

HCI Usability & Accessibility Project Report

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Name of Website: **Wowhead**

URL of Website: <https://www.wowhead.com/>

Primary Function of this Website:

The reason why people visit **Wowhead** is the single most comprehensive and indispensable database and knowledge base for the people that are playing in World of Warcraft (WoW) it's more "**WoW Google**" than "**Wiki**".

Introduction



In this report, I will evaluate the usability and accessibility of **Wowhead**, a website used by WoW players to search information about the items, quests, guides, and game information. The goal is to see how easy the site is to use and how well it supports people with different accessibility needs, including users with vision and other difficulties.

To do this, I will test the site using several of **Nielsen's Usability Heuristics**, highlighting areas where Wowhead works well and areas where it could be improved. I will also use tools like **Google Lighthouse**, included in browser **debug features**, and manual checks to identify issues that may prevent some users from fully accessing and enjoying the site.

By the end of the report, the reader will have a clear picture of Wowhead's strengths and weaknesses and how it's usability could be improved.

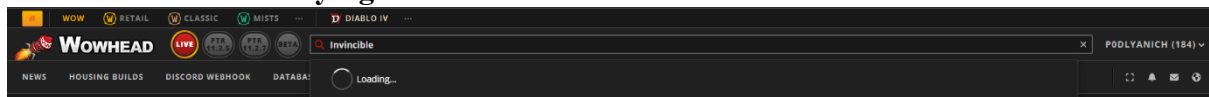
Usability Assessment

In this section, I selected **five heuristics**, where **Wowhead's** developers did a good job, followed by five areas where the site could improve. For each example, I describe what the user is trying to do and explain why the design helps or causes problems.

Good Examples

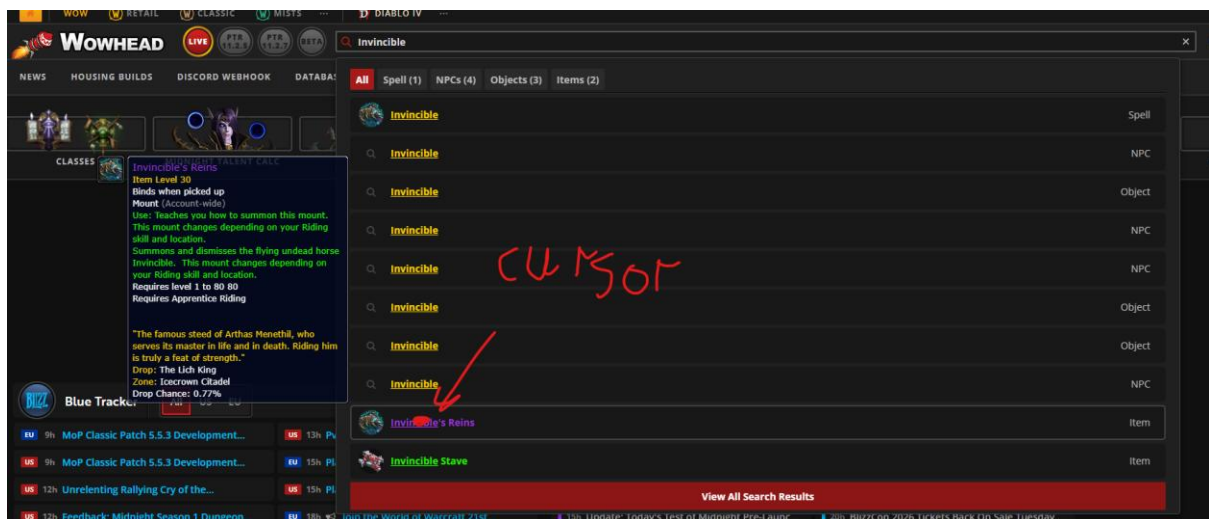
Visibility of System Status

What are the user is trying to do:



Why is a good example:

Wowhead updates the search bar suggestions immediately as you type and shows small loading animation when need. This makes it clear the site has received the input and is processing it. Users don't feel lost because they always see that the system is actively responding.



Recognition Rather Than Recall

What are the user is trying to do:

A user wants to compare different versions of the same item (Normal, Heroic, Mythic or Mythic+ and Upgraded versions of those ones)

The screenshot shows the Wowhead website interface for the item 'Interloper's Reinforced Sandals'. The page is dark-themed and features a top navigation bar with links to various game sections. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Item Overview:** Displays the item name, level (652), and a list of stats including 3204 Armor, +3,526 Agility, +24,483 Stamina, +1148 Versatility, +528 Mastery, and Durability 80/80. It also shows the item's requirements (Level 80) and drop information (Dropped by: Adaru, Drop Chance: 40.6%).
- Version Selection:** A dropdown menu allows users to select different versions of the item, including Normal, Level-Up 2, Raid Finder, Raid Finder Extended, Normal, Heroic, Heroic Extended, Mythic, Mythic Extended, and Tournament Realm.
- Description:** A detailed description of the item's effects, including 'Effect: Upgrade Level: Myth 1/8 / Quality: Epic' and 'Effect: Upgrade Level: Myth 2/8 / Quality: Epic'.
- Quick Facts:** A section providing additional information such as 'Side: None', 'Repair cost: 78', and 'Added in patch 11.2.0 "Ghosts of K'esh"'. It also includes a link to the item's icon.
- Screenshots:** A section for screenshots of the item, with a note that none are currently available.
- Videos:** A section for videos of the item, with a note that none are currently available.
- Fishing Locations:** A section listing the locations where the item can be fished, including 'Manaforge Omega: Wastes of K'esh'.

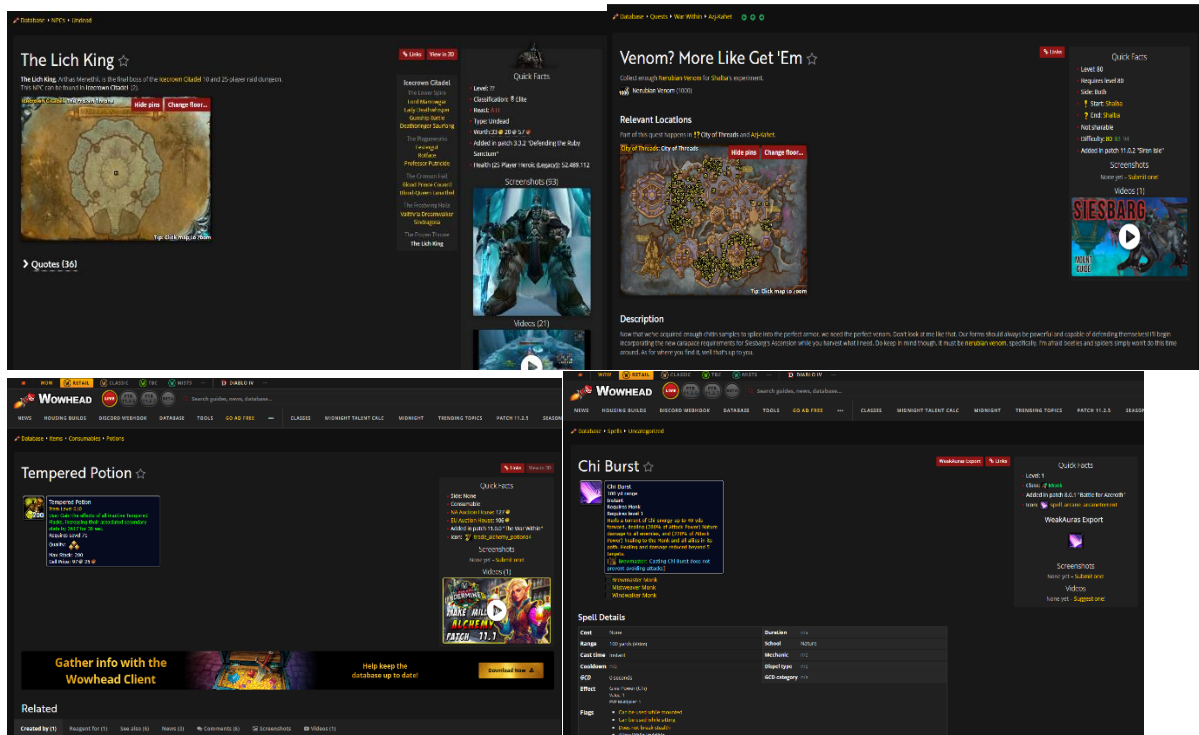
Why is a good example:

Item pages on Wowhead show all item variations together, often with tabs or side menus. The user doesn't have to remember the stats or search again for each version. The information is laid out visually, which reduces mental effort and makes comparisons easy.

Consistency and Standards

What are the user is trying to do:

A user browses different pages like spells, items, quests, and NPCs.



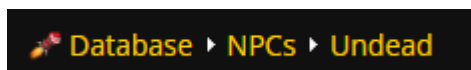
Why is a good example:

These pages all follow a very similar structure: the titles at the top, important stats in a box on the right, and comments pr guides below. Because the layout stays consistent, the user quickly learns how to navigate the whole site. Even if the content is different. The structure of the site always feels familiar.

User Control and Freedom

What are the user is trying to do:

A user accidentally clicks into the wrong database page and wants to return to their previous result.



Why is a good example:

Wowhead uses breadcrumbs (“Home > Database > Items/Quests/Spells/NPCs/etc. > ...”) This gives users an easy way to undo their actions without frustration. They don’t feel trapped on a page or forced to redo their search from the beginning.

Match Between System and the Real World

What are the user is trying to do:

A user reads a guide or looks up a rotation for their class.



Why is a good example:

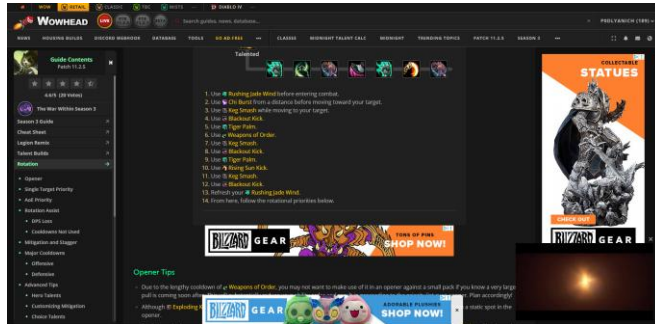
Wowhead uses the same icons, colours, spell names, and terminology that appear in the actual Worlds of Warcraft game. This makes everything easier to understand immediately because the site speaks the “language” players already know. There is no learning curve for understanding icons or spell interactions.

Bad Examples

Aesthetic and Minimalist Design

What are the user is trying to do:

A user tries to read a guide or look up an item quickly.



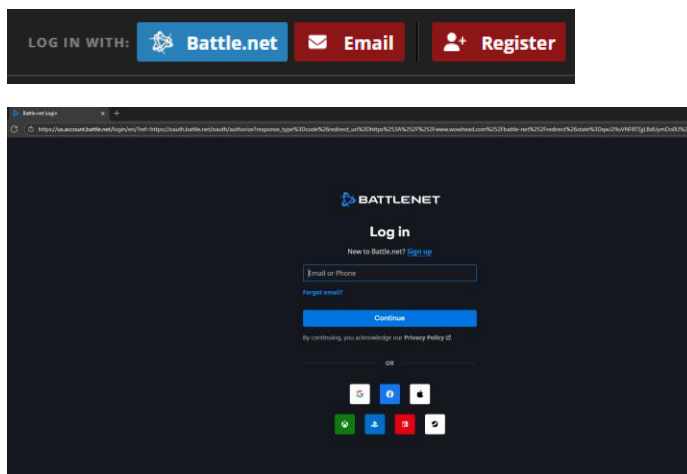
Problem:

Wowhead pages are often cluttered with ads, promotional banners, video pop-ups, and large comment sections. The main content gets pushed down, and the page can feel overwhelming. Users may have trouble focusing on the information they came for because the layout is noisy and crowded.

Error Prevention

What are the user is trying to do:

A user wants to log in using their Battle.net account.



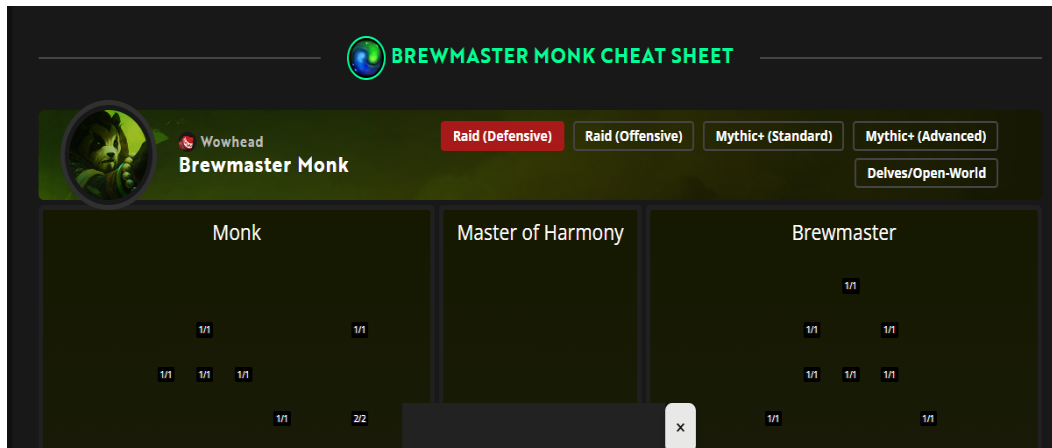
Problem:

The login button immediately redirects users to an external Blizzard page without clearly explaining what is happening. For users who are new to the site or unfamiliar with OAuth logins, this sudden redirect might feel confusing or suspicious. A simple explanation (“You will be redirected to Blizzard to log in securely”) would reduce uncertainty.

Visibility and System Status

What are the user is trying to do:

A user loads a complex page, such a large guide or class talent build.



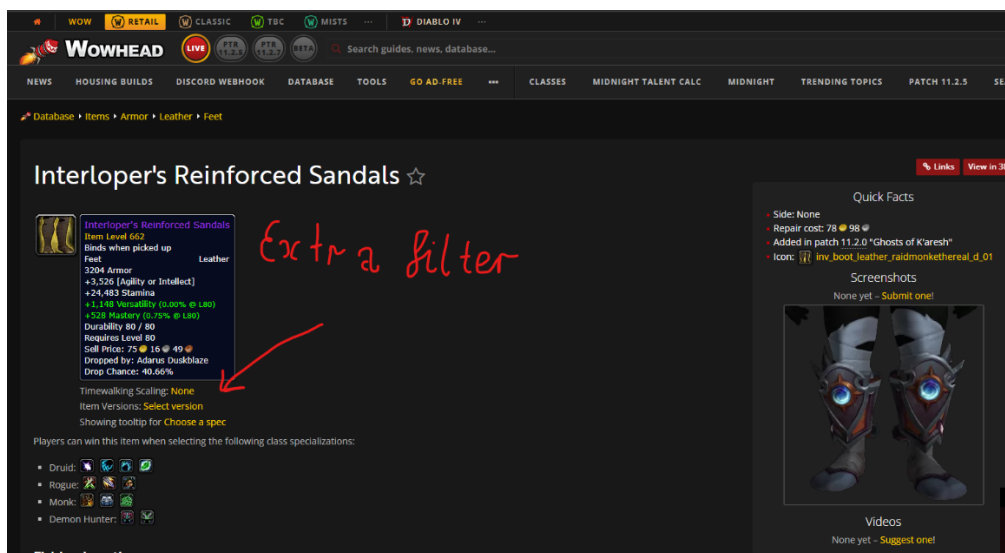
Problem:

These heavy pages sometimes freeze or load slowly, and the site doesn't always show a loading indicator. This leaves the user unsure whether the page is still loading or if something went wrong. A visible progress indicator would greatly reduce confusion.

Flexibility and Efficiency of Use

What are the user is trying to do:

A user wants to filter items or find specific database results quickly.



Problem:

Some important filters are hidden in collapsible menus or small buttons that are easy to overlook. New users may not realise advance filters exist, which forces them to scroll through long lists manually. The filtering system works, but it could be more intuitive and easier to spot.

Help and Documentation

What are the user is trying to do:

A user wants help understanding how to use certain site features, such as filters, guide navigation, or comment tools.

The screenshot shows the Wowhead website's 'All Guides' section. The page has a dark theme and a top navigation bar with links for various game versions (WOW, RETAIL, CLASSIC, TBC, MIST, DIABLO IV) and a search bar. The main content area is titled 'WORLD OF WARCRAFT GUIDES' and features a grid of guide categories: Class Guides, Profession Guides, Expansion Content, Raid Guides, Leveling Guides, Battle Pet Guides, Reputation Guides, Dungeon Guides, Mount Guides, Transmog Guides, and Secrets Guides. Below this, the 'All Guides' section is displayed, showing a list of guides with columns for Title, Category, Author, Rating, Comments, and Expansion. A search bar and 'Add column filter...' option are visible at the bottom of the list.

Title	Category	Author	Rating	Comments	Expansion
Skyriding Cups Overview	World Events	Neryssa	(needs 4 more votes)	1	11/20/20
Cooldown Manager UI Guide	UI	IMX3	(needs 2 more votes)	15	11/20/20
Nerub-ar Palace Achievements Guide	Raids	IMX3	(needs 3 more votes)	0	11/20/20
Nerub-ar Palace Raid Loot	Raids	IMX3	(needs 3 more votes)	6	11/20/20
Nerub-ar Palace Raid Overview	Raids	Paryah	(needs 1 more vote)	6	11/20/20
Northrend Cup Skyriding Event	World Events	IMX3	(needs 1 more vote)	6	11/20/20
Outland Cup Skyriding Event	World Events	IMX3	(needs 1 more vote)	7	11/20/20
Transmog FAQ				1.44	11/20/20

Problem:

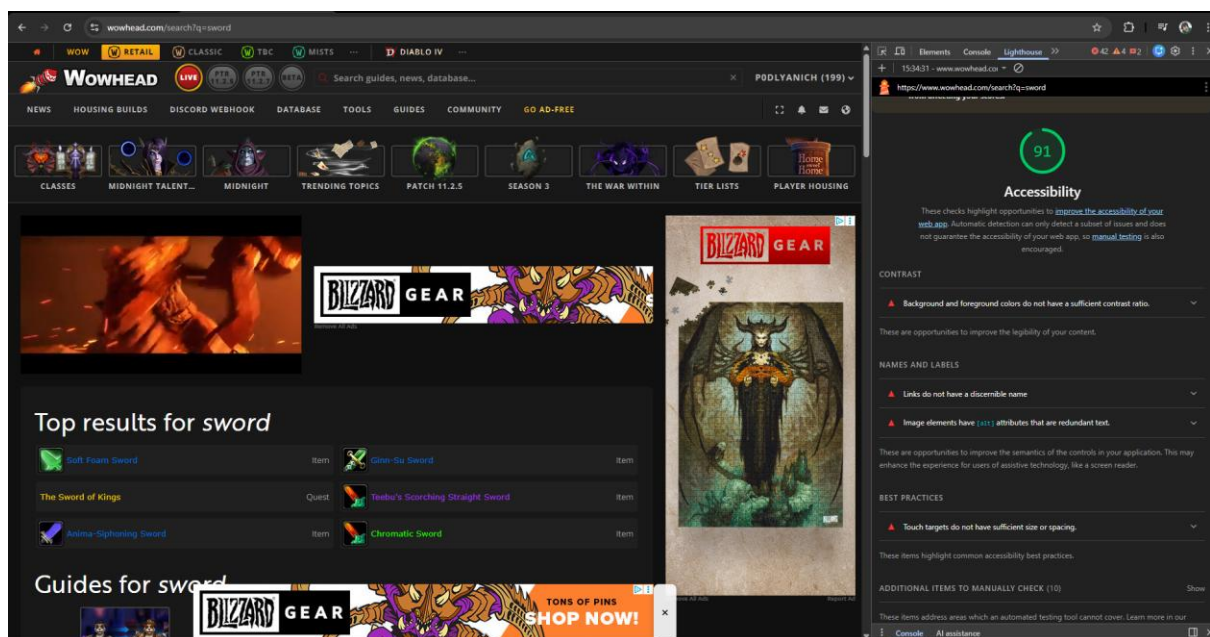
Wowhead does not offer a clear “Help” or “Support” section for general site usage. Most explanations are scattered across old forum posts or buried in comments. This makes it harder for new users to learn how the site works, especially when features are not obvious.

Accessibility Assessment

For this part of project, I evaluated three interactive pages on Wowhead using **Google Lighthouse**, manual inspection, and CSS-off testing. The goal is to identify accessibility issues that could affect users with disabilities and to suggest how these issues can be improved.

Page 1: Main Search Results Page

1. Lighthouse Report Screenshot



2. Top Two Accessibility Problems

Problem 1: Low Contrast Text

Lighthouse reports several text elements with **insufficient colour contrast**, especially small labels, links, and grey text on dark background.

Why this matters:

Users with low vision, colour blindness, or poor monitors may struggle to read text that doesn't stand out from the background.

How to fix it:

- Increase contrast ratio.
- Darken text or lighten the background.
- Avoid using light grey text on dark surfaces.

Problem 2: Missing or Incomplete ARIA Labels

Some interactive elements, such as icons, filters, or menu buttons, are missing **ARIA labels** or have unclear descriptions.

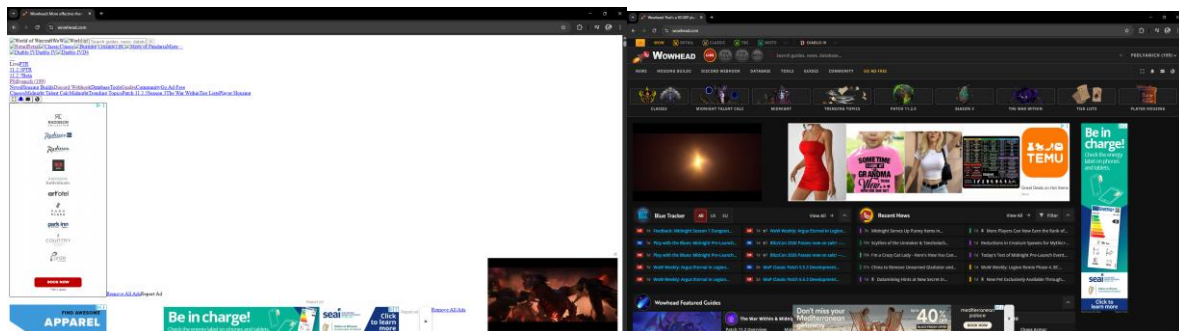
Why this matters:

Screen readers rely on **ARIA labels** to describe elements. Without them, blind users may hear vague labels like “**button**” instead of “**open filter menu**”.

How to fix

- Add clear **ARIA labels**.
- Ensure every icon used as a button has a descriptive alt text.

Page With and Without CSS

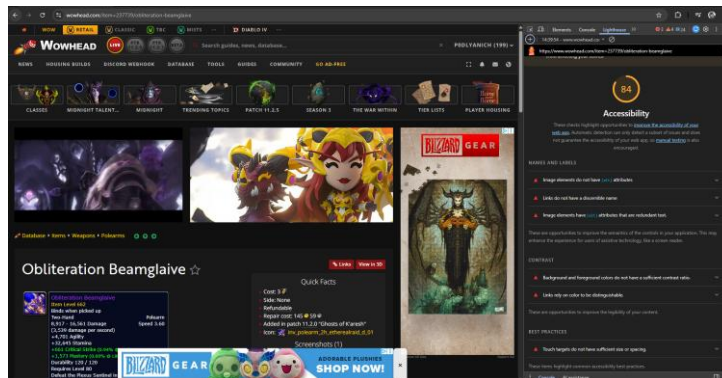


Which version is easier to read?

The version **with CSS** is easier to read because it provides structure, spacing, and visual hierarchy. Without CSS, all text collapses into one long list (ads for some reason still there), making navigation much harder. However, the CSS version includes many decorative elements, and visual clutter, which may distract users.

Page 2: Item Page

Google Lighthouse Report



Top Two Accessibility Problems

Problem 1: Button Icons With No Accessible Name

Many buttons use only icons (e.g. sorting arrows, share buttons) but are not labelled for assistive technologies.

Impact:

A screen reader user may hear “button” with no indication of what the button does.

Fix

- Add “aria-label” attributes describing the function.
- Ensure icons have meaningful alternative text.

Problem 2: Heading Structure Not Logical

Some pages skip heading levels or use headings for styling instead of structure.

Impact

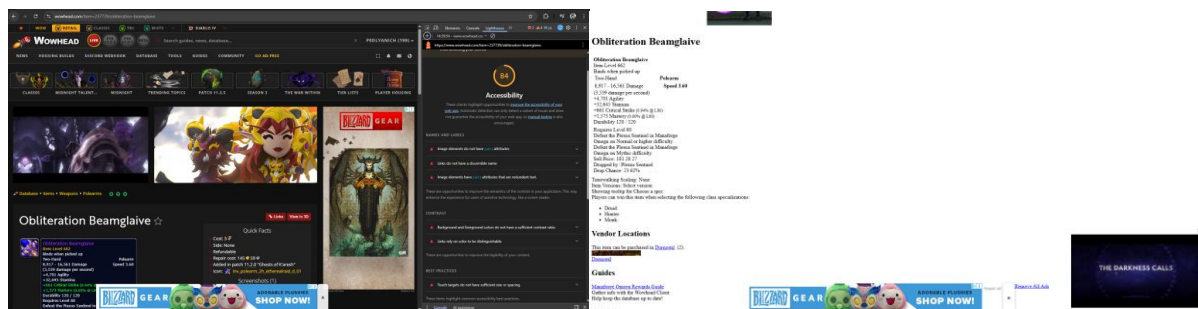
Screen reader users rely on heading order to navigate quickly.

When levels are skipped (e.g. Going from H1 straight to H4), navigation becomes confusing.

Fix

- Reorganize headings to follow a logical structure (H1 -> H2 -> H3 -> etc.)
- Avoid using heading tags for visual styling alone.

Page With and Without CSS



Comparison

Without CSS, content becomes technically readable but loses organisation, Tables, stats, and tooltips become plain text, which can overwhelm users. With CSS, although more structured, some text becomes small or slightly low contrast.

Conclusion

In this project, I took closer look at how usable and accessible Wowhead really is. The site has a lot of strengths, it's familiar to players, the layout is consistent, and finding information is usually straightforward. But during the evaluation, it became clear that there are also some real issues that affect the overall experience.

The biggest problems come from how busy the pages are. Ads, pop-ups, and clutter make it harder for users to focus, and some actions like logging in aren't as smooth as they could be. On the accessibility side, things like low contrast text, missing labels for screen readers, and weak keyboard navigation can make the site difficult or even impossible to use for people with certain disabilities.

Fixing these issues wouldn't just help users with accessibility needs, it would make the site easier and more pleasant for everyone. With a cleaner design, clearer labels, and better support for keyboard and screen-reader users, Wowhead could offer a much more inclusive and user-friendly experience.