. It requires more trust towards your party members, more skill. Maybe that is why personally I dislike the tendency of some tanks to simply charge everything.

Another aspect of cc is your lack of aggro. Since cc is often used at the start of combat, you will have no aggro towards neutralised mobs. When they wake up, they will often first target their personal nemeses, or worse, the healer. However, by this time you should already have dealt with several mobs and there should be ample time to taunt them.

A more esoteric use of cc is to break groups up in parts. To do this, use a form of crowd control that does not itself initiate combat, such as the rogue's sap or the hunter's wyvern sting, on a

mob in the middle of a line of mobs. Since this mob is neutralised, mobs on its left side won't aggro from a pull of the right side of the group. Note that this is hardly foolproof, but it can be fun to try when faced with a hard pull.

Position

This is where the guide gets fuzzy. Position is not so easy to define.

According to some there are three levels of awareness. One is awareness of yourself (your tanking skills), one is awareness of your surroundings (your party skills and behaviour of the mobs), and one is awareness of the terrain (patrols, timed events and such). I have written in the disclaimer that I will avoid to describe specific class abilities, and terrain awareness can be learned from any walkthrough. The key here is awareness of your surroundings.

A combat is more than just the components. The characters not only just tank or heal or dps, they also predict each other's actions. Most people actively try to work as a team. You can make that easier. To do this, first you have to watch.

When you tank, zoom out your camera, I suggest as far as possible. What I do, is to use the keyboard for most of my actions, and my right hand on the mouse to keep looking around me. This tells me what's around me, **and what the party is doing**. I may not know the ins and outs of their classes, but after a while I get a feel for their actions. For instance, I notice the difference between a heal-over-time healer and a big-heal healer. If I am lucky, I can predict when the mage overaggroes with his area damage and has to icecube. I can then be between the mobs he just lost, and the healer. I can keep track of hunter and warlock pets, both easy to mistarget. By watching this, I can (hopefully) be in place for a threat before it happens.

Also, it teaches you the sort of things your party-members do when they are in trouble. Some dps-characters are sensible enough when they have aggro to not flee, but to bring their mobs back to you. This means you can depend a bit more on them. Some warlocks play with

fearing a mob and then dispelling their own fear just before the mob aggroes new groups. This kind of info tells you when they need help, or when you can leave them be for a moment. This sort of awareness is invaluable, and probably impossible to teach.

There are always many more details to learn, but I hope these insights will help a bit. And please don't hesitate to ignore my advice if it doesn't work, or post a correction where I'm wrong. And keep your shield up.

Notes

Many players place great value in damage meter addons, such as omen. It is a good idea to use such an addon, but a bad idea to look at it too much. It is useful for the dps to see how close they are to pulling mobs off you, but for you it's better to judge the situation itself. Let the others worry about the numbers, your job is to keep them alive. Install the addon only so they have a benchmark of your aggro.

"Everybody's got a plan until they get hit" - Mike Tyson

You can look at it as an offense and defense in a football game. The offense (the mobs), can try lots of times to kill you, and it doesn't matter if they fail. But for you the reverse applies. You are the defense, and you must get it right, you can't fail even once.

Be wary of stairs. If you fight on top of the stairs, and the healer is down below, then it only takes a few steps to be out of line of sight of the healer. Then the healer must move up towards you to heal you, and he will be way too close to the mobs you're fighting. Be very wary of stairs.

"Know your enemy and know yourself and you can fight a hundred battles without peril. If you are ignorant of the enemy and know only yourself, you will stand equal chances of winning and losing. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you are bound to be defeated in every battle." - Sun Tzu

You will notice that melee dps will sometimes

tank mobs off you. This is not always a bad thing, and sometimes even very useful. They can not take the punishment you can, but some can come very close for a while. Rogues, for instance, can dodge almost everything for 15 seconds or so. Some rogues, when they see you taking damage, will take a single mob for a moment to make your job easier. This is not a disaster because they don't move the mob away. It will take only a moment to get it back. However, don't count too much on this. Whatever they think of themselves, the dps are not made for taking damage. You are.

When in doubt, tank the mobs so that they face away from the party. Not only are most mobs more vulnerable that way, it also means that the party doesn't get hit by breath weapons and the like.

Likewise, it can be an advantage to back up to a wall. Enemies that have knockback will throw you into the air, and a wall prevents that. Not only does it prevent damage, but in the air you sometimes lose aggro, making the mobs run away and turning the combat into chaos.

"Tanks are the chosen people" - Sohrsa

Some of your abilities will have cooldowns. The length of these cooldowns says a lot about how to use them. For instance, a cooldown of 1 minute says basically: "Use me once every combat". Longer cooldowns are for emergencies, and those shorter can be used for standard pulls and attacks. This depends of course on how long your combats last, and how dangerous the instance is for the party.

I would suggest using the key binding settings to get hotkeys for the marking symbols. This saves an incredible amount of time, and if you are reading this, then you already know how easily parties can be killed by impatient gnomes.

As another use, it can be a good idea to always use the hotkey for the skull to mark your personal target. This does not affect the global cooldown, and shows the group where your focus is. I use F12 for the skull myself.

I should thank my fellow tank Azzur for telling me about these hotkeys.

An option is pulling with a shout ability. Shouts

cover an area, but do no damage. This also means they inflict negligible aggro. However, they can still come in handy at times.

Second disclaimer

This guide is not well written. I apologise. I lost an earlier version, and didn't want to spend too much time doing it over again.

Besides, I am not a writer.

I am a Tank.